



Clean Water Coalition

CWC

of Indian River County, Inc.

2021 Vero Beach City Council Candidate Questions

The following questions were sent to all the candidates and each candidate confirmed receipt of them. The answers are unedited by the IRNA and CWC and copied directly from the text of the document that we received back. (Formatting was unified.) The answers below are the words of the candidates and we hope that their positions on various issues help you to know them better. Candidate answers are listed in alphabetical order.

The city of Vero Beach now has a Stormwater Utility established. In 2021, stormwater projects were funded by CARES Act money. Will you support the implementation of a Stormwater Fee, and if so how much? If you are opposed to the Stormwater Utility, please provide your reasons for your position.

Cotugno: I fully support and believe it is necessary to establish a Stormwater Utility. Per Matt Mitts, Public Works Director, a consultant review of the process is already taking place and the selection process for this consultant has just begun.

As I understand the process:

- The consultant will determine scope/ type of projects, project costs and project impact to the Lagoon.
- From the consultant’s menu of projects, the City Council can then determine which ones would have the most impact / ROI for every Stormwater Utility dollar raised/ invested.
- The projects then can be ranked; the Council can then determine the most fiscally prudent projects with the highest combined ROI to address needs and impacts. This process will affect the overall Stormwater fee.
- I would prefer this to be a multiyear forecast of projects. In this way both a long-term cost projection as well as accumulative effect/ impact on the lagoon calculated/ ascertained.
- With the City Council having responsibility for rate setting using valid approaches, I believe it is important to understand the project deliverables, their associated costs, their impact on the lagoon and expected results.
- This type of process will hold the City Council accountable for the results and after a reasonable period (3- 5 years) whether the investment has delivered the promoted results.
- Based on the above, I think it is too early to determine the exact amount of the fee as it will relate to the scope/ size of projects undertaken and the fiscal year(s) they are started. However, there are well established and well documented methodologies available. The Stormwater Utility is widely recognized as an avenue to provide funding and accountability.

However, in my opinion, a more holistic approach is needed and must incorporate the health and vitality of the entire Lagoon. The city (with its location almost in the center of the lagoon), can become an advocate on the State level. [My LTE \(attached\)](#) explores a possibility and what a total Lagoon approach can accomplish if there is a will to do so. This LTE highlights a similar impaired waterway and what resulted when an all-encompassing “line of attack” was undertaken.

Daige: A stormwater utility enables Vero Beach to be considered to qualify for water grant funding at a more expedient pace and it gives the City a more favorable status if we present shovel ready projects. This type of grant funding has the capacity to offset costs to the City. Currently the city Council has a study in place to calculate a fee. A pollutant study has not been done. The City Manager has presented projects that have been deferred and those that are currently being addressed. On September 21, 2021, the City Council discussed and agreed to continue with: constructing a new state of the art wastewater treatment facility (a new water reclamation facility (WRF)) at the City Airport, pursuing grants for canal water treatment for reuse for irrigation, and decommissioning of the current wastewater treatment plant. I propose action that continues with this process and to address actual need and pollution type(s), including water quality monitoring, to assure any tax dollars/fees will address cause, effect and cure. KD

Heady: If you want to clean up the lagoon stop dumping in it.

Neville: The first effort in the first year for the stormwater utility is to develop a master plan of projects and policies for the city to roadmap a logical and priority driven stormwater program. We don't know how long the study will take. I intend to work in getting an RFP out to engineering firms right after the start of the fiscal year and will work on getting a quick turnaround on proposals. I fully support the concept of a fee, not a tax, where the fee is based on the impact each property owner makes on the stormwater volume impacting the lagoon. My approach to the fee would be based on the master plan developed.

Wilson: I support and appreciate all the Indian River Neighborhood Association has done on the issues of clean water and protection of the Indian River Lagoon. I look forward to working with you on ways to prevent pollution from all sources and clean up the destruction we have already suffered.

Zudans: I am opposed to any new taxes, particularly during a time of economic uncertainty.

What would you like to see happen at the three corners? How will you make your vision a reality? (Please be as specific as possible.)

Cotugno: I am currently a member of the 3 Corners steering Committee and have been actively engaged in getting the project defined and ready to be reviewed by the public. Any decision made about the 3 Corners Property must be made by the citizens of Vero Beach, not politicians. I would only support any action if it passed a citywide referendum, and fully support a referendum process that is transparent and without political interference.

My personal focus would be developing an engaging, vibrant environment for all citizens while preserving the unique charm and character of Vero Beach. I envision:

- A multiple use area with a Lagoon-walk extending along the water and under the Alma Lee Loy Bridge linking the two major land parcels.
- Multiple uses that could include a hotel, restaurants, day marina and common event location and the Youth Sailing Foundation. Vertical mix use could be a viable option “IF” integrated properly to the site.
- Diverse cultural and performance events can be woven into the environment of the site providing the citizens with numerous opportunities to enjoy time on the lagoon with friends, family, and visitors. To that goal, I have been working behind the scenes with City staff and other civic minded individuals (advocating the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, for example).
- In the beginning of the 3 Corners Committee process, I submitted a “wish-list’ of ideas/ what ifs that I would like to see discussed for the project (see attached). It is from this “listening” at committee meetings and to various individual citizens that helped to develop many of these exciting ideas. Importantly, a celebrated tableau was presented to the Council and the citizens by famed architect Andres Duany
- Many features from this work product should find their way into the project, in my view.

Daige: In 2014 the City Voter approved a referendum that included more park, green space, and recreational structures into our City Charter. The properties under the former power plant and current wastewater treatment plant were first voted into the City Charter by referendum in 2007 and then for a second time in 2014. Any action about these properties is not about my vision but about what the City Voter wishes to do. To date, the previous referendum votes have favored more, not less green space. Any thing done should require least negative effect possible on the Indian River Lagoon. KD

Heady: City taxpayers spent time and close to a half million tax dollars on a plan. Advertise the plan. Let developers submit their proposals.

Neville: I personally think the now defunct electric plant can be turned into a phenomenal asset to the community and a destination for residents and visitors alike. I also think it could be a first class hotel which would anchor any ancillary businesses that would be situated within or near the building. I also agree with the Duane plan which outlines a variety of food establishments on the north property facing the water. I think there should be green space with a focus on native plants as well as places for play. We should have day docks for visitors who arrive by water and a fishing pier using the large and substantial bollards that once fended the barges which brought fuel to the power plant. I agree with the use of the south property waterfront for the Youth Sailing Foundation’s plan to place a learning and storage facility there. The proposal by YSF to use the south property lagoon frontage as a park and picnic area is a perfect use for the public to enjoy the lagoon. The use of the large water storage tanks is still in question. I think they have value for theater/museum space; however, no one has stepped forward to offer a use and consider funding the project. Lastly, I think the middle section of the south property would make a perfect outdoor concert venue and by using directed audio speakers. Issues of noise control could be mitigated in the original design. I am excited to see the forthcoming RFQ’s we will soon

be receiving. This will tell the tale of whether the vision our recent charette process produced will make sense from a financial perspective.

Wilson: More than a decade ago, I and others started the movement to sell Vero Electric. . I also promised to protect Vero's quality of life after the sale. It took nine years to complete the sale and unfortunately, it appears that if nothing is done to move things along, it may take another nine years to complete the job of retasking the old plant site for the future. I have a record of accomplishment and getting things done. I can do this too. I have friends who have spent many hours on this leg of the project. I applaud what they have accomplished but I just don't think we are there yet. We need a plan with a 100 year vision that compliments Riverside Park, The Museum of Art, Riverside Theater. A place the public can go with pride. As I did with the electric issue I pledge to have a plan, approval from voters and beginning construction by the end of my two year term.

Zudans: The people of our great community spoke in favor of the "Standing O" plan and I will make the will of the people my top priority.

If you had complete control over what happens to the Twin Pairs, what would you do? (Keep them the same as now, mitigate issues, lessen lanes, etc.)

Cotugno: My preference, at this in time, would be to mitigate the current issues. Working with FDOT in deploying some traffic calming attributes/ resources referenced on FDOT's Complete Streets website. In a perfect world the Twin Pairs would already have been a discussion topic in an accountable community driven process. However, although highlighted in the Comprehensive Plan, the Twin Pairs discussion has not happened in a productive way. At this juncture I believe the project needs to incorporate many aspects of FDOT's Complete Streets programs. Please note this link:
https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/f0123d7bb9dd4b96a36c5d7951b75193/page/page_28/?view_s=view_274

Using this concept, I believe the following can be done that would have a positive impact on the area and the surrounding businesses:

- Incorporate series of zones that decrease in speed and monitors installed (like Royal Palm Blvd.) that alert drivers to their speed vs. the posted limits. This could begin just before St. Hellen's Church. The speed should be reduced (if possible, by FDOT rules/ regs) to 30MPH.
- Reducing the speed would then allow the pedestrian crossing at 14th Avenue to also incorporate additional speeding calming attributes highlight in the Complete Streets website
- Narrowing of lanes that intuitively cause traffic to slow and become more cautious
- With the narrowing of lanes- a larger well delineated wider bike lane
- Addition of a left turn lane on the 4-lane portion of the Pairs
- On demand crossing areas should be established aligned with the Courthouse and Indian River Chamber and well lighted / walkways leading across the Pairs. These on demand crossings would be like the one at Jaycee Park
- Then I would incorporate enhanced lighting throughout the area.

- I would then upgrade the parking lot across from Icon Brewery both to maximize spaces and from safety standpoint – maximize lighting.
- Enhanced signage to better direct people to the to/ from the business/ entertainment area establishments.
- On street parking can be made more appealing with some landscape enhancements and signage.
- With narrower streets maybe add even some potted vegetation this would add vibrancy to the area and the walkability factor would become greater

Daige: FDOT suggests narrowing the lanes to standard width (currently it is interstate width), to re-stripe the road to indicate the least possible change for the public to view, and are open to lowering the speed limit. The window of time is closing for any change. KD

Heady: Don't fix that which is not broken.

Neville: I think the construction of the "twin pairs" did a huge disservice to the people of Vero Beach and especially the downtown area. Following the construction of the TP's few new businesses were attracted to the area. For years following the FDOT construction the properties fronting both 20th St. and 19th Place lay fallow with little being done commercially. 19th Place was a beautiful, divided boulevard with palm trees in the center grassy areas. Although the possibility for recovering that lost ambience is not likely, there are things that need to be done. First, calm the traffic down through numerous methods. Additional crosswalks with signage and flashing lights needs to be installed. And, as many know, we, the city, have asked FDOT for a safety study for the TP's. I eagerly await the outcome of the report. Many know that Ft. Pierce's section of US 1 downtown is four laned with turn lanes. Likewise, Sebastian has a similar situation. I drive both places and do not find congestion a major concern. If FDOT confirmed the efficacy for two lanes, I would support their plan.

Wilson: I am open to traffic calming efforts on the twin pairs through downtown.

Zudans: I will listen to local businesses and residents to find a compromise that does not disrupt the traffic flow through our downtown.

The STEP System (septic tank effluent system) is a great innovation for our neighborhoods that are still on septic tanks. What do you think the city can do to increase the speed of installation of the STEP system in those neighborhoods needing it most? (Where the infrastructure is already in place.)

Cotugno: Currently I serve as the Vice-Chairman of the Utilities Commission. Please see attached PowerPoint presentation on a concept that I present to the Commission. I believe Public Private partnerships are what is needed. I am open to any ideas that can promote expansion of the STEP System while reasonably protecting the property rights of our citizens.

Daige: Yes, the STEP System is a great idea. To do what is suggested here, the City would need to hire more employees, purchase or rent more equipment, or hire more contractors, if available, that specialize in this field. The current process is paid for by the owner, who have a payment plan available to them, and has to go through an approval process. KD

Heady: The conversions are moving along nicely.

Neville: The step system is a brilliant concept developed by our Water and Sewer Director, Rob Bolton. Our approach has been a voluntary one unless a standard septic system fails, then it becomes mandatory to replace the system. This is the only mechanism to force replacement. And, to get grants for replacement from St. John's Water District is to have a mandatory replacement policy. Mandatory replacement is a difficult issue because of the cost effect it would have on our working-class population. You may know that 11.2% of our population is below the poverty level and the median income for individuals in the city is \$28,000. My plan is to work on a policy for grants to cover costs through a means testing process as a basis for establishing pricing for replacement systems. This would allow for mandatory replacement for persons unable to otherwise cover the cost. I also think we should examine, not only the septic tank, but evaluate the drain field as well to confirm that the entire system is in compliance.

Wilson: I agree that the STEP system is a terrific innovation. We have been working on this through the Council and legislature since I was on Council. This is another ongoing issue that needs to overcome delay.

Zudans: I have met with our utilities director, Rob Bolton, and believe we are currently working at a successful pace that our current city employees can handle.

The City has applied for a Community Development Block Grant for the construction of a new water reclamation facility (WRF). The Preliminary Design Report for the WRF cites the proposed WRF will have the ability to meet Advanced Wastewater Treatment (AWT) effluent standards for direct discharge to the Indian River Lagoon. Do you support the completion of the WRD and operation of the WRF so that all effluent – including reclaimed water – meets these AWT effluent standards.

Cotugno: Yes—Water management, protection, and conservation are some of the most important issues in the 21st century.

Daige: Yes. KD

Heady: Stop dumping in the lagoon. Stop. That's the answer.

Neville: As far as I am concerned, this project is a top priority for our city. It is vital to the health of the lagoon and I will do whatever I can to move it forward as fast as possible.

Wilson: This is a crucial step for what kind of city we will be for the next 100 years. I applaud the IRNA for its continued efforts to spearhead this issue

Zudans: Water that enters the lagoon should be to AWT standards.

Recently sustainable development incentives have been brought up in the city. What is your position on these? What kinds of incentives would you like to see implemented, if any?

Cotugno: I would support them. Issue what can the City offer vis-à-vis what they actually control during the development build phase. One possibility would be stormwater mitigation. All new building within the city must have stormwater mitigation. What-if, the incentive was that if you double current required amount, you would be allowed a larger Floor Area Ratio (FAR). It could be something worth discussing.

Daige: The Florida Building Code has sustainable development codes and has for some time. The particular 'incentives' requested are for no particular project and has no site plan. The proposal called for a larger footprint with decreased green space. The actual request was to change the FAR ratio. For clarification, the City Charter addresses our FAR ratio along with Height and Density, and those changes would necessitate voter approved referendum. KD

Heady: All are tax dollars. Just stop. I didn't need any taxpayers paid incentive to come here over 30 years ago.

Neville: The City acted on a property owner initiative to establish an ordinance allowing Floor Area Ratio (FAR) abatements in consideration for adding energy efficient elements to a construction project. I did not support the concept because the increased FAR for the property would result in an even greater burden to our stormwater situation. In principle I favor energy credits where practicable, but not the FAR as a basis for credit exchange.

Wilson: Vero Beach is like an endangered species. Our quality of life must be protected. Vero Beach is perfect like it is. Leave it the heck alone!

Zudans: I believe in low taxes and low government spending so that all businesses can thrive in our community.

What, if anything, do you think Vero Beach needs to do to combat sea level rise? What kinds of projects/plans do you want to see the city undertake?

Cotugno: I think this is a difficult undertaking for a municipality the size of Vero Beach. However, the city should be available to participate/ support in any Regional Plan. Much of the Florida coastline is at risk for “chronic inundation” by sea water. Serious impact could be felt by as early as 2045!

Daige: Vero Beach sits behind a dune ridge. Beach renourishment is washed out by storms and there is concern for the type of sand used and its effect on marine life. Canals and storm drains flow toward the East. The Indian River Lagoon is in between. Hurricanes occur frequently. An integrated study would be a necessary start. KD

Heady: lol. Doubt the City of Vero Beach is in control of sea level rise. Give me a break.

Neville: Sea level is rising. It’s no hoax; it’s happening. There are not a lot of things a city our size could do to affect any material change at the macro level. We can, however, do things at the micro level which may help homeowners and business owners to mitigate probable flood events. One thing we could consider would be to revise the City of Vero Beach Comprehensive Plan to recognize the threat and then make changes to construction permit ordinances to require greater grade elevations. I also believe that the idea of “one wall standing” grandfathers the existing site plan is an obsolete concept and should be revised.

Wilson: Sea level rise would devastate the barrier island. We must be prepared for all contingencies. I am interested in hearing more about the possibility of reopening the inlet around Bethal Creek.

Zudans: The sea levels have been rising for 10,000 years, since the last ice age, I am open to mitigation efforts/projects hat do not destroy our local economy.

Are you familiar with FDEP’s program of TMDL (Total Maximum Daily Load) requirements for the City? Do you think they are fair for our section of the lagoon? Do you think they are adequate for improving the water quality of the IRL?

Cotugno: To maintain the current status quo, yes, but there will be very little and slow incremental improvement. Once again, refer to my LTE. To me, a bold plan is the only way the lagoon has a chance to be restored to anywhere close to its natural state.

Daige: 1 - Yes. KD. 2 - A specific study of our section of the Lagoon is necessary for specific remedy. KD

Heady: OMG. Just stop.

Neville: I think the TMDL measurement of phosphorous and nitrogen is a good measure to assess the city's problem and how we proceed to make the situation better. The problem with TMDL measurements is that, as is the case with the City, we may have many more credits than we need and that may result in not working on very worthy projects. In essence, just because we are "flush" with TMDL credits does not mean that we should not be doing all we can to lower the P and N numbers.

Wilson: I am told that we are meeting the basic requirements. I would like to know more. I would look to the IRNA as an expert source of information.

Zudans: The Indian River Lagoon is approximately 156 miles long and our community encompasses around 6 miles of it. The idea that our TMDL can make a huge impact in improving water quality compared to the total lagoon footprint on the treasure coast is naive. It will take a collaboration between communities to make it happen. We can do our part while encouraging others to do their part too.

What would you do to improve relations with the County on issues such as the distribution of the 1 cent sales tax?

Cotugno: Relationship building, relationship building, relationship building! This process takes time and effort for Council members to reach out and collaborate with the Commissioners. I believe in the process and have already begun the effort during my campaign. By the time the election takes place, I will have discussed this topic with the county commissioners. Maybe it is time for a "reset". There is not a plausible reason for the current adversarial relationship, instead, there is every reason to establish a good faith working connection. If nations can do this, we all certainly can!

Daige: Mutual respect and open dialogue are the responsibility of both governments. KD

Heady: County lawsuits against the city are disgusting.

Neville: I have no understanding of why some commissioners seem to have a hostile attitude toward Vero Beach. While at the recent joint meeting, I could feel the tension in the air and it need to have to that way. I was flabbergasted when Commissioner O'Brien averred (paraphrased) that Indian River Shores had done so much for the arts in Vero Beach that we should be grateful and should give them lower rates. The consequence of that is twofold: 1) Bond issuance and price per gallon pricing is much more difficult and 2). the hard-working people of Vero Beach would have to make up the difference for the affluent Town of Indian River Shores. I don't understand how the one cent sales tax issue has gotten so convoluted. There are two districts: Vero Beach and the remainder of the county. Nearly half of the money comes from the Vero Beach District. The city should get their district revenue and cover legitimate expenses that would otherwise come from the general fund, which is now the case.

Wilson: I was the first to bring up the unfair treatment of the City of Vero Beach on the distribution of the Tourist Tax. I have a plan to make the County and the Tourist Development Council provide Vero Beach with an opportunity. This is another thing that I can get done while others have fallen short.

Zudans: My leadership style revolves around building relationships and encouraging collaboration and consensus. I have already started meeting with other leaders and elected officials in our county to be ready to work day one if elected. What happens in the city of Vero Beach affects the county but the county does not have a say in what we as the COVB do with our portion of the 1 cent sales tax. If you are referring to the bed tax, then the county has sole discretion to its distribution.

Currently the City is in a lawsuit with the Shores over reuse water rates. How can we resolve issues that crop up and maintain a cooperative relationship for mutual benefit?

Cotugno: In a word: Diplomacy. Certainly, there are shared goals here that can be nurtured. Everyone wants the same thing; clean, quality water service / wastewater treatment at a reasonable price.

Daige: On September 21, 2021, staff present Chapter 164, the 1989 Territory Service Agreement Presentation, at the City Council Meeting. This was the information that was supposed to be presented to the joint meeting of the Vero Beach City Council and the Indian River County Commission on September 8, 2021, but was not. Policy and procedure must be openly discussed and respected to have mutual cooperation. Questions cannot be addressed and civil conversation cannot be had without mutual respect for those who represent the taxpayers. KD

Heady: Same as above. Just stop.

Neville: I have no idea what the problem is with Indian River Shores. But, here is my suggestion. Either weekly or monthly we should host a periodic luncheon. We should invite the Fellsmere, Indian River Shores, Vero Beach, and Sebastian council members (perhaps select staff) along with the Indian River County commissioners. I think the cross-fertilization would be outstanding. In addition, we would learn so much about each other that it would be easy to pick up the telephone over a thorny issue. We just need to mind our Sunshine Law matters. We could invite guests and the press and have informative speakers. I think this would be very successful in bringing the cities, towns and the county closer together.

Wilson: I have a long standing working relationship with the Shores. However, in the end I would represent the interests of Vero Beach. Vero Beach will not be bullied by the County or the Shores.

Zudans: We have an incredible opportunity to simultaneously resolve these lawsuits, fund a state-of-the-art sewer facility and keep rates the same or better. It goes back to the previous question....it is about building and repairing relationships and I am the candidate most able to make this happen.

With the loss of revenue from the City's electric utility, what do you recommend the City do to raise sufficient funds to cover the rising costs of City services.

Also, many of the issues above require significant funding over time. If you think any of them are on your priority list, please explain your funding plan.

Cotugno: Financial stability is first and foremost the hallmark of a strong, working city. Thinking strategically in prioritizing projects and providing responsible budgetary oversight is job number one! This is one of the reasons why the 3 Corners project needs to move forward. It could be a positive contributor to real estate and other business associated tax revenue, enhancing the 1% sales tax contribution, and even leveraging to get more generous funding of qualified City projects via the bed tax. Establishing Business Improvement Districts (BID) could be initiated to maintain, develop, and enhance current areas that draw people to Vero Beach. Again, this could be an excellent discussion topic for a citizens group to undertake. All of this said, there are many projects that need to be completed to maintain the quality of life in our favorite City. With the glide path funding source, that was created from the Electric Utility sale, being reduced to -0- in fiscal year 2023-2024 financing the budget will be challenging. Especially when ~85% of the budget is personnel and personnel related costs. The price of non-completion of some of these projects will cost much more in the future. Selecting the right tool at the right time is complex and will require an “all-in” approach. There are many avenues to investigate: staff / services reductions, government-based financing, development contributions, public-private partnerships, user fees, impact fees, millage rate adjustments, asset sales etc. Nobody really likes to talk much about some of these approaches, but it is the job of our council to explore real-life ideas and come up with real-life solutions for our citizens!

Daige: There is funding available in reserve from the electric sale. The most prudent use of that fund should be in the form of city asset investment projects and not for yearly reoccurring expenses. Necessary public dialogue about a sufficient tax rate to maintain City assets and evaluation of current responsibilities should be considered. We could initiate the process and procedure to reclaim tourist tax dollars generated in the City limits. Encouragement of moderate business expansion at our Airport would enable good paying jobs. Included should be proper assessment and application of storm water management to address infrastructure needs that address pollutants. KD

Heady: Don't spend more money in any year than exceeds the city's income.

Neville: The logic presented by the then presiding city council for accepting the sale of the electric system was that the taxes from the general fund would continue to rise as a result of increased property values and economies would be found in the management of city affairs. Rising property values have actually occurred but finding economies in the management of the city has not come to fruition. Should it be necessary we may have to increase ad valorem taxes.

Wilson: I will not close Leisure Square under any circumstances and Vero Beach has sufficient funds to meet its needs with good management and Council Cooperation. With that said City staff is doing a good job “making the trains run on time” as they say.

Zudans: The city has been able to transition from the hidden electric tax with zero tax increases. I will continue hold the line on spending and help navigate the “soft landing” no tax increases and 30%

reduction in electric rates resulting in a \$14 million dollar hidden electric tax stimulus to our local economy year after year in perpetuity.