



Fernandina Beach City Manager: Challenges and Qualifications

The City Charter provides general guidelines for Commissioners on the hiring of a City Manager. For example, “the City Manager must be chosen solely on the basis of executive and administrative qualifications without regard to political belief,” “the City Manager must have prior management experience, and the Commission must consider more than one (1) qualified candidate,” and “the City Manager must be a member in good standing of a professional organization...” However, Commissioners and the Search Committee need to identify specific criteria based on current needs.

The founding members of Conserve Nassau, formerly known as the Comp Plan/LDC Working Group, have spent four years researching issues in Fernandina Beach, interviewing experts, staff, committees and commissioners. We provided input on the EAR public input sessions in 2019, the Comprehensive Plan legislative mandates in 2020, Comprehensive Plan Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11 and 12 in 2021, the City Charter update in 2021, the Vision 2045 Plan and numerous LDC ordinances. Thus, we are providing Commissioners, Search Committee members and the public with our perspective on the challenges that need to be addressed in Fernandina Beach and the expertise needed to address those challenges.

The Most Critical Challenges for Fernandina Beach

1. **Prepare for sustainability and resiliency.** The greatest threat we face is the threat of climate change, sea level rise and storm surge to our economic, environmental and social sustainability. On our barrier island, we need to:
 - **Protect and grow our dunes.** Renourishment, public and private dune walkovers, native vegetation planting and public policy protecting the dunes and wildlife have helped us grow our dunes, but we need to address this far more seriously.
 - **Protect and grow our Amelia River marshes based on nature-based approaches** like adequate buffers and living shorelines.
 - **Limit development in the flood zone.** We already have limitations on city infrastructure in the flood zone, but we need to go further to minimize costly damage and reconstruction.
 - **Protect our wetlands,** critical for water quality, carbon sequestration and other benefits.
 - **Conserve land more aggressively; budget and seek grants to support it.**
 - **Upgrade our building and development standards.**
 - **Educate the public and professionals regarding requirements and best practices.**
 - **Plan for and educate the public on potential emergencies** from a number of sources.
 - **Limit development to redevelopment.** We are replacing native vegetation and dunes with buildings far too large for our small parcels, replacing our natural protections with impervious surface. This is diminishing the ability of our island to process stormwater and moderate temperature.
 - **Ensure that we have sufficient native shade tree canopy and understory to process stormwater, moderate temperatures and protect us from storm winds.**



- **Continue to update hardscape stormwater processing.**
 - **Upgrade infrastructure to accommodate anticipated scenarios.** Our infrastructure must be adequate to protect us from future storms and other climate-change disasters.
 - **Complete the downtown flood wall.**
2. **Manage overdevelopment and density.** Overdevelopment and increasing density are gradually undermining not only our environmental sustainability, but also our economic sustainability because of their impact on congestion and the small-town character of the city. Based on Amelia Island Convention and Visitors Bureau data and our own discussions with residents and tourists, both visitors and residents are here primarily because of the environment and the small-town character.
 3. **Develop a long-term planning perspective.** We need a fifty-year plan that schedules out maintenance, rebuilding, capital projects, etc. to limit crises. We also recommend hiring a Chief Financial Officer with a broad, long-term perspective.
 4. **Address the affordable & workforce housing crisis:** This is a serious problem with businesses unable to hire staff and the county's own retirees unable to live in the county. The City needs to collaborate with the County on this, but also develop its own initiatives.
 5. **Address mobility issues:** We need multi-modal transportation systems to address congestion and multiple types of needs. This should be addressed in collaboration with the County and studied from a broad perspective. Employers must be included in developing solutions.
 6. **Develop a collaborative, mutually supportive working relationship with the County.** Neither the City nor the County can make progress without meaningful collaboration.

City Manager Credentials and Skill Sets

Based on the challenges above, we consider the following credentials and skill sets advisable in addition to meeting City Charter requirements:

1. Master's degree in public administration or a related field
2. Substantial (5 years) documented success as a city manager, preferably in a coastal environment
3. Demonstrated understanding of the coastal environment and related challenges
4. Effective written and oral communication skills in interacting with other professionals, staff and citizens
5. Demonstrated consensus-building skills
6. Demonstrated long-term strategic planning skills
7. Proven leadership skills in moving the community toward a long-term sustainable future
8. Demonstrated fiscal management skills, including long-term fiscal management
9. High ethical standards demonstrated in previous positions. This is a major priority for professional organizations and will be essential for establishing public confidence.
10. Desirable: Documented success working with enterprise funds, mills or ports

We are available to discuss these recommendations and their foundations with Commissioners and others. Our Comprehensive Plan drafts, webinars and our input regarding the Vision 2045 Plan will soon be available on our new website: ConserveNassau.org.

