



Mayoral Forum Questions

1. Assume you take office in January 2020. What will you do in your first 100 days to address flooding?

The City of Charleston, with its 135,000 residents, is currently operating on a balanced budget of \$215 million, which is up nearly 23 percent since 2014. However, except for the Low Battery Seawall project (which is designed and has an identified funding source through completion, including \$25 million already in the bank), no money has been reserved to address flooding relief efforts, nor has a specific plan been mapped out for prioritizing or funding large-scale flood mitigation infrastructure throughout the city.

While many standalone studies have been produced, we still lack a unifying plan. Such a roadmap for fully funding flooding relief efforts must, by definition, begin with identifying projects in order of importance and magnitude. Here are my top five (with the estimated cost to implement or complete):

- Calhoun West/Hospital District (\$400 million)
- Church Creek Drainage Basin Improvements, Rezoning and Water Management Infrastructure (\$100 million)
- West Ashley Drainage Easement Acquisition and Maintenance (\$25 million)
- King & Huger Flooding Relief (\$30 million)
- Johns Island Implementation of Dutch Dialogues Water Management Plan (\$25 million-plus)

These are not prioritized to the exclusion of other projects but represent the most critical and unfunded efforts. Our current sources of revenue are limited and primarily include our General Fund, Drainage Fund and Stormwater fund, none of which produce the resources necessary to tackle flooding infrastructure. We must, instead, look to effectively leverage other sources, including:

- **State Infrastructure Bank:** On Day 1, I will have the City begin the application process for \$200 million dollars to commence work in the Church Creek Basin and on the Calhoun West project. These efforts will both address flooding and critical mobility infrastructure.
- **Charleston County Half-Cent Sales Tax:** These funds are largely derived from sales in the City and should be used for critical flooding infrastructure needs, all of which, when complete, will alleviate the problem of water collection in our roads.
- **Cruise Ship Passengers:** Consistent with the unanimous vote of Council in 2015, we must implement a \$25 per head landing fee which, based on current size and frequency, will raise an annual revenue of \$10 million.

2. Charleston's flood map, flood hazard and rainfall data are severely outdated or missing entirely. How will you ensure the latest science is incorporated into the city's planning efforts?



All infrastructure projects we design and construct, particularly those aimed to control water and manage flooding, must be based on updated and accurate science as well as accurate project area data. One set of data that is currently missing in the city's databank is accurate measured and mapped groundwater elevations and migration patterns. This data is crucial for the design and implementation of small (check valves etc) and large (Calhoun West/Church Creek) alike. When elected, I will merge the Resiliency Team with the Planning and Engineering departments and have a mandate that all critical scientific data crucial to flood water and floodplain management is current and is incorporated into all design.

3. Across the region, plans to address flooding vary differently and there is a lack of communication across municipal lines on this issue. As mayor, how will you address this problem and increase the City's collaboration with neighboring jurisdictions and the Council of Governments (COG)?

I wpoint to my five years as Chairman of CARTA, a position which I have been elected unanimously three times. Eighteen members comprise the CARTA board, all of whom are elected officials or delegates appointed by elected officials (local Mayors, members of city and county councils and the Legislative Delegation). Our Executive Director, with whom I have daily contact, is also the Executive Director of the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments. My working relationship with all members of the board, as well as the Executive Director, is reflected in the accomplishments under my leadership. A few examples: we have erased a \$6 million deficit and operate on a balanced budget; we are two-thirds of the way through replacing the oldest fleet in the country; the HOP is an unparalleled success providing park-and-ride services for 600 hospitality workers a day; and CARTA has taken the lead in moving the first regional, multimodal transit project, Lowcountry Rapid Transit, toward operation. None of that would have been possible absent a strong working relationship and open lines of communication between neighboring jurisdictions. I have a well-established and tested record of collaboration and will bring that same approach to all issues important to the region and, in particular, to large-scale flooding infrastructure projects, as well as cross-jurisdictional zoning challenges.

4. Residents on the Westside and Eastside are some of the most affected by flooding and waves of new infill development. How will you ensure all the interests of all residents are included in the city's planning for a growing city and a changing climate?

All Charlestonians are feeling the effects of the challenges posed by sea level rise, either directly or indirectly. Some clearly feel the effects more immediately and just as we must work to be equitable in sharing the city's success, we also must be equitable in working to solve flooding issues for all residents. We are in this together and no solutions can or will be successful without community buy-in and support. All projects and solutions must, by mandate, include community input and be aimed at improving residents' quality of life. That said, and taking a page from the Dutch, we must be bold and have a large-scale view of time, scale, purpose, systems and environment. We cannot accept, and will not accept, projects that are single-purpose. Multi-purpose projects add economic, environmental, recreation, mobility and social benefits that are crucial to a vibrant and livable community.



5. Planners and scientists believe it will cost more than \$2 billion to solve all the city's flooding problems. How will you prioritize spending on projects in the short and long term? Give one project example of what you will do in your tenure and where the money will come from.

In addition to my response to Question 1, it is important to note that there are several smaller-scale, short-term relief projects that are effective, affordable and can be implemented immediately. An example is the check-valve installation program that I led in and around District 8. Each of the approximately 20 installations has been remarkably successful and brought real, tangible and effective localized relief to long-term flooding problems.

6. Regulations and building practices in place now ignore the realities of a changing climate and encourage development in flood prone places. Unless we revise zoning and land use ordinances this city will continue in the pattern of building and flooding. What are your specific plans for updates to zoning and land use practices and how will you garner the political support to transform current practices?

There are a few obvious and necessary steps that need to be taken in relation to zoning: first and foremost, no building in a defined and known flood plain. Bridgepointe is an example of such folly. That, coupled with an update and fortification of our stormwater regulations, will go a long way toward ensuring new development does not occur where we know there will be continued and increased rates and depths of flooding. Additionally, we need to put a halt to non-native fill being used to meet mandated flood elevations. By importing fill, all we do is move the problem around. Furthermore, Johns Island is the perfect example of where adhere to the recommendations of the Dutch on new development in terms of elevation and water flow. As to existing development, particularly on the peninsula, we must allow those in homes that repeatedly flood to raise (in a reasonable way) the base elevation of their ground floors. As a City Councilman, it is my firm belief that the only way to accomplish these goals is through constant communication with staff, community leaders and fellow councilmembers. There is a clear desire across the City to tackle flooding issues head on. We need to prioritize and act.

7. Buyouts for homes that flood severely and repeatedly are becoming a growing trend nationally to mitigate the impacts of worsening flooding. We saw this recently in the Bridgepointe subdivision of the Shadowmoss neighborhood. What are your thoughts on this mitigation strategy and do you plan to help people whose homes are repeatedly flooded relocate to higher ground?

The short answer is yes. Areas of repeated flooding are not areas where we can continue the pattern of repair and reconstruction after every water event. At some point, common sense tells you that the only solution is to relocate. In my capacity as a private attorney, I represented 47 homeowners in the Parkhill Subdivision that flooded repeatedly, and relocation was the only solution. It was expensive but necessary. As Mayor, I will build into the budget a fund for this extraordinary but mandated remedy.

8. We all know there are limited dollars to address worsening flooding in Charleston, and some projects must take a backseat to others. Still, the current



administration has endorsed Charleston County's plans to use money from the 2016 half cent sales tax to build the I-526 extension. Do you agree we should fund the I-526 extension, and, if so, how do you justify spending those hundreds of millions of dollars rather than immediately funding action on flooding?

There is currently a signed agreement in place between Charleston County and the State Infrastructure Bank related to 526 and it will be years before the project's final fate is determined. That time can't be spent sitting still. I do believe that funding infrastructure projects through the County half-cent sales tax that serve the dual purpose of improving our transportation network while mitigating flooding issues is a must. Also as noted, one of the first actions I'll take as mayor is putting together a SIB application, with assistance from BCDCOG, for \$200 million to help complete stormwater projects in the city.

Let's also not forget that we're in an unnecessarily deep hole because the city's largest public works project is \$43 million over budget, an issue the current administration did not begin to address until three years into its tenure -- and the very same week it announced a property tax increase.