



STREETSCAPE TO SKYLINE: DO WE NEED HIGHER DESIGN STANDARDS FOR DOWNTOWN JACKSONVILLE?



An Issue Forum report by JCCI *FORWARD*
for the Jacksonville Community

June 2006



Introduction

In the past ten years, downtown Jacksonville has changed dramatically. The River City Renaissance and the Better Jacksonville Plan have helped shape some of these changes. City Hall, new Main Library and the Jacksonville Museum of Modern Art surround a renewed Hemming Plaza. A sports complex with an arena, ballpark and renovated stadium have added a new look to familiar pursuits. The extension of the Riverwalk, new hotels and condominiums, loft apartments, and the new Fuller Warren Bridge connecting a high-rising south river bank to the downtown core all play into a changing downtown. As downtown grows and develops, has the face of the city changed for the better? Do we need higher design standards for downtown Jacksonville?

For this Issue Forum, a citizen committee met with resource speakers from the community to discuss the past, present, and evolving development of downtown Jacksonville. Expert resource speakers from public and private spheres - City Council, City staff, developers, architects - addressed the committee and shared their knowledge, experience, and vision. Their presentations centered on these questions: What design standards do we currently have in place? Do we need higher design standards for our downtown core? What are best practices for cities around the nation? Just what is our vision for Jacksonville?

The committee learned that design standards include the following aspects:

- Guidelines and regulations that prescribe what may or may not be constructed;
- Urban planning principles that create the experience of a city - design of streets, walkways, buildings, lighting, entrances, open and green spaces that create a pedestrian-friendly, welcoming atmosphere for a city;
- Architectural design standards that affect the building's exterior style, shape, size, and features - the aesthetics of a building in the eye of the beholder;
- Sustainable and integrated design standards that address the building as well as people inside and outside – environment issues, self-sufficiency, and the relationship of the building to the street and skyline; and
- Long-term shared visions of a city projecting 100 years into the future.

'Higher' in this report means consistently better, smarter, bolder, grander, exceptional, historical and visionary in any of the above five areas. Higher does not mean standardized, homogenized, or restrictive. Higher means being proactive and going after what we want for Downtown Jacksonville. Higher means having the political willpower and tools to set a long-term consistent vision.

Urban Design Principles and Standards for Jacksonville

In 2000, a Master Plan for Downtown Jacksonville was adopted, followed two years later by the Downtown Zoning Overlay. The Downtown Master Plan and Downtown Overlay are a set of guidelines that set forth urban design principles for downtown Jacksonville development. The plan is flexible enough to allow for a project to be considered in context of its location and use.

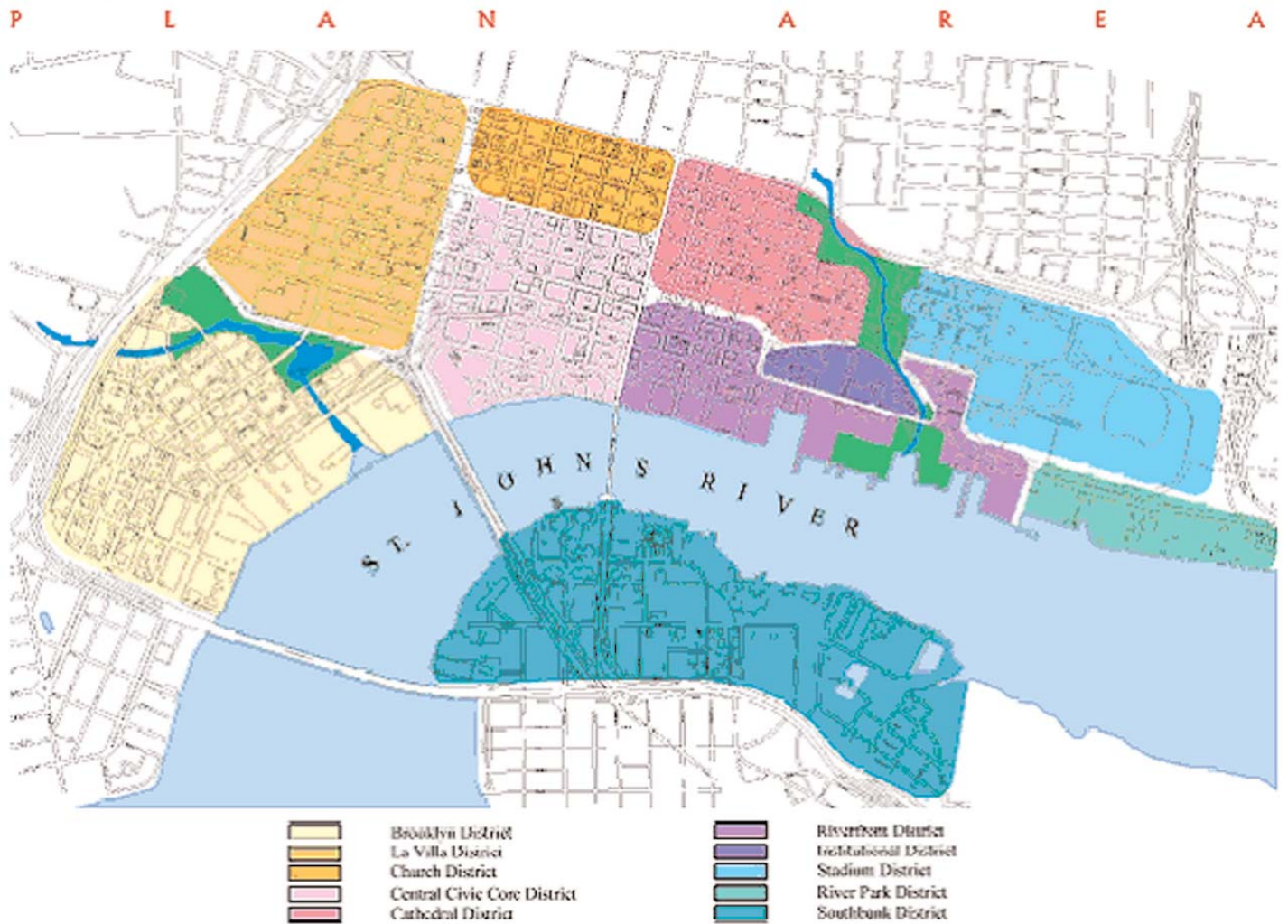
"We have refined the vision for Downtown Jacksonville by creating a comprehensive design theme that sustains the principles and policies contained in the master plan."

Celebrating the River: A Plan for Downtown Jacksonville

Master Plan guidelines include:

- Improve access to river banks creating a substantial greenway for citizens.
- Develop clearly defined downtown districts and identities for major capital investment projects.
- Develop interconnected attractive safe pedestrian links with open space.
- Encourage adequate and well-designed parking.
- Recognize open space as a valuable development asset.
- Provide sustainable connected open spaces with water and natural features.
- Establish a 24-hour city for residential and destination development.
- Enhance the perception of downtown as a safe place.
- Pursue short term actions for long-term vision.

In addition, the plan includes policies and urban design guidelines for public spaces, streetscapes, site and building forms, and marketplaces for the downtown districts.



The Downtown Overlay Zone and Downtown District Regulations (Overlay), adopted in 2002, promote the revitalization and growth of downtown as a high density mixed-use area and replaced the old zoning codes. The Overlay permits 10 districts with various activities for land use in those districts. The Overlay created the Design Review Committee (DRC) to evaluate and make recommendations to the developer in regard to a development conforming to the master plan. Without DRC approval, building permits cannot be issued. As presently formulated, the DRC can only respond to what is brought to them by the developer and architect. The Jacksonville Economic Development Commission (JEDC) serves as the master developer for downtown development, managing and implementing the Master Plan and Overlay. This process includes a conceptual design review. Currently the JEDC is initiating a streamlined development process to make it easier for developers to have projects approved and permits issued. Once a plan is approved, no mechanisms exist to monitor follow-up or enforcement of the approved project design.

“The community and its leaders believe downtown Jacksonville continues to be the regional capital for commerce, government, culture and entertainment.” Master Plan

Regulating architectural design based on aesthetics is difficult. Design is said to be a subjective experience. Some may like Spanish revival and others may prefer modern. Resource speakers recommended letting developers and architects do as they wish and that the market place will take care of style based on demand. The resource speakers all agreed that the downtown core is the appropriate area for high-rise buildings. No height restrictions are needed as long as the footprint and context of the building is appropriate for the site.

Urban Planning for Best Practices

Good design standards reflect use of good urban planning principles such as an organizing principle for a city, pedestrian friendly streets, greenways, and open-air public spaces. Well-designed cities such as Paris, Charleston, Savannah, Louisville, Pittsburg, Annapolis, Chattanooga, Washington D.C., and San Francisco all have water bodies with large green spaces accessible to the public. Urban planning has changed over the years. As streets have grown in width to accommodate cars, streets have become less friendly to pedestrians. Good urban planning includes wider sidewalks (up to 20 feet) with narrower street areas providing an enjoyable experience for pedestrians. Preserving or creating view corridors of the river from downtown streets also provides a sense of place for a river city. River access, green spaces and parks are all key urban design elements for residents and city workers. Trees and awnings give pedestrians relief from sun and rain.

Public art, fountains, benches, lighting, even bike racks, all make for a friendlier and inviting downtown experience.

Other design elements such as boulevards, distinctive skyline and skyscrapers, scale, historic areas, vistas or high places, soft spaces, public plazas and markets, public art, and bridges can create variety and interest in the city. Distinctive places create an identity for the city and enhance citizen pride. Great buildings designed by great architects lend stature as well as excitement and distinction to a city.

Historic preservation of buildings and districts also makes for great cities. Often historic districts are protected and limited to low-rise buildings. New Orleans, Savannah, and Charleston all have areas of historic significance that are valued by residents as well as visitors.



"Jacksonville aspires to be one of the world's great cities. Downtown is the heart of Jacksonville and its vitality is critical to the city's future as a world-renowned livable place."

Vision Statement "Celebrating the River: A Plan for Downtown Jacksonville (Master Plan)"

Although old cities grow organically over time, the best cities are built on the city's assets. For example, 30 years ago, Portland, Oregon decided to remove the freeway along the Willamette River. The freeway was moved inland and all the transportation land is now a much-enjoyed public greenway with civic activities along the river. Shared vision and long-term commitment for change by public and private entities created this new integrated plan. Pittsburgh began acquiring land for their large downtown waterfront park at the convergence of three rivers – their city's unique feature. Foresight and hindsight, vision and memory are needed in the present by citizens, businesses, developers, and government.



New standards for sustainability and energy efficiency of buildings are being adopted in Florida and throughout the country. LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) offers a rating system for sustainable and high performance buildings that encourages and guides a collaborative, integrated design and construction process. "Green" design and construction practices benefit the environment and occupants in five broad areas:

- Sustainable site planning
- Safeguarding water and water efficiency
- Energy efficiency and renewable energy
- Conservation of materials and resources
- Indoor environmental quality

To date, we have no public or private buildings in Downtown Jacksonville, either built or permitted, that use sustainable environmental design concepts. The University of North Florida Social Science building does conform to LEED certification and is our only example in northeast Florida.

The Future of Downtown Jacksonville

In 1998, the city provided incentives for the construction of a new hotel in downtown Jacksonville. The citizen response to the architectural design of this hotel spurred the drafting and adoption of the current Master Plan. Although some speakers declared that the Master Plan sets a clear vision for Downtown Jacksonville, others believe that it does not encompass a grand, future-oriented vision for Jacksonville. They call for something more than the Master Plan and Overlay to create an image and identity for Jacksonville. A larger, more specific vision may be necessary to inspire and ignite people's passion for change. Additionally, some resource speakers purported that specific architecture standards are not needed, while others point out that Jacksonville's recent buildings lack distinction and would argue for higher architectural standards. One speaker called for "EQ", an "Exceptional Quotient" for downtown and another stated that buildings should reflect the time in which they are built.

A shared long-term vision for Downtown Jacksonville is a political challenge. Currently the mayor and a city councilor are holding separate visioning meetings compiled of different participants to determine a vision...likely leading to separate outcomes. Implementing a long-term vision for Downtown Jacksonville requires both consistency and continuity. The city and the owner of the Jacksonville Landing were recently in dispute over parking, view corridors, and public or private ownership of the land, which is a result of unclear or inconsistent standards being applied. "Staying the course" and applying a consistent process reduces the risk for developers and allows each project to be evaluated against the larger goal. The review and permitting process can be used to balance private property rights with the broader needs of the community. Investing in the waterfront often leads to better city design.

Resource speakers agreed that downtown development could be improved by better implementation of the current Master Plan. Implementation relies upon those who support and are knowledgeable of the Master Plan and Downtown Overlay. Some resource speakers stated that consistent and better implementation of the Master Plan is enough; while others believe that we need to raise the bar with each new project.

The St. Johns River is Jacksonville's key asset. The 2005 JCCI report, *River Dance: Putting the River in River City*, notes that "Jacksonville's year 2000 downtown Master Plan (aptly named Celebrating the River) states that 'Jacksonville is the celebration of a great, international river and extensive public green space, where city parks and attractive water features are essential components of busy, sustainable urban neighborhoods.' The downtown plan incorporates four themes: the St. Johns River, open civic space, sports and recreation, and arts and culture."

If Jacksonville's vision is to be a world class city, resource speakers emphasized the need for creative leadership with individual, public and private willpower to make Jacksonville a remarkable city from the street to the sky.

Key Findings

The committee discussed the information from speakers and readings over the past six weeks and came to general agreement that the city needs to be proactive in going after what we want and need to put the feet under the vision. The committee wishes to share the following five points with the citizens of Jacksonville.

1. The Design Review Committee (DRC) is responsible for implementing the Master Plan and Downtown Overlay. For better urban planning and design, the process of application, review, and permitting has not worked. The DRC is in the best position to make a difference to cultivate and implement higher design standards for downtown Jacksonville.
2. The vision as expressed in the Master Plan and Overlay is elusive and not tangible enough to citizens to create the energy and excitement for an exceptional downtown development.
3. The downtown core lacks significant public access to the river with pedestrian-friendly parks and nodes along the river. Park lands are not connected and developed to maximize functional greenspace for those working and living in the city.
4. The DRC, city and developers are not committed to sustainable and energy efficient design for public and private development. Sustainable building criteria, such as LEED certification, are not required for permitting of new buildings.

5. A consistent and long-term commitment (25-50 years) to a vision is required for a city to grow into greatness. Clear vision, strategy, and action anchor and sustain the long-term vision through changes in city council, mayor, and staff; developers; architects; and citizens.

Action Goals and Strategies

After reviewing the Key Findings, the Committee set the following action goals.

Short-term Goal:

Presentation to Design Review Committee (DRC) of Key Findings in regard to higher design standards for Jacksonville to improve clarity in DRC's role, openness for community participation, stronger mix of design-oriented professionals serving on the DRC, and greater enforceability of DRC actions.

Action Chair Susan Pitman with John Allmand, Oliver Barakat, Martin Edwards, Meredith Klein, Jennifer Mansfield, Aaron Plewke, and Rhonda Williams. This meeting and presentation was accomplished on May 23, 2006

Longer-term Strategy:

Propose a specific project based on the higher design standards discussed in the Findings and act as a catalyst and a convener to get good/better projects built. Specific strategies including the possibility of design competitions; partnering with existing efforts, such as Emerging Architects and Downtown Vision; and working on a potential site for a river park.

Action Co-chairs: John Allmand and Meredith Klein Committee members: Oliver Barakat, Martin Edwards, Kay Ehas, Rachel Johnson, Steve Kowkabany, Jennifer Mansfield, and Aaron Plewke.

This forum has been made possible by the generous support of:



If you would like to serve on the Action Plan team, please contact the JCCI *Forward Planner* at 396-3052 for more information.

Forum Participants

Martin Edwards, Chair Heather McEachen, Vice-chair
(2 or more meetings)

John Allmand*
Oliver Barakat*
Steve Congro
Kay Ehas
Ron Gay
Amy Harrell*

Daniel Herbin
Rachel Johnson
Meredith Klein
Steve Kowkabany
Chris Kuhn*
Jeff MacFarlan

Jennifer Mansfield
Mike McCollum*
Amy Miller
Cynthia Neal
Vitina Pellot, Issue Forums Chair
Susan Pitman

Aaron Plewke
Marvin Reese
Lisa Sheppard*
Rhonda Williams

* management team

2005 -06 Forward Executive Committee

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Jill Jinks, Chair-elect
Fionnuala Geoghegan, Treasurer
Eric "Brian" Smith, Jr., Immediate Past Chair
Jordan Boss, Vice Chair Training
Michael Connolly, Vice Chair Recruitment

Ajani Dunn, Vice Chair Communication & Technology
Jennifer Gornto, Vice Chair Socials
Amy Hays Holliman, Vice Chair Action Plans
James Holt, Vice Chair Fundraising
Vitina Pellot, Vice Chair Issue Forums
Ryan Whitaker, Vice Chair Leadership Development Workshops

Resource Speakers

Mike Balanky – Developer, San Marco Place
Oliver Barakat - Design Review Committee Member & Commercial Real Estate Broker, CB Richard Ellis
Susan Cleveland – U.S. Green Building Council, North Florida
John J. "Jack" Diamond - Rink Design Partnership
Thomas O. Ingram – Pappas Metcalf Jenks & Miller, P.A.
Suzanne Jenkins - Jacksonville City Council
Eric Lindstrom - City of Jacksonville, Economic Development Commission
Terry Lorince – Executive Director, Downtown Vision, Inc.
Ted Pappas - PBV Architecture
Mike Shalley – Vice-President St. Joe Company
Mike Saylor – Director of Planning & Development, City of Jacksonville
Jason Teal – Assistant General Counsel Land Use and Environmental Law Department, City of Jacksonville

Resources

Celebrating the River: A Plan for Downtown Jacksonville (The Master Plan)

The Downtown Zoning Code Overlay (The Overlay)

"Creating a Vibrant City Center" Urban Design and Regeneration Principles, Urban Land Institute

Downtown Development Process, Jacksonville Economic Development Commission, City of Jacksonville
Building Green, Building Smart. Arlington County Department of Environmental Services

City of Jacksonville Planning and Development

<http://www.coj.net/Departments/Planning+and+Development/default.htm>

U.S. Green Building Council – Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design

<http://www.usgbc.org/>

Sierra Club Building Better: A Guide to America's Best New Development Projects.

<http://www.sierraclub.org/sprawl/report05/>

Top 15 Skylines in the World v3.0 <http://diserio.com/top15-skylines.html>

Best Skyscraper of the Year for Design and Function 2004 & 2005

<http://www.emporis.com>

An Issue Forum Reader is available in the JCCI Library

JCCI Forward Staff

Karen Kempf - JCCI Forward Planner

Esther Hollander - Administrative Assistant

What is JCCI Forward?

Established in July of 2000, *JCCI Forward* is an initiative of JCCI that seeks to involve developing leaders and community-minded people with important issues facing our community. With an emphasis on developing rising leaders from the ages of 25 to 45, *JCCI Forward* provides the information, tools, and resources needed to develop strong leadership skills and to affect positive change in our community.

Mission

The mission of *JCCI Forward* is to empower emerging leaders and community-minded individuals to affect positive change in Northeast Florida through a platform of results-oriented issue forums and leadership development programs.

Why Join JCCI Forward?

JCCI Forward is an ideal way to interact with city leaders, to experience leadership development, and to build a network of friends and associates who all share the common goal of improving our community.

Activities & Events

JCCI Forward provides the information, tools, and resources needed to develop strong leadership skills and to help affect positive change in our community. Like JCCI, *JCCI Forward* hosts its own community forums and workshops, all with the three-fold aim of studying the issues which are central to our community's growth, providing an opportunity to meet, interact and work with our community's existing leadership structure, and focusing on the skills critical to assuming a leadership role in our community's future.

Issue Forums

Issue Forums offer participants a venue to interact with respected community leaders and resource experts on issues of concern to Northeast Florida's citizens. Participants explore issues critical to the community's growth, seek understanding of related problems, and come to consensus on proposed action plans that can be implemented locally.

Leadership Development Workshops

Leadership Development Workshops are half-day seminars devoted to keeping *JCCI Forward* members involved, engaged, and connected. These workshops offer a foundation for leadership skills by allowing members to study important community issues in a dynamic setting, while interacting with expert resource speakers.

Trainings

Trainings offer *JCCI Forward* participants opportunities to learn and improve their leadership skills, such as facilitation, consensus-building, and how to run effective meetings.

Leadership Opportunities

While *JCCI Forward* is supported by JCCI, it maintains an Executive Committee and several established committees that offer opportunities for individuals to get involved and hold leadership positions. Additionally, Issue Forum Management Teams provide participants with hands-on planning experience.

Other Events

Networking Socials allow members to connect with each other, strengthen relationships, and learn more about *JCCI Forward*. Mystery Guest Lunches provide participants with access to local leaders in the intimate setting of lunch with a community leader. Food For Thought gatherings offer an additional way for members to connect, network, and discuss community issues.

How to Join

JCCI Forward members are also members of JCCI and are encouraged to participate in all JCCI and *JCCI Forward* functions.

Name: _____ Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____ Phone Number: _____

E-mail Address: _____

Please select a membership category from the following:

- Basic Member: \$50 Receives bimonthly newsletter, annual report, and invitations to JCCI and *JCCI Forward* events.
- Family: \$75 Two family members receive basic member benefits.
- Patron: \$150 Receive basic member benefits plus the Quality of Life Report, a JCCI study, and a sponsored membership.
- Visionary: \$225 Receive patron benefits plus a second sponsored membership and a VIP Reception invitation.
- Corporate/Business: \$250 Receive visionary benefits plus a third sponsored membership

Complete the above and send it along with your check to *JCCI Forward* 2434 Atlantic Blvd., Jacksonville, FL 32202

For more information please visit us online www.jcci.org/forward

ISSUE FORUM

2000 - Emerging Business/Workforce Preparedness
2000 - Transportation System
2000 - Arts Education in Public Schools
2000 - Public School System Education Plan
2000 - Voter Education
2001 - Preparing for the Super Bowl
2001 - Downtown Living
2001 - Professional and Community Theatre
2001 - Truancy
2001 - Voting Irregularities
2002 - Business as a Partner in Education
2002 - Downtown as an Entertainment Center
2002 - Pathways to Power
2003 - Convention Business
2003 - Financial Literacy
2003 - Role of the Mayor in Education
2003 - Job Growth
2004 - Ecotourism
2004 - Community Health
2005 - Downtown...Greentown?
2005 - The Underground Connection
2005 - *Forward* Thinking: How to Effect Change in Jacksonville
2006 - Creative Community: What's in it for Us?
2006 - Streetscape to Skyline: Do We Need Higher Design Standards for Downtown Jacksonville?

FORUM CHAIR

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Marcus Haile
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2434 Atlantic Boulevard,
Jacksonville, FL 32207
904-396-3052
FAX 904-398-1469
www.jcci.org

