

Infrastructure Transition Committee
NEIGHBORHOODS INITIATIVES SUBCOMMITTEE
FINAL REPORT
August 18, 2023

Many of the older neighborhoods in the Northwest Quadrant of the city have never received the infrastructure improvements that were promised by Consolidation over sixty years ago. These underserved neighborhoods should be a priority, and the City of Jacksonville should make a commitment to fix this decaying infrastructure.

There is more to infrastructure than just sidewalks and septic tanks. There are many intangibles that need to be addressed in addition to bricks and mortar. Successful neighborhoods are those which offer a high quality of life, a concept which includes walkability, open public spaces and parks, libraries, trees, attractive streetscapes, well-kept public and private properties, transportation access, healthy commercial areas, public safety, visual aesthetics, and a sense of community---all of this is in addition to well-maintained public infrastructure. Improving the quality of life in Jacksonville, particularly the Northwest Quadrant, is one of the most important things our new administration can do.

Our committee believes that the Deegan Administration has a rare opportunity to do a reset on the way many of the City's departments respond to the problems that face Jacksonville.

RECOMMENDATIONS

JEA's Septic Tank Phase Out Program requires appropriated funding not only to start construction but also to start the lengthy outreach process required to secure participation.

- The Mayor's office should thoroughly reevaluate the septic tank ordinance to streamline it, including 70% acceptance requirement. Further, at the current pace of the program, the Failure Area Neighborhoods will not be addressed for another 30 years. Identifying and appropriating a long-term source of funding allows the JEA team to begin the outreach process immediately. Failing septic tanks create a threat to both the health of citizens and our rivers.
- The Mayor's office should provide dedicated funding as soon as possible, in order for this project to show significant progress in the next four years. This will reduce the time necessary to abate the threat to public health and the environment. Increased long-term funding should be secured.
- The Mayor's office should consider creating a septic tank pump-out program for tanks that are not scheduled to be removed. Private contractors can provide this service similar to private contractors that handle garbage collection or school buses. The county can be divided into zones that the private contractors could bid to service. Every septic tank would be pumped out at a minimum of once every 5 years. This would ensure the tanks are more likely to perform and property owners should enjoy

savings since contractors will be able to provide the service cheaper than current service due to efficiencies of scale. A fee similar to the annual garbage fee would be assessed on property owners with septic tanks. This charge would likely be approximately \$40 -\$50 a year.

- The Mayor's office should encourage JEA to further efforts to underground overhead utilities in connection with the septic tank phase out program. In addition, JEA should be encouraged to adopt a plan to underground most of the remaining overhead utility lines to harden our utility system against future storms and wildfires. Undergrounding utilities will improve reliability, save on maintenance costs and improve the aesthetics of our community.

Citizen Planning Advisory Committees (CPACs) are intended to maintain open and effective communication between city government and Jacksonville residents, businesses, neighborhoods, community organizations, and educational institutions. The CPACs are divided along the boundaries of the city's six planning districts. Former City Councilwoman Randy DeFoor, who chaired the City Council's Neighborhoods, Community Services, Public Health & Safety Committee (NCSPHS), reported to our subcommittee that the information provided by residents through the CPAC system often goes nowhere. She also expressed frustration that the CPACs had no connection to the Neighborhoods, Community Services, Public Health & Safety Committee.

- The boundaries of CPACs should be more compact so neighborhoods with similar issues can find more common ground. Consequently, the number of CPACs should be increased from six to seven, with the boundaries of each aligned with the School Board districts.
- A Mayor's representative should attend each CPAC meeting and take back recommendations to the Mayor's office. Response from the Administration, with resolutions or recommendations, should be received by the CPAC Chair within 2 weeks after the meeting.
- The Mayor should ask the City Council President to reschedule the Neighborhoods, Community Services, Public Health & Safety Committee meetings to a 5:00 pm time slot to be more conducive to engaging citizens active with the CPACs in the NCSPHS meetings.
- The Subcommittee recommends changing the name "CPAC's" (Citizen Planning Advisory Committees) to "Community Forums" to accurately represent their activities.

630-CITY is a vital service that is the most frequent way in which citizens interact with the city government. It is very effective in registering and helping to resolve citizens' problems. There are two major needs that can be addressed immediately:

- The service is not as widely known or understood as it should be. The Mayor's office should embark on an extensive marketing campaign to publicize 630-CITY and encourage its use.
- 630-CITY staff members are well-trained and courteous. They are not, however, equipped to handle mental health crises. The City's new Chief Health Officer should

implement a system of on-call mental health professionals to which 630-CITY crisis calls can be directed.

The Municipal Code Compliance Division (MCCD) has not had a staffing increase in ten years, causing the capacity of the division to lag far behind the needs of the city. This department is directly responsible for managing the physical blight in underserved neighborhoods such as those in the Northwest quadrant.

- Support reviewing an increase in staffing level of code compliance officers, which would allow for more even enforcement of the relevant ordinance codes across the city in a way that is truly driven by community needs rather than citizen complaints.
- Officer training should be regularly updated, enabling code enforcement officers to interpret and effectively enforce municipal codes.
- Evaluate the current classification of key positions within the department that carry higher workloads relative to the same position in other departments within the city. This will reduce turnover, further improving efficiency.
- Invest in a modernized software package for MCCD (the current package was developed in 1997), which would allow for integration with other City systems, improve tracking of cases, allow for more robust data analysis, improve decision-making, and maximize the staff time available.
- Foreclosure options for abandoned properties should be streamlined:
 - Properties that repeatedly engage the code enforcement process consume staff time and departmental resources. Many vacant properties have absentee owners and can consume inordinate sums of money when it comes to nuisance abatement and demolition expenses. Liens are often not collected, and this should be remedied.
 - Earlier identification and intervention can reduce costs and preserve scarce housing units, particularly those owned by out-of-town individuals and corporations, which are often difficult to contact. Revitalization of blighted properties through early intervention allows the property of habitual offenders to be transferred into the hands of community organizations, non-profits, and investors, which would accelerate the process to save housing resources and protect those properties' chain of title.
- Special Magistrates should not be members of the Office of General Counsel but should be a neutral party to avoid conflict of interest.
- The City should enhance maintenance of historic city-owned cemeteries in Northwest quadrant. Focus on Emmet Reed cemetery should be an immediate project.

The Public Works Department is responsible for the maintenance and construction of an incredible collection of City assets that directly impact the quality of life in Jacksonville's neighborhoods. With a growing CIP budget and the forthcoming resiliency plan, an increase in the Public Works Department's operating budget is critical. Current staffing levels and turnover rates present a challenge to infrastructure improvements citywide.

- The City should pursue funding through the Justice40 Initiative, under which, the Federal Government has made it a goal that 40 percent of the overall benefits of certain Federal investments flow to disadvantaged communities that are marginalized, underserved, and overburdened by pollution.
- Prioritize older and underserved neighborhoods particularly in the Northwest quadrant.
- The resurfacing of major neighborhood streets is ranked by the Director of Public Works as the #1 improvement that changes neighborhood attitudes about pride in the place they live. Increased road resurfacing will also improve road safety and reduce maintenance costs. The resurfacing budget should be increased, with priority on underserved communities.
- Increase the visibility and accessibility of the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), using a more consumer-friendly format so citizens can understand how the system works and can participate in the planning process, such as a publicly accessible dashboard (website).
- Explore bringing waste management under City control rather than using private contractors and waste management companies.
- Enhance efforts to improve tree canopies through quarterly maintenance and proactive tree planting in underserved neighborhoods. As sidewalks are added to communities, trees should be planted to provide needed shade.
- The City should prioritize safety projects that will increase pedestrian and bicycle safety mirroring the Vision Zero strategy to eliminate traffic fatalities and severe injuries while increasing safe, healthy, equitable mobility for all.
- The City should encourage Parks and Recreation to acquire property to enhance public access to our waterways.
- Additional resources should be dedicated for litter removal.

Neighborhood Ambassador Program

- The City should implement a pilot Urban Core Ambassador Program, modeled after DVI's Ambassador program. The pilot project would take place in older neighborhoods proximal to Downtown, north of the St. Johns River. DVI should consider a partnership with JTA to acquire funding and prioritize older neighborhoods, neglected neighborhoods, and neighborhoods in the Northwest Quadrant.

Transportation

Coordination among the Jacksonville Transportation Authority, the Florida Department of Transportation, the North Florida TPO, Public Works, JEA, other utility providers, railroads, and other stakeholders, is needed to facilitate transportation projects, in the beginning of each project, and to acquire grants and Federal funding for the efficient development of local transportation needs.

- A collaborative transportation committee, which would include the Mayor's Office, JTA, FDOT, the North Florida TPO, Public Works, JEA, other utility providers, railroads, and other stakeholders, is needed to develop a comprehensive transportation plan, coordinate logistics on major projects, and collectively pursue strategic funding

opportunities. Adopt legislation to establish the core group of required attendees and to ensure this committee continues with this and future administrations.

- Consider lowering of speed limit in residential neighborhoods as appropriate and implement other traffic calming techniques to make neighborhoods safer.

Planning, Zoning, and Historic Preservation in Older Neighborhoods

Many older neighborhoods in the urban core have historic buildings that are eligible but have not yet been designated by the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission. The designation of Historic Districts, as well as individual historic landmarks, engenders pride in neighborhoods and often produces a decrease in blight and increase in property values.

- Priority should be given to older and underserved neighborhoods for historic designation, including individual landmark buildings as well as contiguous districts.
- The City should develop a policy to give special consideration to legacy residents and implement strategies to protect them against displacement.

The Historic Preservation Commission, as well as the staff of the Planning and Development Department, can have a major impact on older neighborhoods. In the recent past, these entities have often been more sensitive to desires of developers than the needs and wishes of neighborhood citizens. The Zoning Code is outdated and needs revision.

- Update COJ's Zoning Code to address the many outdated provisions, to reduce the amount of variances and waivers, and to consider today's needs for density and walkability.
- COJ should re-evaluate the criteria for PUDs to avoid inappropriate developments intruding into the neighborhoods.
- Several older neighborhoods have Zoning Overlays, which provide customized protection for the special character of those neighborhoods. These Zoning Overlays should be enforced. Also, Zoning Overlays should be considered to protect additional older and underserved neighborhoods.
- Neighborhood plans should be updated, maintained, and supported to serve as guidance documents for neighborhood redevelopment.
- Appoint a Director of the Planning and Development Department who is attuned with the concerns of neighborhoods and who understands what is needed to create sustainable and vibrant neighborhoods.

Office of Economic Development

The Administration should create policies for economic security for food desert neighborhoods.

Submitted by: Wayne Wood and Diallo-Sekou Seabrooks, Co-Chairs

This Subcommittee has been dedicated to the mission and charge requested from the Mayor's Transition team. Garrett Dennis has been a good leader as we have developed the Neighborhoods Initiatives Subcommittee Report contribution to the Mayor's Infrastructure Committee. Here is the team:

Dr. Wayne Wood, Co-Chair	Neighborhood Activist, author and historian
Diallo Sekou-Seabrooks, Co-Chair	Developer of the nonprofit Urban Geoponics, Community advocate and Real Estate Investor
Eunice Barnum	President of the Sherwood Forest/Paradise Park Community Association
James Coggin	Senior Director, Grantmaking and Impact Investing at the Community Foundation
David Garfunkel	President of LIFT JAX
William Hoff	Urban Core Community Advocate
Leslie Jean-Bart	Attorney at Terrell Hogan
Carla Jones	Storytelling with Strategy Agency
Michael Kirwan	Attorney at Foley & Lardner, President of
Tyler Matthews	President ETM, infrastructure and development consulting
Jim Robinson	Civil Engineer, former Director of Public Works for COJ

The Subcommittee has had many presentations from a variety of Departments throughout the City providing us valuable information which allowed this Subcommittee to develop our recommendations. Here is a list of those presenters:

COJ Neighborhood Overview-CPAC focus	Randy DeFoor, former City Council Member, Chaired NCSPHS Committee
Jacksonville Electric Authority (JEA)	Mickhael Sulayman
COJ Public Works Department	Steve Long, Director of Public Works
COJ's 630-CITY Department	Monica Cichowlas, Customer Service Mgr. 630-CITY
COJ's Municipal Code Compliance Division (MCCD)	Thomas Register, Chief MCCD
Springfield Preservation and Revitalization (SPAR)	Michael Haskins, Executive Director SPAR
Jacksonville Transportation Authority (JTA)	Greer Gillis, Sr. Vice President JTA
Department of Transportation (DOT)	Jim Knight, Urban Planning and Modal Admin. DOT
North Florida Transportation Planning Org. (TPO)	Jeff Sheffield, Executive Director TPO
COJ's Neighborhoods Department	Chiquita Moore, Operations Dir. Neighborhoods
Overview of CPAC's, COJ's Neighborhood Services	Michelle Godwin, Neighborhood Svcs. Coordinator
CPAC Chairs from 5 of 6 CPAC's	Donald Green, North CPAC Rhonda Boyd, Northwest CPAC Joanne Parker Griffin, Southeast CPAC Tim Keeley, Greater Arlington/Beaches CPAC Bryant Shumaker, Urban Core CPAC
COJ's Office of Economic Development (OED)	Ed Randolph, Economic Development Officer and Karen Nasrallah, Manager OED