



**Office of the Mayor
City of Jacksonville
Alvin Brown**

Address to City Council – 2014-2015 Proposed Budget

**July 14, 2014
As prepared for delivery**

Good morning, Mr. President and members of Jacksonville City Council. Sheriff Rutherford. Honored guests. City employees. Fellow citizens. Thank you for this opportunity to present the proposed City of Jacksonville budget for the next year.

I first wish to congratulate President Yarborough and Vice President Anderson on their new leadership roles. I also want to thank each member of City Council for your dedication and service to the people of Jacksonville.

This is a dynamic time for our city.

Our unemployment rate is falling and our high school graduation rate is rising. Foreclosures are down and home values are up. Our businesses are investing, our port is expanding and our college-educated population is growing. Our Downtown is coming alive, our neighborhoods are getting rid of blight and our parks are being enjoyed by millions of visitors.

In short, we are a city blessed with new energy that is driving us forward to a better and more prosperous future. Our responsibility is to sustain and build that momentum to achieve even greater progress. It takes vision. It takes leadership. It takes a spirit of partnership.

Thanks to all of us working together – our City Council, businesses, nonprofit organizations, faith-based communities, schools and all of our citizens – we are making Jacksonville a city of opportunity.

We can see a city of opportunity in the cranes hovering over Riverside Avenue as they build 600 new housing units and a new park, Unity Plaza, on what was once blighted city property at the gateway to Downtown.

We can see a city of opportunity in our veterans who are finding civilian careers in Jacksonville with our Jobs for Vets initiative that connects veterans with more than 230 local employers, large and small.

We can see a city of opportunity in the high school students who will be the first in their families to pursue a college degree – thanks to participation in our Learn2Earn partnership that introduces them to higher education with a one-week immersion experience on a local college campus.

We can see a city of opportunity in the One Spark festival, a showcase for innovation and entrepreneurship, that brought 260,000 people to the heart of our Downtown. We can see it in the huge crowds and excitement at recent events like the U.S. National Men's soccer match, the Florida Country Superfest and the annual Jacksonville Jazz Festival. We'll attract even more top-tier events thanks to our new Sports Council partnership with JAX Chamber and Gator Bowl Sports.

Finally, we can see a city of opportunity in our many top rankings:

For the second consecutive year, we are among the top five cities in the nation for finding a job. We are the second fastest-growing job market for IT business services (behind only Austin, Texas). We are in the top 10 among large U.S. cities for growth in our college-educated population. We are being called the "Best U.S. City to Start a Business," a city that is "hot for start-ups" and the most small business-friendly city in Florida.

Yes, we truly are a city of opportunity.

For the first time since 2007, our local property tax base is growing. But City expenses are also up. The ever-increasing costs of annual responsibilities such as pensions continue to eat into our revenues. As in past years, we face tough choices and we must make difficult decisions.

Today, I am honored to present Council with a budget that is balanced – and with no increase in our property tax rate. This is a budget that recognizes we still live in difficult financial times. But it also recognizes that we must make essential investments for Jacksonville to be a true city of opportunity.

As a city of opportunity, we must invest in jobs. This has been our Number One priority from Day One. And it remains our Number One priority today.

In Jacksonville, we want people working. And we know that people want to work. At last month's Citywide Job Fair, we had 15,000 job-seekers and more than 150 companies with jobs to fill. These people were looking for opportunity, looking to be self-sufficient and looking to live the American Dream.

We have made tremendous progress in the past three years. Our unemployment rate has gone from over 11 percent to under 6 percent today.

We did it by investing in our city, investing in our businesses and investing in our workforce. We did it by working with Daniel Davis and JAX Chamber, Jerry Mallot and JAXUSA Partnership, and Governor Scott and his economic development team.

Last year, we directly assisted 14 companies that are creating nearly 2,000 new jobs with \$360 million in new private capital investment. This year, thanks to our London trade mission, Greencore is investing \$10 million and creating nearly 300 new jobs in Jacksonville. And Adecco Group is relocating its North American headquarters here – bringing 185 new jobs with an average salary of \$63,000 per year.

One of our most powerful engines of economic opportunity is JAXPORT. We want to help the port continue to modernize and expand.

That is why I established our Port Task Force. I want to thank Councilman Ray Holt for his service on the Task Force and his commitment to helping JAXPORT achieve its full economic potential.

Already, the design phase to deepen the harbor has started. Six months ago, many people thought it was “Mission Impossible” to get Congressional authorization for this project. But we proved it could be done.

We succeeded because we all came together, united and determined: Governor Scott, Senators Nelson and Rubio, Congresswoman Brown, Congressman Crenshaw, JAX Chamber and companies like CSX. At the national level, I worked closely with my colleagues on the U.S. Conference of Mayors who also had a stake in this legislation.

Our leadership and teamwork paid off for Jacksonville.

We are also investing to expand international business and trade opportunities.

Exports from the Jacksonville metro area are up more than 31 percent since 2008. As chair of the U.S. Conference of Mayors Task Force on Ports and Exports, I know that international trade and ports will play an even larger role in our economy. 95 percent of the world’s customers are outside the United States. We want to sell to the world.

That is why I am grateful that City Council has approved a new Office of International Trade. This office will create jobs by coordinating with JAXPORT and local companies to position Jacksonville to compete in a 21st century global economy.

We must also invest in our small businesses and entrepreneurs. They are the foundation not only of our economy, but our community, too.

That is why we will reactivate the Northwest Jacksonville Economic Development Trust Fund to promote small business success and create jobs in an area of our city that needs more opportunity.

Creating a city of opportunity means investing in our Downtown. We want Downtown Jacksonville to become a vibrant destination for people to work, live and visit. A great city depends on a great Downtown.

That is why we worked with JAX Chamber, the Civic Council and City Council to create the Downtown Investment Authority to lead efforts to revitalize Downtown. I appreciate the hard work of DIA Chair Oliver Barakat and his colleagues and CEO Aundra Wallace and his staff.

Establishing DIA has laid the foundation for a more vibrant Downtown. Now is the time to build on that foundation.

That is why we are entering into a partnership to provide parking in the Yates Garage for the new Jessie Ball duPont Center – a \$20 million investment in Downtown. This new hub for nonprofit organizations will be located in the old Haydon Burns Library. It will add 200 new workers downtown and bring new life to a building that has been vacant for nearly a decade.

That is why this budget proposes to boost our investment in One Spark so this annual event can continue to grow.

Here in Jacksonville, we are blessed to have a mighty river flowing through our Downtown. We must make that riverfront a catalyst for Downtown revitalization. That effort starts with The Jacksonville Landing.

There is a vision – a plan – to redevelop The Landing as a Downtown showcase that offers housing, entertainment and retail, as well as green space and a plaza opening the riverfront to our Downtown.

In this budget, I ask the City Council to commit \$11.8 million in capital investment to make the public infrastructure improvements needed to revitalize The Landing.

We must also make progress elsewhere on our riverfront.

The Shipyards property is one of our City's most important riverfront assets. It has sat empty long enough. There is now strong private-sector interest in this City-owned property. This budget proposes to start the environmental clean-up needed to encourage private development of this strategic property.

I also ask the Council to support the redesign of another riverfront property – Metropolitan Park – to enhance its capabilities as a major entertainment venue. I would like to thank Finance Chair Richard Clark for being a tireless advocate for Metropolitan Park.

As a city of opportunity, we must invest in our veterans.

Veterans are a vital part of our community – and we want Jacksonville to be the most military- and veteran-friendly city in the country.

That is why we have enhanced our core services to assist veterans in securing their earned VA benefits and other assistance.

With support from the U.S. Department of Labor, we are also helping homeless veterans in our community find jobs and safe housing.

I firmly believe that no one should spend a night on the streets of the nation they've fought to defend. That is why I am committed to ending homelessness for our veterans in Jacksonville. I especially want to thank Councilman Stephen Joost for his passionate commitment to helping homeless veterans.

Today, we're honored to be joined by several veterans who were once jobless and homeless, but who are now proud and productive members of our community. We welcome you.

As a city of opportunity, we must invest in public safety – because the first duty of any government is to protect its citizens.

That is why I support Sheriff Rutherford's Operation Ceasefire anti-violence campaign.

Our laws must be enforced, and lawbreakers must be held accountable. To do that, Sheriff Rutherford and I have partnered on a proposed budget that will allow the Sheriff's Office to hire 40 additional police officers and 40 additional community service officers. I want to thank Sheriff Rutherford and his team for working closely with us on the development of this year's budget.

Just as we must be tough on crime by giving law enforcement the tools it needs, we must also be tough on the causes of crime.

As a city of opportunity, we must invest in education and our young people. As Mayor, I am focused on helping young people by providing positive opportunities so they can succeed in school and stay out of trouble.

That is why we have worked together with the private sector, our schools, our nonprofits and faith-based communities to provide positive adult role models through our Mayor's Mentors.

In this budget, we are adding resources to the Jacksonville Children's Commission to expand our Summer Jobs program for teens. We have a group of kids here who are spending their summer working hard, thanks to this program.

This budget will also allow the Children's Commission to offer more summer camp and after-school opportunities for our children. I want to thank Councilmember Kim Daniels for her strong advocacy on behalf of Jacksonville's young people.

These are smart investments in our kids. They are smart investments in crime prevention. And they are smart investments in our future.

Another smart investment is Learn2Earn.

Learn2Earn empowers high school students to go to college, pursue their dreams and achieve their God-given potential. This summer, they not only got to live on the JU campus for a week. They toured other campuses – the University Florida, Florida State, Florida A&M and the University of Central Florida. We have a group of Learn2Earn students here with us this morning. We welcome you.

As a City of Opportunity, we must invest in our quality of life – our neighborhoods, our parks, our libraries and more. Quality of life goes to the heart and soul of who we are as a community.

During the past year, we launched Operation Blight to clean up our neighborhoods. I want to thank Councilmember Denise Lee and the Council's Ad Hoc Committee on Neighborhood Blight for their leadership.

Quality of life means giving every Jacksonville citizen an opportunity to enjoy the unique assets that our city has to offer. But some in our community do not even have access to basic services like city water.

Nearly 50 years ago, certain neighborhoods were promised access to city water – and those promises have not been kept. These citizens have been waiting far too long. Our City must make good on its word.

I would like to commend Councilwoman Lori Boyer for working with my administration, the faith community and the private sector to fulfill that promise in the Larsen neighborhood. Legislation is currently before City Council to extend waterlines to residents of the Larsen neighborhood.

This budget takes that effort several steps further. Thanks to the leadership of Councilman Reggie Brown, we propose to fund the long-delayed extension of waterlines to the U.S. 1 corridor in Northwest Jacksonville. And thanks to the leadership of Councilman Warren Jones, we propose to fund improvements in the Robinson's Addition neighborhood.

We cannot be a city of opportunity if all of our residents do not have access to safe, clean water. As Mayor, I will continue working with City Council to fulfill the promises our City made to its residents. This is not just good government. It is a moral imperative that we must fulfill.

Neighborhood senior centers are also essential to our quality of life. In Jacksonville, we're proud to invest in our seniors because they have already invested so much in our city – raising families, paying taxes and building businesses.

Our budget calls for making long-overdue improvements to the Mary Singleton, Charlie T. Joseph, Longbranch, Moncrief and Riverview Senior Centers. I want to thank Councilmember Dr. Johnny Gaffney for his support of our seniors. We have some seniors here from these centers. They make Jacksonville special.

In a city of opportunity, all of our citizens must have access to opportunity.

Through increased support for our Public Service Grant Program, we will strengthen our partnership with nonprofit organizations to help families and individuals in need.

These include some of our most well-known nonprofits like Clara White Mission, Lutheran Social Services, Daniel Memorial and the Emergency Services and Homeless Coalition. These organizations do life-saving – and life-affirming – work for our community's most vulnerable residents.

Investing in quality of life also means that people, regardless of income, should have access to the justice system. That is the mission of Jacksonville Area Legal Aid.

In these challenging times, JALA has become a major partner in helping our citizens achieve economic stability, especially in areas like housing. For years, our county has lagged behind other Northeast Florida counties in supporting JALA's mission.

I want to give Councilman Bill Gulliford credit for an innovative public-private partnership idea. He suggested that the City agree to match the private funds that JALA is able to raise each year. This would provide an incentive that empowers JALA to be innovative in its fundraising. Our budget will provide the first City match to JALA's privately-raised funds.

We must also continue to ensure that our public hospital – UF Health Jacksonville – has the financial stability to provide essential medical treatment to the citizens of our community

Councilman Matt Schellenberg has been leading an effort to find innovative ways to sustain UF Health in its critical work. In this budget, I propose an additional contribution as we partner with UF Health to provide health care to all of our citizens.

In order to be a city of opportunity, we must ensure that our neighborhoods have the tools they need to thrive. There is no better example of a neighborhood that is primed to thrive than our historic Five Points District.

Five Points is a landmark area which is growing in popularity with new restaurants, shops, offices, and other amenities. Its growing success has also led to growing traffic problems. This budget will fund a redesign of streets and sidewalks to make this neighborhood safer and more accessible. I want to thank Councilmembers Jim Love and Robin Lumb for their leadership in advocating for the Five Points Plan.

A city of opportunity is one that works to protect its natural resources – so our children and grandchildren can enjoy them. In Jacksonville, we are blessed to have the largest urban park system in America. Parks help define Jacksonville as one of America's great cities.

Last year, we opened Sheffield Park. Earlier this year, we celebrated the opening of Seaton Creek Historic Preserve. With our People + Parks Connection, we have expanded public access and use of our parks.

And with our Waterproof Jax, more than 1,500 children are getting free swim lessons this summer. They include hundreds of children at Woodland Acres Elementary School in Councilman Bill Bishop's district. We have a group of these new swimmers here today. We welcome you.

This proposed budget continues to invest in our parks.

For example, at Blue Cypress Park, we propose to replace the boardwalk and rebuild the swimming pool that has been closed for the past two years. Council President Yarborough and Councilman John Crescimbeni have long been advocates of Blue Cypress Park.

Thanks to the leadership of Councilman Don Redman, we propose to invest in the long-delayed opening of Touchton Park.

Councilman Doyle Carter deserves great credit for his long-standing advocacy of the Jacksonville Equestrian Center. His leadership has helped ensure our budget makes modest but necessary investments in the future success of the Center.

It is impossible to have a discussion about the quality of life we enjoy without talking about the St. Johns River. The river supports our ecosystem. It supports our tourism and recreation. It supports our economy.

We will invest in preserving and protecting this vital asset in our community with projects to improve water quality. Our proposed budget will increase the City's investment in phasing out septic tanks. We also propose to make a substantial capital investment in other water quality improvement projects.

Our public libraries are vital educational institutions in the community – serving people of all ages, from all walks of life and from all across the city. This budget will help restore service hours at the Main Downtown Library. And we propose to help our libraries invest in new materials after years of budget cuts.

Our overriding goal in this budget is to protect our taxpayers and invest in Jacksonville's future. It is about getting the best return on our investment for the next generation.

We have reached a point in the life of our community when we must seize the moment and use our resources to make not only a better today, but a better tomorrow for Jacksonville. To move us forward as a city of opportunity, it is both necessary and the right thing to do to use a modest share of the City's financial reserves to invest in these key priorities that will make a positive, lasting impact on our city for years to come.

We need to remember: This is not just about us. This is about our kids and grandkids. This is about the power to realize their hopes, dreams and aspirations.

In the words of Bernice King, the youngest child of Dr. Martin Luther King: “There is tremendous power when people come together around an issue that is clear, a cause that is just and a purpose that is righteous.”

Together, we have the power.

Together, we have the power to achieve pension reform – once and for all.

Together, we have the power to create jobs for the jobless and expand opportunity for all.

Together, we have the power to find housing for the homeless and do what is right for all those who have served our country in uniform.

Together, we have the power to create safe neighborhoods and protect our children from violence.

Together, we have the power to educate our young people and prepare the next generation of entrepreneurs and business leaders, doctors and scientists, educators and engineers, police officers and firefighters.

Together, we have the power to transform our downtown into a vibrant destination – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

And together, we have the power to achieve the best quality of life for our city.

There are no problems we cannot solve when we work together.

In 2 Timothy 1:7, it says: “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.”

This is the spirit that should guide us as we lead Jacksonville forward to new greatness as a city of opportunity.

I want to thank all the members of our Council for your continuing service to our city. May God bless you. And may God continue to bless the City of Jacksonville.