A VISION FOR JACKSONVILLE

WORDS BY
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2026

INTRODUCTION

This initiative started in 2012 when I began thinking about Jacksonville's identity as a city, who we are, and concluded with "A Vision for Jacksonville" in 2020. I pursued Jacksonville's identity singularly for a few years, thinking and writing about our Jacksonville identity, reviewing the city's Comprehensive Redevelopment Plan (CRA) for both the Northbank and the Southbank, and interviewing city leaders. After three years working on my own, I brought in other Jacksonville architects who, as a group, formulated an identity, a vision for our city.

The initiative continued for eight years in three phases:

1. A Community Identity for Jacksonville
2. Senior Architects Steering Committee
3. A Vision for Jacksonville

A COMMUNITY IDENTITY FOR JACKSONVILLE

Jacksonville does not have a community identity. It is inevitable when trying to envision the integrated downtown environment to which we aspire, that we consider how this relates to our identity. Thus, it is necessary to consider this broader umbrella under which all downtown elements, both environment and activities, must coalesce. A series of projects will never generate a Jacksonville identity.

Why do we need an identity?

- A community identity is what connects us all.
- It is a common human value that we can all agree upon.
- It is what we can rally around.
- It's the flag under which we march.
- It allows us to work together to accomplish things that we otherwise couldn't.
- It's what makes us proud to be part of this community.
- With such an identity, we need not worry about what the rest of the world thinks of us—that will be an automatic outcome.

Examples:

Community identity can consist of physical objects (Seattle Space Needle, St Louis Arch, San Antonio Riverwalk, Chicago "Bean" sculpture, etc.) or ideas (Austin Music, Charlotte Banking Center, Las Vegas Entertainment, Los Angeles Movies, Silicon Valley Technology, etc.). Virtually anything that ties us together and makes us proud can be a community identity.

Previous Identity Studies:

There have been many studies regarding our community identity including the comprehensive Riverdance study by Jacksonville Community Council Inc. (JCCI) in 2000. And as part of a community input phase of the JAX2025 initiative in 2013, JCCI undertook two exercises to gather information regarding what the community thought is or should be our identity. Anyone from the community was invited to participate. The table where I sat included a homeless person. In the hundreds of 6-word and 3-word responses to the question of our identity, there was not any overriding consensus.

Previous Identity Studies (continued):

The private Civic Council (CC), made up of leaders in the Jacksonville business community, is currently working on the Jacksonville identity issue through soliciting input from the community. Anyone can fill out the survey from the CC website. Their survey statement is: *Jacksonville's remarkable growth and natural advantages have yet to be matched by a clear, cohesive identity—one that defines who we are, connects our built environment, and fuels civic pride. Unlike peer cities such as Charleston and Nashville, our vague reputation limits our economic potential, tourism, and talent attraction, while dampening residents' sense of belonging.*

Interviews:

I interviewed many city leaders, including:

- Marcelle Polednik, Director, MOCA.
- Ben Warner, Executive Director, JCCI.
- Diane Brunet-Garcia, Partner/Vice President, Brunet-Garcia.
- Michael Cavendish, Gunster Law.
- Preston Haskell, Chairman, The Haskell Company.
- Alan Howard, Chair (outgoing), MOCA Board of Trustees, Attorney.
- Paul Astleford, President and CEO, Visit Jacksonville.
- Jim Draper, Artist, Environmentalist.
- John Zona III, Architect
- Lara Dietrich, Dietrich Planning, (JIA draft plan)
- Steve Williams, CEO Harbinger
- Steve Halverson, President and CEO Haskell, former Chairman Civic Council
- John Delaney, former mayor and UNF President

Identity Conclusions:

After working singularly for three years from 2012 until 2015, I came to the following conclusions:

- An identity is an overall context that unifies it: past, present, future.
- An identity is context that unifies is a vision.
- An identity doesn't just happen—it must be created.
- Creation of a city identity requires city leadership. It cannot be done from the grass roots level.
- Our identity must be "uniquely Jacksonville". It cannot be gleaned from other cities.
- Our identity is not likely to be "one big development project".
- An impediment to our having a community identity may be our generally negative thinking and attitude about ourselves and our community. This undermines self-confidence, which is necessary to build our identity.

Identity Conclusions (continued):

Among my considerations for a Jacksonville identity were two primary possibilities:

- Harlem of the South. The city has been hesitant to recognize our rich musical heritage, mostly centered in LaVilla. The LaVilla community was destroyed, firstly by routing I-95 highway through it and secondly by demolishing most of the community though Federal redevelopment programs and grants. All members of our community may not be able to relate to this identity.

- The River. The St. Johns River is Jacksonville's unique feature, unlike any other river flowing through any other city worldwide. All residents of Jacksonville can take pride in and relate to the river

SENIOR ARCHITECTS STEERING COMMITTEE

In 2011 I attended the local chapter of The American Institute of Architects regular meeting. AIA is a national professional organization, not a non-profit. I had been a member of AIA since 1968 but didn't attend meetings regularly and had not attended at all since my retirement in 2007. Two things struck me about that meeting. Although AIA Jacksonville has a membership of over two hundred, only about 25 were in attendance. Secondly, I didn't see any members with full gray hair, like me, there. I thought that the AIA chapter members were missing a great opportunity to engage and leverage the experience of older architects.

After thinking about this lack of connection between older and younger architects I decided to create a small group of older architects to discuss this issue and, hopefully, get them (and me) more engaged with the chapter. I invited a few of my fellow architects to meet and at our initial meeting we decided to invite the current chapter president who could lend credence to our committee. We also invited the leader of the Emerging Design Professionals (EDPs) of the chapter so that we had a

younger perspective. EDPs are younger architects working on completion of their professional architect licensing exam. I named this group the Senior Architects Steering Committee. We met regularly and discussed at length the architectural and planning happenings around the city. And we discussed varied ideas to connect the younger architects with the older. We agreed that many of the younger architects did not even know many of the older architects. Two of the programs which we generated are enumerated in the following pages.

Ten Architects You Should Know:

As our first committee undertaking held in early 2012, we organized a program titled Ten Architects You Should Know. I led this initiative and we agreed upon a list of ten of us and fellow architects which included Melody Bishop, David Boyer, Dave Engdahl, David Laffitte, Tom McCrary, Ted Pappas, Tom Reynolds, Hershel Shepard, Walter Taylor and John Zona. To stay within the time constraints of a regular chapter meeting, we limited presentations to 6 minutes each. And to enhance the interface between senior and younger architects we assigned an EDP to each presenter to help with the presentation technology. Many of the senior architects had only film slides and projectors for their presentations, and we wanted to organize and sequence the presentations in electronic media. Interest spread in the community regarding our meeting program, and we expected a large crowd. It was free! In addition, we needed a theatre-like venue for the presentations, so we reserved the theatre in the main library downtown. One of the technology knowledgeable EDPs aggregated all the presentations so that each would follow efficiently right after the previous. About 250 were in the audience. The program and the presentations went well. The EDPs introduced their assigned senior architect and some of the presentations were done jointly. I believe this event accomplished our goal. Our program was copied annually thereafter by the EDP group under the title 777—seven presenters with seven slides for seven minutes.

Speed Mentoring:

Our Senior Architects Steering Committee continued to meet regularly under my leadership, and we discussed additional older-younger ideas. One program which we initiated followed what a few other AIA chapters had been doing—Speed Mentoring. The concept is to have one senior and one younger architect sit and talk together for a limited period, we set 5 minutes, to get to know each other, share experiences and to pose questions. Then the EDP would move to the next senior architect. That worked well toward achieving our committee objectives and some of the mentor-mentee relationships continued beyond the session.

A VISION FOR JACKSONVILLE

Our Senior Architect Steering Committee continued to meet, and we began to discuss how we might undertake a "real" project in the community, a tangible project which could by demonstration elevate AIA Jacksonville and the value of architects. After much discussion concerning what our small group could undertake (obtaining grants and financing for a project, etc.), I brought my visioning work to the committee. At many subsequent meetings we began discussing our city identity, and lack of coordination of the proposed riverfront projects. In early 2015 we settled on what we now call the Downtown Visioning Initiative, which I continuously led until the conclusion of the effort in 2020.

Jacksonville lacks a clear, iconic, integrated vision of what we want our downtown to be when we're finished (it will always be evolving but we need an umbrella under which all that we do fits). A successful vision which generates an active, cohesive, integrated and viable downtown Jacksonville cannot be achieved through separate isolated individual projects. For the city to be successful, vision comes first, and then projects are the strategy by which we implement that vision.

We first presented our initiative idea to the AIA Jacksonville chapter and submitted the idea for approval to the Executive Committee. The AIA Executive Committee issued this statement:

"*As architects, we are visionaries, planners and creators. We are used to envisioning something which does not exist and then developing a pathway to bring that vision to reality. Our skill sets in connection with the built environment are unique.*"

AIA Jacksonville Executive Committee accepted the recommendation of the Senior Architects Steering Committee and to engage the chapter in use of our collective creativity to explore and recommend to city officials a vision for Jacksonville. This would be done through a series of charette interfaces, to include all interested parties. The intent was to make our ideas known as a chapter and to make a difference in the city.

First, we established the initiative objective:

"To develop and present as AIA Jacksonville an integrated cohesive and iconic vision for downtown Jacksonville"

Vision can have a variety of meanings. From my prior work on identity, we set our architects' definition of vision:

- A Vision is about connectivity.
- A Vision is not a masterplan.
- Projects are not a Vision.
- A Vision connects projects.
- A Vision is a context with which every citizen and visitor can identify.
- A Vision makes us proud to be part of our community.
- A Vision is first and foremost about what we think about ourselves.

Little did we know when we began this initiative that we would be meeting and working on this for five years! The team met every two or three months, with a lot of individual work between meetings. The core group, who did the yeoman's amount of work, consisted of Chris Allen, Tom Duke, Dave Engdahl, Chris Flagg, David Laffitte, Ted Pappas, Brandon Pourch, Alan Wilson and John Zona. We brought other AIA and community members into specific sessions—all interested were invited to participate. And we engaged outside consultants who had expertise in a certain segment of what we were creating. All the work done by team members was done gratis. We made interim presentations to city officials and city entities, and to AIA Jacksonville chapter.

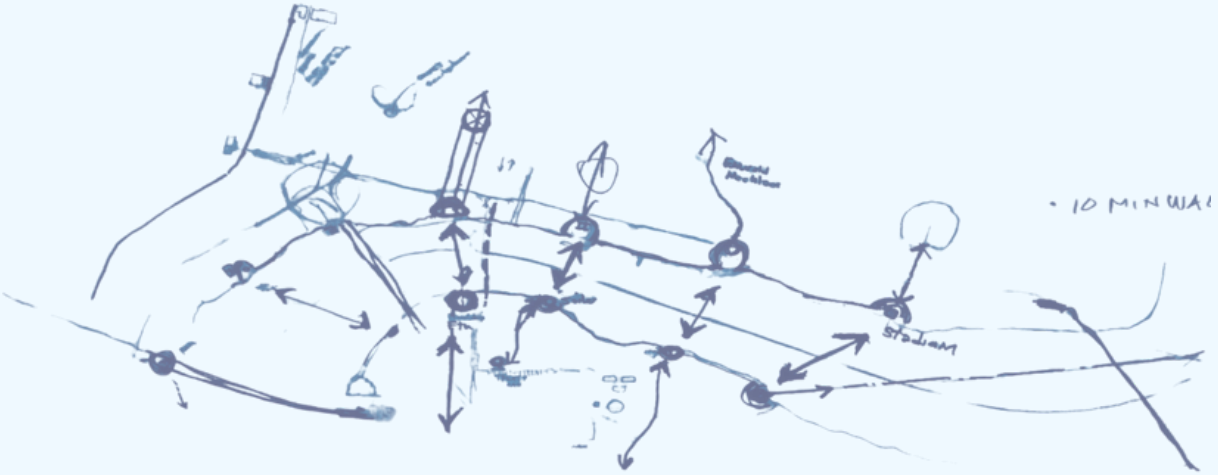
As part of my earlier search for an identity for Jacksonville, John Zona and I had met several times. Through my research with the Art in Public Places Committee, I had found a city in western Canada that was made up of a variety of small communities. To distinctly identify each of those communities a sculpture was created focused on the uniqueness of that community and placed at the center of the community. The sculpture provided an identity for each respective community. We both agreed that a similar identity concept could be applied along both banks of our river at strategic points and could, in aggregate, create an overall identity for

Jacksonville. We strongly agreed that Jacksonville's identity must be about our unique St. Johns river winding through our city. John created a rough sketch outlining that concept which became the basis of our downtown visioning initiative.

With our objective, definition of vision and conceptual direction defined, we began with review of the DIA Community Development Plans, CRA's for Northbank and Southbank. The basis of those documents was to "Redevelop the downtown from the river into the city."

Our committee studied worldwide large and smaller cities which are developed around a river and compared them to Jacksonville. We examined how the river was leveraged as the center of events and activities, assessed how the river tied into the city forming a comprehensive and unique whole. We reviewed the role of icons and identity. It was clear to us that the St. Johns River is truly unique, is our universal connection, and should be celebrated. After many meetings and extensive discussions, we developed the vision as briefly outlined in the following pages.

Initial Vision Concept Sketch



Vision for Jacksonville:

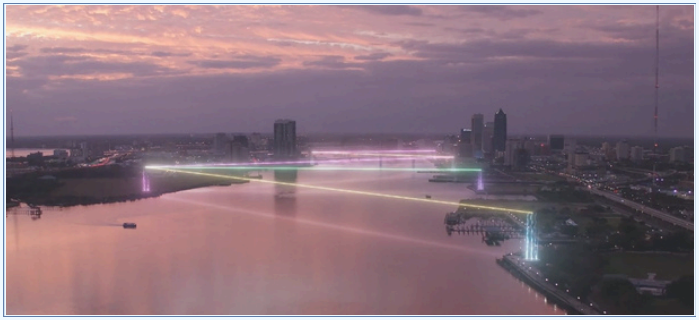
- It's about THE RIVER!
- Develop a series of pedestrian activity nodes along Northbank and Southbank riverwalks at key pedestrian connection points into the city.
- Space nodes about 10 minutes walking distance apart.
- Focus each activity node on uniquely Jacksonville history, heritage and culture such as our vibrant sports, Navy, music, railroads, Dixieland Park, health and wellness systems.
- Provide each activity node with a 15-20' tall icon relating to the respective theme.
- Connect each activity node through pedestrian ways from the river into the city.
- Connect the activity nodes across the river through water taxis.

- Anchor each activity node with a 100' tall Marker, visible one to the other and across the river. Develop Markers as waveform sculptures emanating from their riverfront location. All community constituencies can easily understand such universal symbols and can relate to them.

- Equip Markers with laser lights.

- Program and schedule laser light shows from the Markers, connecting Markers and both the Northbank and the Southbank, along and across the river.

- In aggregate, Markers provide a uniquely Jacksonville riverfront identity day and night.



The AIA Downtown Visioning Committee spent six months on designs for the activity node Markers. We studied objects which are related to the river, held design charettes with other design architects and developed many interesting options. Some on the committee thought each respective Marker could be different in design than the others. I saw a small directional sign to the riverwalk in San Antonio, Texas, which showed three wavy parallel lines with a directional arrow. No words, and none needed. It is a universal symbol. Everyone who saw that sign immediately knew it was about water and about the river. Aha, I thought, that's it! I could envision 10 or twelve of these 100' high symbols as Markers along the Jacksonville riverfront as an identity for our city. I made a scale model of this idea proposing three separate wavy vertical blue painted stainless steel prongs as the Marker design. The committee agreed that it was unique and clearly was about the river and agreed to proceed using this Marker design in our vision.



The last year of our initiative the committee spent working with an outside consultant, at our own personal expense, creating a two-minute video summarizing our vision titled “A Vision for Jacksonville”. We distributed it widely to city officials and posted it on YouTube (where it remains). Progress and finalized vision articles of our work were published several times in local publications. I created a PowerPoint show which was presented at an early 2021 AIA chapter meeting. AIA Jacksonville gave the project an award at its annual Awards Gala.


2021

THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS
JACKSONVILLE CHAPTER

presents this

Community Service Award

to

Downtown Vision Committee

for

Advocacy and Design *in the* Creation *of*
“A Vision for Jacksonville”

President

Andrew Hind, AIA

President-Elect

Jonathan Frost, AIA

October 13, 2021

I had planned to call a press conference to promote our vision, show the video and present “A Vision for Jacksonville”, but the ramping up pandemic prevented that approach and the initiative stopped. City officials are aware of our efforts, and our conclusions, and have very meekly incorporated a few of our ideas into the riverfront plans. But development of Jacksonville’s riverfront seems to be continuing to consist of a series of individual development projects, without an overall vision or identity as a guide.

FEATURE (distinctive characteristic)	ADVANTAGES (means favorable to desired end)	BENEFITS (what's in it for me?)
IDENTITY/PROMOTION		
1. River Centric	• River as our greatest asset.	• Consistent with DIA planning directions.
2. Uniquely Jacksonville	• Unifies our past, present and future. • Creates a community identity that connects us all.	• Pride in our community. • Allows us, together, to accomplish what we could not otherwise achieve.
3. High Level Organizing Framework	• Context for development of riverfront and downtown. • Considers downtown as a whole.	• Coordinated riverfront ensemble. • Creates a great city, which individual projects alone cannot.
4. Series of Node Markers 100' Tall	• Visually connects Northbank and Southbank riverfront. • Inherent orientation and wayfinding.	• Waterfront as a whole becomes iconic (our St. Louis Arch).

FEATURE (distinctive characteristic)	ADVANTAGES (means favorable to desired end)	BENEFITS (what's in it for me?)
RESIDENTS/VISITORS		
5. Coordinated Riverfront Pedestrian/Bicycle Environment	• Linear riverwalk parks create river focus. • Venue for a single coordinated riverfront program or event.	• Water experience for all. • People gathering/meeting. • Public access to the river. • Encourages healthy lifestyle.
6. Nodes	• Pedestrian/bicycle destinations. • Themed centers embody city history and presence. • Themed related smaller icon. • Light and sound shows connecting the riverfront. • Gateways from riverfront into city.	• Fun spirit-lifting activities and events. • Informational and educational. • Individual interactive experiences. • Functions day and night.
7. Water Taxi Connections	• All nodes connected, both banks of the river.	• On-the-water experience. • Ease of travel across the river.
8. Node Connectors	• Pedestrian/bicycle pathways connect nodes to key points within the city.	• Ease of wayfinding. • Pedestrian friendly downtown.

FEATURE (distinctive characteristic)	ADVANTAGES (means favorable to desired end)	BENEFITS (what's in it for me?)
BUSINESS/FINANCIAL		
9. Grand Downtown Public/Private Partnership	• Proactive (not reactive). • Catalyst for our city to prosper now and in the future. • Basis against which all development can be measured.	• Context for decision making—public and private. • Developers know what to expect. • Incremental implementation.
10. Drives Development	• Integrated with the design of each respective project. • Adds to existing riverwalk investment.	• Enhanced value of riverfront property.
11. Resident and Visitor Destination	• Crowds spend money.	• Supports businesses and development.

The following text is taken from AIA Jacksonville's promotional video titled "A Vision for Jacksonville":



"What makes a great city?
World-class cities feature architectural icons and public spaces…pedestrian friendly, engaging residents and visitors alike, inspiring their hopes and dreams.

Now, imagine the complete transformation of Jacksonville's own distinctive riverfront with the magnificent St. John's as its centerpiece.

Born out of a desire to create a unique identity that connects us, the Jacksonville chapter of the American Institute of Architects has a vision... to use our greatest asset as a catalyst for connectivity, entertainment, education, and enjoyment.



Our downtown riverfront will be an attraction and a destination. With exciting activity modes at key points along the river walk, where people enjoy the river through waterside parks and river taxis, as well as beautiful pedestrian plazas that give everyone the chance to experience and celebrate this wonderful river that defines our city.





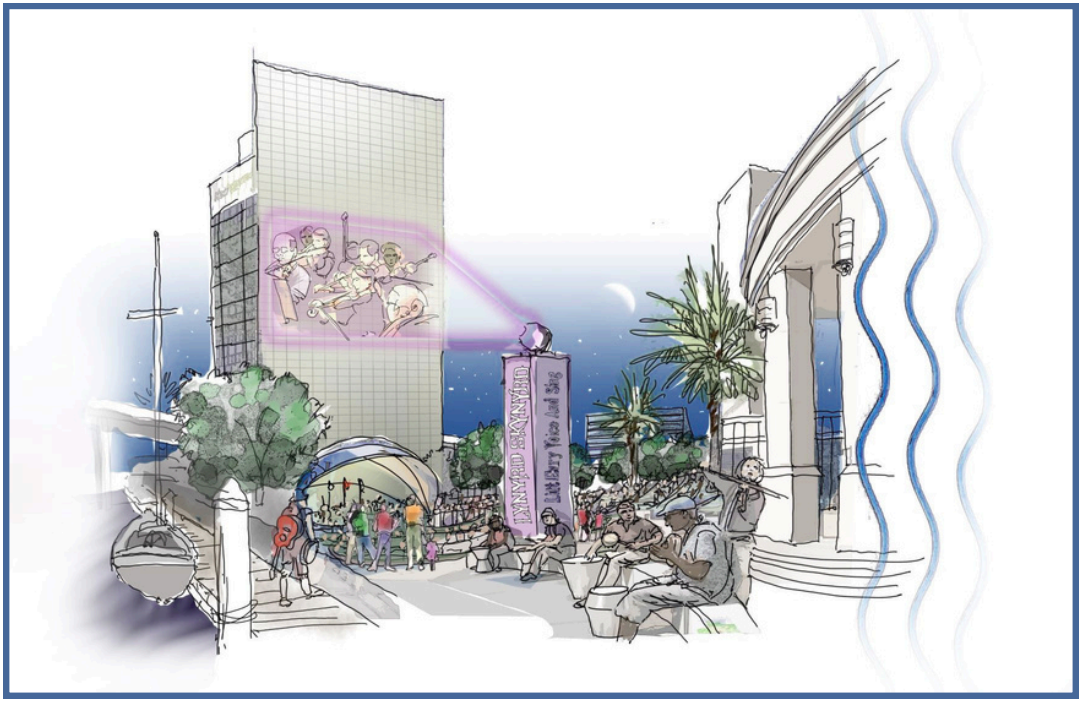
Each activity node is focused on a uniquely Jacksonville theme of history and culture— like our storied history and community connections with the U.S. Navy…



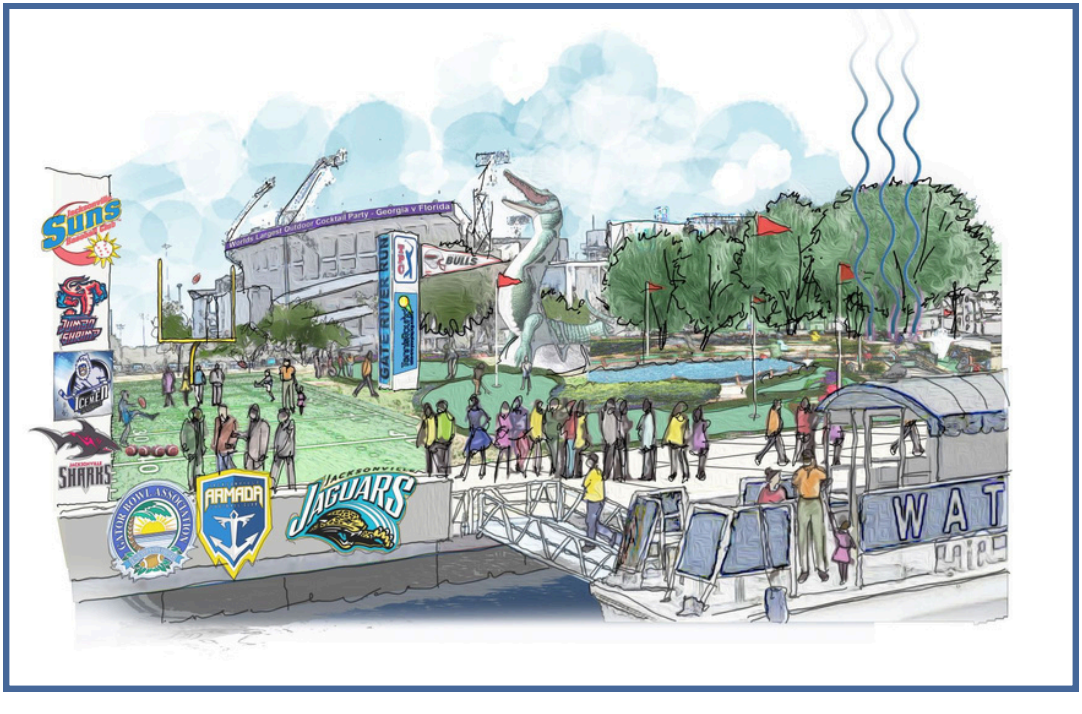
...or Dixieland Park, Jacksonville's great resort attraction of the early 20th century.



A music theme node explores Jacksonville's incredible musicians of LaVilla and Southern Rock...



... and Jacksonville's enthusiasm for sports is emphasized,...

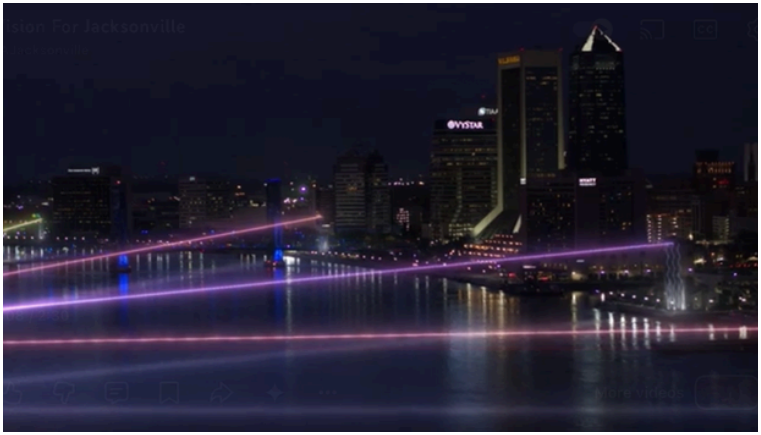


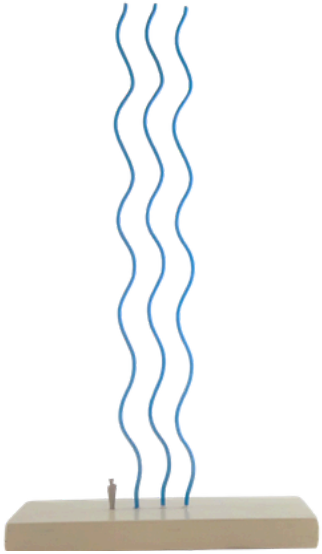
... as well as railroads and their influence on the development of the city.



Our great healthcare system is featured to encourage healthy lifestyles.

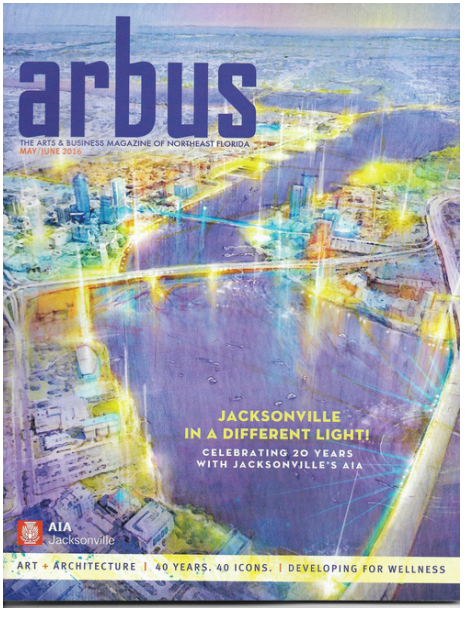




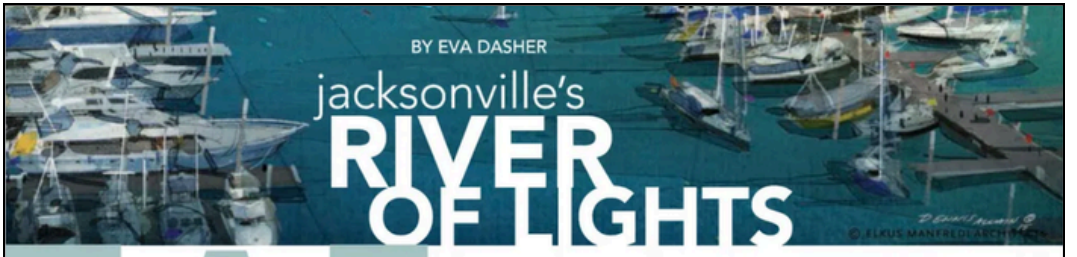


Topping off everything is a strong, unique design element—iconic waveform markers, each a hundred feet tall, identifying places for community activities and events, and illuminating a dazzling display of original electronic art. This design is a platform for our city, our river, and our heritage."

PRESS CLIPPINGS



Arbus May/June 2016



BY EVA DASHER

jacksonville's RIVER OF LIGHTS

When you imagine Jacksonville twenty, thirty or even fifty years into the future what do you see? Will it be a destination city, perhaps even a "Gateway to Florida," where droves of national and even international tourists flock to spend a few days reveling in all that our vibrant city has to offer? Will Downtown be a bustling hub of business and recreation filled with restaurants, hotels, museums, and entertainment venues that draw crowds of locals and visitors both day and night? Will neighborhoods and areas along our wide, sparkling river offer scenic walkways lined with shops, bistros and bars punctuated by parks and shaded places to sit, relax and enjoy our beautiful city?

A visionary group of local architects and urban designers, organized through Jacksonville's chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), have done more than just imagine these scenarios. They have taken the initiative to conceptualize a plan tentatively referred to as "River of Lights" that will showcase and connect the most vital components of our city in a compelling and revolutionary way, whether they exist today, are in development, or have yet to be conceived.

Chris Flagg, FASLA, of Haskell says the plan came about when the group of forward-thinkers got together a little over a year ago and essentially asked, "How do we create points of destination and draw people to Downtown, the North Bank, and the South Bank other than a fireworks show?" Downtown development was finally gaining momentum after a "long economic hibernation," and a number of upcoming projects including Unity Plaza, the Laura Street Trio, and Peter Rummell's Healthy Town (now referred to as The District) were individually generating their own level of excitement and anticipation.

Although the group, which, in addition to Flagg, counts

Above: *Peter Rummell's The District project.*

AIA charettes, shown at right, clockwise from upper left: *Alan Wilson, AIA, Thomas Duke, AIA; Melody Bishop, AIA, Brandon Pourch, AIA, Ted Pappas, FAIA, Ledia Durmishaj, Assoc. AIA; John Zona, AIA, Bill Bishop, AIA; Yves P Rathle, architect, ASAI, Ted Pappas, FAIA, Dave Engdahl, AIA, Chris Flagg, FASLA, John Zona, AIA.*



Tom Duke, John Zona, Ted Pappas, Dave Engdahl, Brandon Pourch, and Chris Allen among its members, agree that each of these projects has its own merits, they also feel it is necessary to incorporate each new project, along with recent or more long-standing buildings or areas, into a more cohesive plan that can provide inspiration for the future of the city as a whole. "We are trying to make Downtown remarkable, the ingredients are there – they just haven't been connected," says Tom Duke of Thomas Duke Architect, PA. "It's kind of like a coral reef: put some structure down there and then let it take off and bloom."

The structure that Duke is speaking of isn't yet fully realized, but the group doesn't intend their plan to be an "end-all static vision." They prefer that it is intentionally vague, and only want to start out with the existing strengths of our city and expand on those in order to create a framework for connectivity. In order to come up with ideas for creating that framework, one of the items on the group's agenda includes studying other cities that have had great success in connecting the strongpoints in their cities in some form or fashion.

John Zona of Zona Architecture gives the example of San Antonio's River Walk: "It's a different scale, but the right idea," he explains. "That was done over forty years ago and look what that has done for San Antonio and their little river! And now it is reaching out into the rest of the city. They are creating nodes and instead of just going along their river there are incentives for taking you deeper into the city and each one [node] leads to something important."

And this is exactly what this group wants for Jacksonville, something that not only connects the areas along our broad, flowing river, but for that connectivity to lead to other showcased areas of the city.

"Why isn't Jacksonville coming together downtown? What's keeping it from happening?" asks Ted Pappas, FAIA, a principal at PBV Architecture, and longtime architectural advocate for Jacksonville. "There have been so many plans and it never

gets anywhere. We felt like this would be a way to provide a spark. A gift we wanted to contribute to Jacksonville from the AIA."

The "spark" that Pappas and the others envision will include many different components that will enliven a number of "gateway activity nodes" that will continue to be defined as the project moves forward. "We know that there are some major projects in the making, The District, Khan's amphitheater project, and also Brooklyn, and they are all still growing in development," says Pappas. It will be equally important to include areas that are still in development or recently completed as well as more long-standing Jacksonville favorites, for example Hemming Park and Friendship Fountain, in the plan. Flagg explains, "We want to build on the frameworks of the early city master plans that were developed – layers on layers of master plans – and the districts that were identified in those master plans."

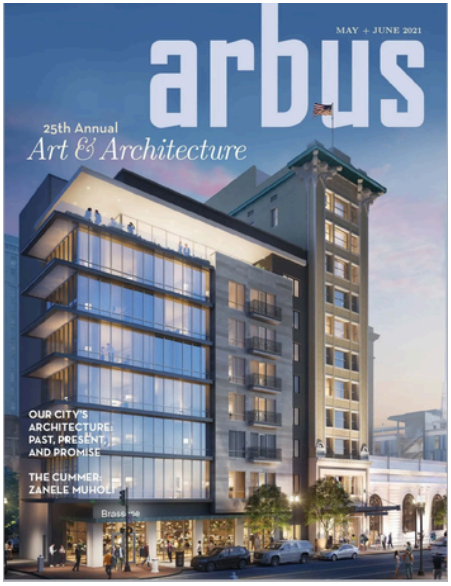
Including all of these major components of Jacksonville is quite an ambitious task, but the group has, for now, narrowed them down to twelve major gateway activity nodes in addition to a number of minor nodes to be located along the existing and logical future extensions of the Riverwalk system. Duke hopes that this will "create spaces, almost like a promenade, along the river that would allow opportunities to tie back into the city."

Each of the twelve nodes will have their own distinguishing elements, but will also have similar key features in order

to tie them together. Some of these key features will include: a distinctive vertical visual element in order to be visible from one another; laser lights (so that all of the nodes will be visible at night and, more importantly, be able to connect to each other with light); rich landscape and hardscape features; artwork that will include sculptures, graphics, or paintings; a permanent marker with an overall map and detailed blow-up to show where you are located; and water taxi stands so that the North and South Banks can connect. It will also be essential for the Riverwalk and nodes to generate an atmosphere of excitement, like the excitement which usually emanates from vibrant city plazas, so that people will naturally be compelled to gather in those areas. As a result, some nodes will then become logical gateways to key Downtown activities that aren't located directly on the river.

When summarizing what the group hopes to accomplish, Duke cites the thoughts of Edmund Bacon, an architect and urban planner who wrote *Design of Cities* back in 1967: "My hope is to dispel the idea, so widely and uncritically held, that cities are a kind of grand accident, beyond the control of the human will ... I contend that human will can be exercised effectively on our cities now, so that the form that they take will be a true expression of the highest aspirations of our civilization."

A lofty goal indeed, but one that can truly be realized for Jacksonville if city leaders agree to implement the AIA's innovative and inspired "River of Lights" vision. Zona echoes the sentiments of his colleagues when he declares, "We need to get on with it so we can make Jacksonville fabulous!"





BEGINNING

A group of experienced members of the American Institute of Architects, Jacksonville Chapter (AIA JAX) have been meeting regularly since 2011, organizing events and activities which facilitated their involvement and participation in the chapter, particularly engagement with the younger emerging design professionals (EDPs). Our meetings included the current AIA chapter president and the leader of the EDPs. Discussion of accomplishing a real project for the community was a constant meeting topic. In 2015, we noted the many proposed large public and private projects planned along both sides of the river downtown with no overall context or vision as to how they would fit together to create a composition which is unique to Jacksonville. Many of the projects were led by developers, whose planning was primarily focused on their individual projects and sites. We discussed how the magnitude of any of the projects proposed would not singly constitute a Jacksonville riverfront identity. Under the leadership of John Zona and Dave Engdahl, this discussion led to our undertaking the initiative of developing an overall river-focused vision for downtown.

PROCESS

We began studying other well-known cities which were developed around a river, how the river was leveraged as the center of events and activities, and how the river tied into the city forming a comprehensive and unique whole. We compared the scale of those cities and rivers to Jacksonville. We reviewed the approved Northbank and Southbank Community Redevelopment Area (CRA) plans, which recommended beginning development at the riverfront and then progressively into the city. The vision initially developed by Zona and Engdahl was a series of Jacksonville-centric pedestrian activity nodes, perhaps 12, developed along the river walks at key points, spaced at about a 10-minute walk apart, with pedestrian links connecting to the city. This vision creates a comprehensive framework into which existing, current, and unknown future projects will fit on both sides of the river. To visually connect the activity nodes along and across the river, each node will contain a hundred-foot tower which we named a marker. Markers will denote the activity node locations and will be visible from one node to another. Lasers on the markers will provide for light shows between markers along and across the river. We believe the markers, in aggregate, will provide a uniquely Jacksonville riverfront identity both day and night. After spending considerable effort determining the appropriate Jacksonville marker image, we created a water-focused design—a waveform sculpture which we believe all Jacksonville constituencies can understand and to which they can relate.

As our work progressed, we made interim presentations to various city groups. In her role as councilwoman and later as leader of the Downtown Investment Authority



(DIA), Lori Boyer encouraged us and provided opportunities for us to make progress presentations of our vision to various city entities and others such as the city consultant engaged to create the riverfront development standards. The concept of individual aspects of Jacksonville's unique story of history and culture as themes for the respective activity nodes emerged from our interface with Boyer. DIA began to adopt some of our visioning ideas as they were evolving. *Arbus Magazine* featured our in-progress vision. We participated in charette work sessions in conceptualizing activity nodes for the U.S.S. Adams (and now the U.S.S. Orleck), Friendship Fountain, and the Times-Union Performing Arts Center. Through 2020, we created a short video which summarizes our vision for Jacksonville.

Our AIA JAX vision is strictly that, a vision, not a plan or masterplan which mandates specific locations for the activity nodes, nor the specific story of our history or culture to be featured at each respective node. Our vision provides a broad framework for all projects, past, present, and future and for telling our Jacksonville story and is a vision that engages all constituencies in our community and visitors alike.

TEAM

Many members from AIA JAX participated during development of the vision. We invited others from outside the AIA chapter to share their ideas. All time and expertise by the AIA team was contributed pro bono. A core group of nine was engaged throughout the visioning process.

Chris Allen, AIA
Dave Engdahl, AIA Emeritus
Chris Flagg, ASLA
Tom Duke, AIA
David Laffitte, FAIA
Ted Pappas, FAIA
Brandon Pourch, AIA
Alan Wilson, AIA
John Zona, AIA

In addition to the team listed above, architect Yves Rathle created early renderings of our vision. Susan Masucci of Ruckus Advertising + Public Relations joined the team pro bono the past two years to assist with presentation and promotion. We engaged CROP Creative Media to produce the video. Architectural illustrator Ron Garnett produced the artist concept sketches of possible themed activity nodes.

AIA Jacksonville Has A Riverfront Vision



The Jacksonville chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA Jacksonville) has a riverfront vision for the city. A chapter team has been developing the vision since 2015. Leading this initiative is a 48-year San Marco resident, Dave Engdahl, AIA Emeritus.

The AIA Jacksonville vision consists of a series of activity nodes developed at key points along the Riverwalks with pedestrian links connecting from the river into the city. Each activity node is envisioned to be based on a theme relating to Jacksonville's history and culture and centered around a 15-20-foot-tall icon relating to the respective theme.

Each activity node will be anchored by a 100-foot-tall waveform marker visible from one node to another. Lasers on the markers will connect across the river and provide for light shows along the banks.

Today, the AIA vision is strictly that, a vision, not a plan or masterplan that mandates specific locations for the activity nodes, nor the specific story of Jacksonville history or culture to be featured at each respective node. The AIA vision provides a broad framework for projects that would feature Jacksonville's story and engage residents and visitors alike.

To watch the two-and-a-half-minute video entitled "A Vision for Jacksonville" that summarizes and showcases the vision, visit www.aiajacksonville.org.

A VISION FOR JACKSONVILLE



WORDS BY
DAVID ENGDAHL