

# RAIL YARD DISTRICT

Technical Assistance Panel

**ULI North Florida**

June 18 & 19 | Jacksonville, Florida





# Preface

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## About ULI

The Urban Land Institute (ULI) is a nonprofit education and research institute supported by its members. Its mission is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide. Established in 1936, ULI has more than 44,000 members worldwide representing all aspects of land use and development disciplines. The North Florida District Council was formed in 2005 and has more than 530 members in 34 counties, including the cities of Jacksonville, St. Augustine, Gainesville, Tallahassee, Panama City and Pensacola.

## What are Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs)?

Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs) are one- to two-day panels convened by the local ULI District Council at the behest of a community, nonprofit, public entity or private enterprise (Sponsor) facing real estate or land-use issues. The District Council assembles a panel of six to 10 senior-level professionals chosen for their knowledge of the issues facing the Sponsor. The interdisciplinary team of seasoned real estate professionals may include land planners, architects, financiers, developers, appraisers, attorneys and brokers who are well qualified to provide unbiased, pragmatic advice on complex real estate and land-use issues, including:

- The re-use potential of existing properties
- Revitalization of corridors or specific properties
- Key economic and other issues relating to public/private land-use situations
- Specific development and land proposals or issues
- Market feasibility, financial structuring, and more

Panel members are not compensated for their time, but they are reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses, such as overnight lodging and transportation to attend the TAP. To ensure objectivity, panel members cannot be involved in matters pending before the Sponsor, currently work for the Sponsor or solicit work from the Sponsor during the six months following the TAP program.

## How Does the Program Work?

TAP members are briefed on the issues facing the Sponsor and receive detailed information relevant to the task, such as Sponsor history, maps of the study area, demographics and other data necessary for an understanding of the task at hand. During the two-day program, TAP members tour the study area, interview stakeholders, and work collaboratively to produce preliminary findings and recommendations which are presented after the TAP workshop in either a private or public forum. A complete report follows within about six to eight weeks with detailed recommendations.

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# Sponsor and ULI Participants

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**LISC (Local Initiatives Support Corporation) Jacksonville**

## **Technical Assistance Panel**

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TAP Committee Co-Chair

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## **Acknowledgments**

On behalf of the Urban Land Institute, the TAP Committee Chairs and TAP panelists wish to thank the following members and sponsors for their contributions:

**Genesis / Halff**

# TAP Scope

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LISC engaged ULI North Florida to convene a Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) for the purpose of studying the Rail Yard District – a mostly industrial, urban core area west of Downtown Jacksonville that encompasses several neighborhoods, including Mixon Town, New Town, Lackawanna, Robinson’s Addition and College Gardens. Although there are some challenges, there are pockets of success and generally positive momentum. The objective of the Rail Yard District TAP is to provide a roadmap to redevelopment and rehabilitation for the District, offering practical recommendations and action steps to address the following needs:

## **Master planning land use for the Rail Yard District**

Identifying the appropriate land use categories, land use and zoning designations and regulatory methods, including overlay districts, to encourage redevelopment and rehabilitation of commercial, retail, industrial and residential areas, while also providing for a scheme that will encourage development of entertainment, parks and civic spaces.

## **Master planning transportation infrastructure for the Rail Yard District**

Identifying and prioritizing gateway corridors, road improvements/upgrades, streetscapes, mass transit, pedestrian and bike ways, connectivity with interstates and to improve and support “traffic” to surrounding urban core neighborhoods and retail corridors. The purposes of the planning, in part, should have a focus on increasing sustainability and survivability of existing businesses, while also offering attractive sites for incoming redevelopment.

## **Rail Yard District identity and strategic visioning plan**

Taking into account the District’s existing assets (historic building stock, multiple direct-access points to interstate highways, proximity to downtown and UF Health Jax, Emerald Necklace & Trail, and variety of existing businesses) and current limitations (see above), create a go-forward image identity strategy that incorporates the core goals of the Rail Yard District Business Council and stakeholder objectives, with a focus on place making/space activation and infill/redevelopment opportunities.

Prior to making its recommendations, the panel will tour the focus area and interview stakeholders, including business owners and community leaders. Preliminary recommendations will be presented to LISC leadership and the Rail Yard District Business Council on Wednesday, June 19, 2019 at 4 p.m. The final report, delivered within six to eight weeks, will provide specific recommendations and short-term action steps to create the desired improvements.

***“ I hope we [RYDBC] can come up with a foundation that can outlast my lifetime.”***

— Annie Murphy, ECO RELICS, RYDBC Vice President







# Panel Process



The ULI North Florida District Council assembled a group of accomplished ULI members who have expertise in land planning and zoning, transportation, and urban and economic development, making for an intensive two-day workshop to address the challenges facing the Rail Yard District.

Prior to convening, TAP members received information on the Rail Yard District, its community impact, area maps, the Emerald Necklace Master Plan, traffic counts and retail market data.

Orientation on day one included an introductory presentation by James Coggin, program officer of LISC, and Jeff Edwards, chief financial officer for Beaver Street Fisheries, which operates the Jacksonville Farmers Market. Edwards is also president of the Rail Yard District Business Council (RYDBC). A tour of the study area was followed by interviews with District Councilman Garret Dennis, District 9; Annie Murphy of Eco Relics and Kara Scremin, of Engine 15.



On day two the panelists interviewed Chad Grimm, chief operating officer of Load King, and spoke with Kristen Reed, chief of Community Planning for the City of Jacksonville about the City's Neighborhood Action Plan program. The panelists discussed the input from stakeholders, suggested solutions to the issues to be addressed, formalized their observations and made their recommendations at the day's end to LISC staff and Rail Yard District Business Council members.





# Executive Summary

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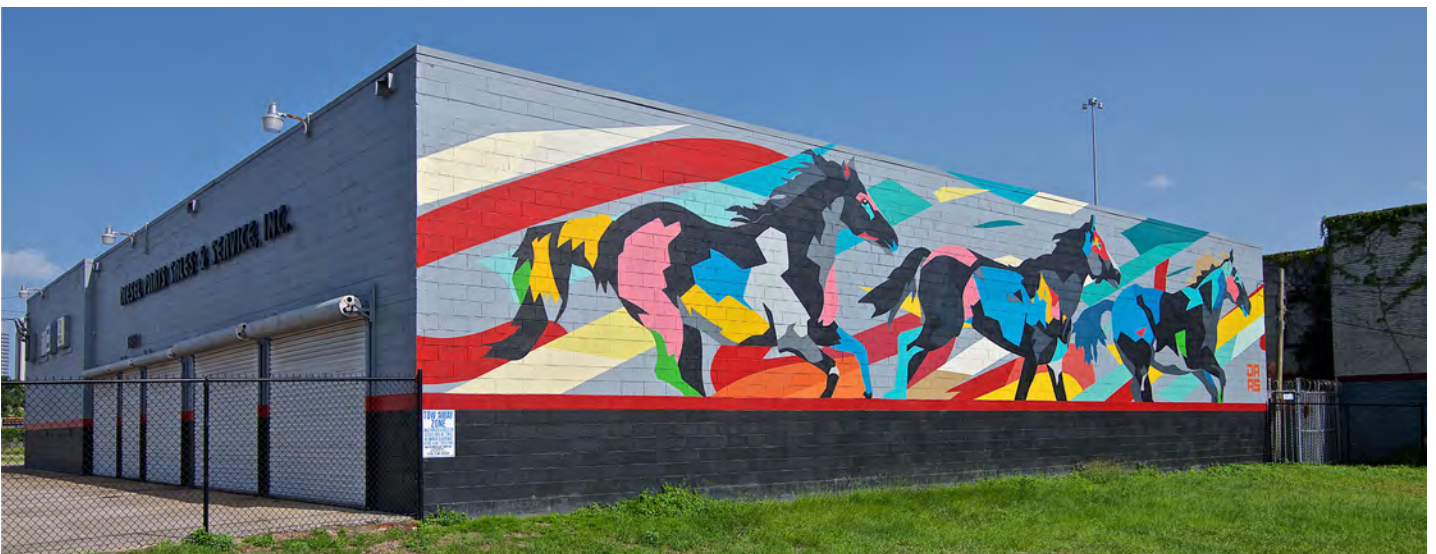
The Rail Yard District (RYD) is a construct of various communities west of Jacksonville's downtown core. It is so named to pay homage to its past as a hub of industry built along the rail lines that were once the lifeblood of Jacksonville. The passing of the rail era, however, left the communities that were built around the transportation hub in decline. Today, the area is home to vacant lots, abandoned warehouses and blight. Residents are predominantly economically disadvantaged. However, recent focus on re-use of existing buildings and properties has created change and momentum toward positive redevelopment.

The newly formed Rail Yard District Business Council seeks to address the many issues facing new and existing businesses, including outdated zoning and land use issues and infrastructure that is old and insufficient to accommodate today's needs. Some properties may have potential environmental impacts, creating a perception that has hampered investment in the District.

The RYD is ideally located adjacent to Downtown and the revitalized areas of Brooklyn and Five Points to its south, major interstate highway access, and the planned Emerald Necklace trail and greenway that will run through it. The area is included in both the Jacksonville Enterprise and Empowerment Zones, making it eligible for various federal and state grants and tax incentives for brownfield cleanup.

The Technical Assistance Panel's overarching recommendation is for the RYDBC to hire a consultant who is well-versed in zoning, planning and community redevelopment to assist in putting together a redevelopment plan and to identify someone who is capable of assisting with zoning and permitting issues. Funding can come from a variety of sources, including stakeholders, philanthropic organizations, City of Jacksonville Community Block Grant, corporate grants, a Tax Increment District and/or the creation of a Business Improvement District (BID).

The Neighborhood Action Plan should address land use, rezoning, transportation infrastructure, drainage and stormwater management, as well as streetscapes and design elements. To succeed, the Council will need to find a sponsor on the City Council and gain support for the plan from the mayor and various City departments.



*Mural of Horses in the Rail Yard District*

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## Land Use

Critical to redevelopment is the need to create appropriate zoning designations for the varying areas of the District. The RYDBC must work with the City's Planning Department on the rezoning issues. Some flexibility in the current City code requirements would allow for more mixed and adaptive reuse classifications and requirements and would help spur development.

TAP members also suggest engaging an individual to assist new businessowners with zoning and fire code issues. Other recommendations include developing a District-funded program to support expediting and streamlining City review of development plans or improvements, as well as developing an agreement with City officials to streamline the process, relieve investors from liens on abandoned properties and revise current requirements for minimum parking.

The RYDBC can also seek allocation from the sustainability programs administered by EPA, DOT and HUD to enable infill and transit-oriented development (TOD) so as to create a positive pro forma. The EPA offers assessment and multipurpose grants for planning and revitalizing brownfield sites.

## Infrastructure

The panelists recommend documenting current conditions with a traffic study and developing a transportation infrastructure plan. The RYDBC may consider creating a financial vehicle for phased improvements, such as a Community Redevelopment Agency.

Also, a study of stormwater infrastructure, flood control and water quality is recommended to identify immediate and long-term steps needed to alleviate existing conditions using best management practices. The RYDBC should seek code refinement and incentives to achieve water quality and stormwater management objectives.

## Identity

The panel believes that the RYD could benefit from a visioning exercise that includes industrial, commercial, retail and residential stakeholders. Due to the varying nature of the District, each subdistrict may have different requirements and goals that can be incorporated into a Neighborhood Action Plan.

Given the age of many RYD buildings, the RYDBC should partner with the City to identify historic structures and apply for publicly funded grants for preservation. Investors may be able to receive tax incentives from the Federal Historic Preservation program for rehabilitating historic properties.

## Subdistricts

In providing more specific recommendations, TAP members focused on three subdistricts that are gateways into the RYD and will have greater impact on development; specifically, Beaver Street/N. Myrtle Avenue, Stockton Street, and Beaver Street/McDuff Avenue.

More flexibility in zoning classification and code requirements is needed to allow for mixed use and adaptive reuse structures. The panel recommends creating an urban mixed-use industrial zoning category for the more heavily industrial Beaver Street/Myrtle Avenue North corridor. This will allow for repurposing

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vacant warehouses into retail, event, showroom, high tech/data and industrial/manufacturing spaces along with residential and open public spaces. The RYDBC should apply for an EPA assessment grant or multipurpose brownfields grant to help with cleanup, and work with the Public Works Department to implement road and sidewalk repairs, interim striping and traffic control measures. Gateway point signage and wayfinding can help to raise the area's identity. TAP members also suggested partnering with the Cultural Council of Greater Jacksonville to commission murals.

The Stockton Street corridor comprises a mix of industrial, commercial and residential properties. The panel recommends creating an urban mixed-use industrial zone north of McCoys Creek with less intense mixed-use industrial in the residential area. The more residential nature lends itself to activating open spaces and vacant lots with interim recreation and food trucks. There is a need to implement road and sidewalk repair as well as gateway signage and wayfinding, and an opportunity to apply for brownfield cleanup grants. The Emerald Necklace plan for a community gathering place and plaza by the Stockton Street Bridge provides an opportunity for the RYD to create a visual focal point there with art, lighting, public space improvements, etc. that will become a destination.

Beaver Street/McDuff Avenue subdistrict includes the largest residential populations. TAP members recommend adding medium density residential to the zoning mix to enable the conversion of vacant commercial properties into mixed-use/multifamily developments. There also is potential for adding zoning for community, commercial and hydroponic gardens. The area is home to the abandoned Public School 10, which offers a prime opportunity for adaptive re-use. As with the other districts, the panel recommends working with Public Works to implement road and sidewalk repairs on select roads and adding gateway signage and wayfinding. In addition, the I-10 underpass provides an ideal location for public art.

## Other Recommendations

Research shows that very few residents of the RYD actually work there. The panel recommends partnering with Edward Waters College and other local schools for job training/education and creating internships/apprenticeships/mentoring programs with local businesses.

Census tract data do not indicate the number of people who are regularly engaged in the community. TAP members suggest collecting and using employee demographics from RYDBC membership in commercial marketing.

Transforming the RYD will take a long-term commitment. The end result, however, could lead to the emergence of a truly unique District, greater economic development for Jacksonville and a better quality of living for RYD residents.



*The Glass Factory*



*Engine 15*



# Background

***“The Rail Yard District is the new frontier of our city.”***

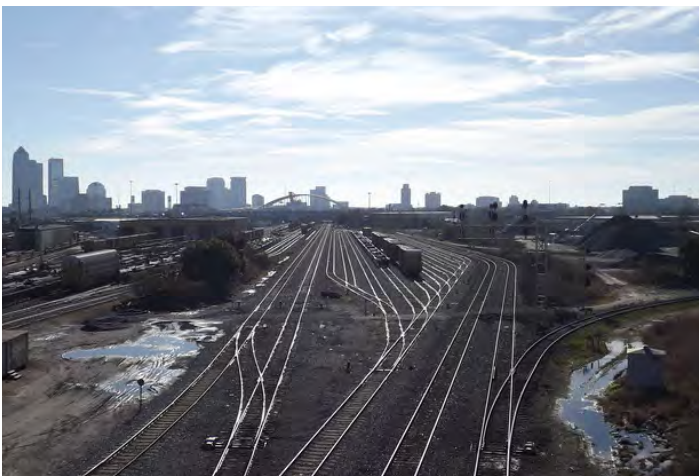
— Garret Dennis, Jacksonville City Councilman, District 9

To the west of Downtown Jacksonville sits a 4 ½ square mile area that largely goes ignored by most people in Jacksonville. Newly named the Rail Yard District, it enjoys unique access to major roadways. The area is bounded by Kings Road to the north, I-10 to the south, I-95 to the east and Huron Street to the west and encompasses parts of the Mixon Town, New Town, College Gardens, Robinson’s Addition and Lackawanna neighborhoods. Beaver Street, a major roadway, cuts through the middle. Three major railroads, CSX, Florida East Coast and Norfolk Southern, converge there in what is called Honeymoon Yard.

Major sections of the area are largely industrial and blighted. Most of the residential areas are situated in the western portion of the District or north of Beaver Street, but there are businesses imbedded in residential areas. Annual household income is between \$10,000 and \$20,000. Retail is a challenge because of the demographics.

The District’s landscape is pitted with vacant lots, potholes, inadequate housing and abandoned, dilapidated warehouses. Hundred-year-old drains are incapable of handling heavy rains. Some areas have no drains. Flooding on certain roadways is common.

The District’s condition belies its history dating back to 1857 with the advent of rail. It once was a busy hub of industry, spurred by trains heading to Jacksonville Terminal (now the Prime Osborne Convention Center). The Railway Express Agency (REA) built in 1935 on Myrtle Avenue North was a major economic generator. Access to rail brought industry, an influx of African-American workers, construction of “shot gun” houses to accommodate them, and businesses to support the residents, such as the Jacksonville Farmers Market, which opened in 1938. After World War II, rail spurs were built down Harper and Swan Streets enabling trains to serve the warehouses there. But the District declined in the 1960s, mirroring that of the railroad industry, and the District’s fate seemed cemented with the closing of the Jacksonville Terminal and REA in the mid-1970s.



*Honeymoon Yard*



*Jacksonville Farmers Market*



LISC Jacksonville began exploring the possibility of connecting the old industrial district with the low-income New Town community to the north. What their research found was that the industrial area is home to more than 350 businesses with nearly 6,300 employees, representing some \$3 billion of business. While most businesses are small entities, the District includes the likes of Beaver Street Fisheries, Coca-Cola Beverages Florida, CSX, Danone North America, Jacksonville Transportation Authority, Load King, Peterbrooke Chocolatier and W.W. Gay, among others. Almost none of the residents who live in the District work there. Chad Grimm noted that when residents get hired at some of the businesses in the District they typically move to better neighborhoods.

Many of the newer businesses that have moved into the area are bringing new life to the District by repurposing old vacant warehouses into retail, tap rooms, sports and event spaces. They see the area as having great potential given its many positive assets. What they share, however, are concerns about deteriorated and inadequate infrastructure and zoning/permitting policies that hamper recruitment of new businesses and expansion of those already there. The North Florida Transportation Planning Organization (NFTPO) acknowledges the roadway infrastructure issues, but no one advocates for it.

LISC determined that what was needed was joint action to address these common issues. They organized area companies to band together as part of the nonprofit Rail Yard District Business Council (RYDBC), which was established in 2018. Its mission is to advance economic development in the area. Goals include branding to create a positive image, improving infrastructure, and stimulating and recruiting business expansion in the District. LISC has provided the RYDBC with grants for placemaking, logos, a website and AmeriCorps volunteers.



*Beaver Street Fisheries*



*CSX*



*Coca-Cola*

## May 31, 2019 Rail Yard District Business Council Membership

The Council ended its first membership year May 31, 2019, with 60 members. The group wants to hire an executive director and needs between \$100,000 and \$200,000 to operate. Currently, dues do not cover the cost. RYDBC has had some philanthropic interest and may need grants going forward.

There has been little overlap with local neighborhood groups thus far. The Council has an open seat for a resident on the RYDBC board that has not been filled. But meetings are open to residents who are encouraged to provide input. The hope is that an influx of new businesses into the District can offer employment opportunities for area residents and thus help surrounding economically disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Company	Number of RYD Employees
AOK Industries	2
Armorock	20
B & B Restaurant Equipment	5
Battalion Airsoft Arena	13
Beaver Street Commissary	1
Beaver Street Enterprise Center	3
Beaver Street Fisheries	400
Ben Stewart - CBRE	
Big D Building Center	15
Blackwater Capital LLC	
Cain & Bultman	62
Cash Building Materials	15
Coca Cola Beverages Florida	550
Condaxis Coffee & Tea	9
Conrad Yelvington	8
CrossFit Salt De Terre	5
CSX	550
David Miller	
Diesel Parts Sales & Service	5
Drummond	85
EcoRelics	20
Engine 15 Brewing Co. & Glass Factory	8
Fidelity Bank	
George P. Coyle & Sons	13
Groundwork Jacksonville	
Jacksonville Transportation Authority	845
Jacksonville Urban League	
Jimerson & Birr	
Lemon Street Brewing	2
Load King Manufacturing	181
Lockwood Quality Demolition	5
McCurdy-Walden, Inc.	

Company	Number of RYD Employees
Mixon Studios	2
Moody Appraisal Group LLC	
Nextran Truck Center	63
North Riverside Community Development, Inc.	0
Northeast Florida Community Action Agency	
NT Plastics	9
Paschal Brothers Hardware & Lumber Co.	14
PeterBrooke Chocolate Factory	22
Power & Pumps	15
Preferred Freezer Services, LLC	49
Rethreaded	5
Scherer Construction	10
Self-Help Credit Union	
Senator Audrey Gibson	
Sissines Office Systems	
Sol Brotman	
Spence Industrial Supply Co.	2
Standard Feed & Seed Inc.	10
Sunn Battery Co.	14
Sunshine Peanut Company	49
Tabula Rasa	3
Tetra Tech, Inc.	
Thomas Duke Architect, PA	4
Travis Williams	
W.W Gay	1300
Wellhouse Company	
<b>Total</b>	<b>4393</b>

# Analysis

***“It makes me so sad to see so many old vacant buildings. I want to save all of them in our neighborhood.”***

— Kara Scremin, Engine 15 and The Glass Factory, RYDBC Board Member

The Rail Yard District was cobbled together from several neighborhoods with different characteristics in an effort to connect the heavily industrial east with Coca-Cola in the more residential area to the west. The District enjoys unique access from Downtown, I-95 and I-10. Its proximity to Downtown and neighboring areas like Brooklyn and Five Points that have undergone a transformation makes it ripe for revitalization.

Most of the RYD is included in the Jacksonville Enterprise Zone, and the portion south of Beaver Street is also included in the Jacksonville Empowerment Zone, providing state and federal tax incentives to businesses in the area.

The RYDBC serves both large and small businesses. The Council’s leadership acknowledges the need to hire an executive director, but current dues will not cover the cost. And while the members appear to be aligned on basics, there is a difference of opinion as to what is the most immediate need. Some feel the District needs a quick win through branding and aesthetic changes that can make the public corridor more attractive and alter the District’s perception. This would spur investment, bring in new businesses and add momentum to the need for infrastructure improvements. Other members take a more long-term view. They contend that without fixing the zoning and infrastructure issues first, change will not occur.

Many businesses are willing to provide financial support to spur change. But they do not want to take on the heavy load themselves and are looking for support to come from the stakeholders within the entire District.







*Eco Relics*



*Eco Relics*



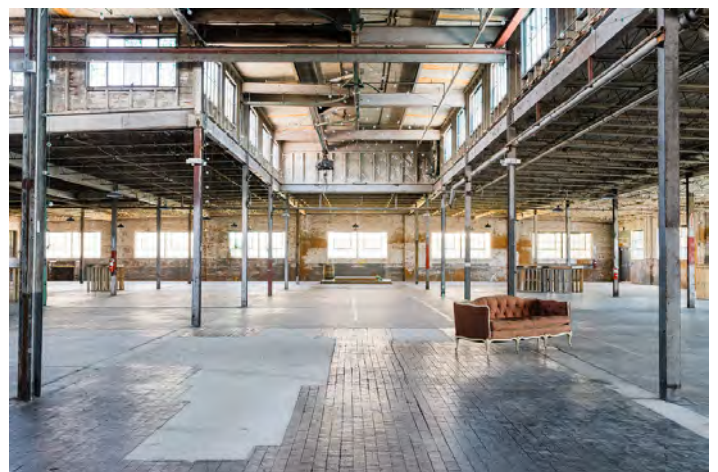
*The Glass Factory*

## Barriers to new businesses

A major barrier to new businesses coming into the District and the expansion of successful businesses currently in the area rests in zoning. While entrepreneurs want to repurpose old warehouses into retail, entertainment and food establishments, restrictive zoning does not encourage infill and redevelopment or reflect the types of businesses coming into the District.

Eco Relics, a retail operation, is classified as a warehouse because the property has limited parking. To meet the standard, Eco Relics claims it would have to have a lot as big as Home Depot. In addition, the warehouse designation requires a minimum of 20 employees, more than the retail operation realistically requires.

Businesses also complain of a long, complicated process to get up and running. To new business owners unfamiliar with the codes, fire and zoning requirements can seem conflicting. For example, fire code requirements for the same building may change when converting it from a warehouse use to a public venue or retail use which hosts outside customers. An ombudsman who is familiar with the zoning and fire codes may be needed to assist new businessowners.



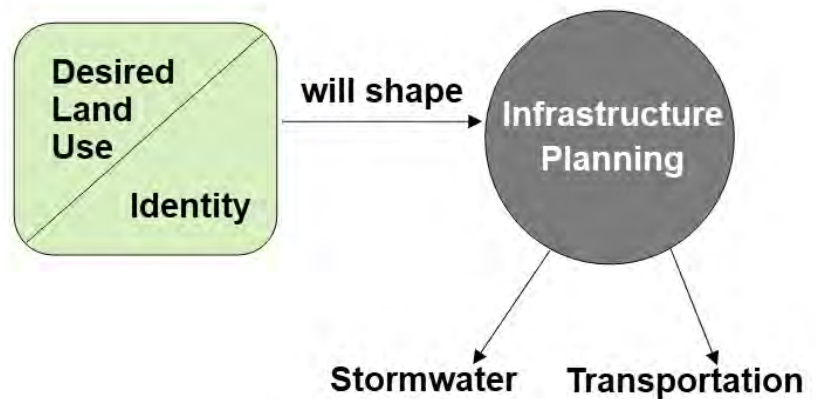
*Inside The Glass Factory*  
Photo by: Jessica Lauren Photography



Many investors shy away from redeveloping old properties that are saddled with liens. While the City will not forgive the liens, these properties sit on the rolls not producing taxes. Other disincentives include the lack of credit for green space when an investor removes a slab from a vacant lot, and the fact that some District properties may be contaminated.

## Land Use

The panelists agreed that the RYDBC must start building relationships with the City's Planning and Development Department and the North Florida Transportation Planning Organization (NFTPO). A consultant is needed who is well-versed in zoning, planning and community redevelopment to assist in putting together a redevelopment plan and to identify someone who is capable of assisting with zoning and permitting issues.



The City's Planning and Development Department is aware of the need for zoning flexibility in historically industrial parts of the City. Kristen Reed, chief of the Department's Community Planning Division, told panelists they have received similar requests in other areas of the City to update zoning to accommodate retail oriented uses, particularly in areas ripe for redevelopment.

The Community Planning Division manages vision plans, neighborhood action plans (NAPs) and corridor studies developed for the City of Jacksonville. They are charged with the interpretation of consistency with plan recommendations for land use and zoning applications, and for the evaluation and implementation of plans and studies. She suggested that the RYDBC refer to the City's Urban Core Vision Plan that was approved in June 2010, and recent NAPs.

NAPs address a multitude of issues in a variety of neighborhoods and contain strategies and recommendations that can be put into action. Some propose overlay plans and design guidelines. Some address public right-of-way improvements, while others focus on zoning. NAPs can be initiated by a local community group, such as the RYDBC, or by a City Council member.

To move a plan forward, RYDBC would need to have a plan in place and a sponsor on the City Council. If City Council initiates it, approval would depend on the City budget. Since 1977, a total of 19 NAPs have been completed and adopted by the City Council.



*Broken Streets and Sidewalks*

## Infrastructure

The District enjoys unique access from I-95 and I-10. Exits may be reconfigured as part of the reconstruction of a section of I-95 planned over the next five years, offering an opportunity for the RYDBC to provide input on any such reconfiguration.

Currently, roads within the District are not sufficient for existing and future uses. This includes not only road width and turning radii but a lack of sidewalks and drainage support systems. Panelists agreed that a traffic study should be considered to determine appropriate circulation demand. It should denote current conditions, establish benchmarks, identify the gaps and recommend remedial actions. Such a study should include design criteria for sidewalks, setbacks, road speeds, public bus routes, signage, etc. The acquisition of property may be needed to effect needed improvements in turning radii, queuing, and circulation of trucks and trailers.

Initial investment in “low hanging fruit” such as streetscape improvements and sidewalk repair can encourage additional participation and support within the business community. Immediate improvements may entail installation of stormwater management features, street striping, bus stop repair, pedestrian and bicycle paths. Implementation would require the participation of city, state and federal governmental agencies, including the NFTPPO and Federal Highway Administration, as well as that of existing businesses.

Likewise, a stormwater management and associated infrastructure study should be considered to identify water quality requirements and associated best stormwater management practices. Code refinement and incentives may be needed to achieve water quality and drainage improvements. A function of future development could include credit for construction of infiltration galleries that direct storm runoff from non-road areas and/or risk-based remediation as a cleanup option at contaminated sites.

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Jacksonville's Enterprise Zone is also the City's designated brownfields area. All parcels within the brownfields area are classified as "Potential Brownfields," regardless of actual contamination on the individual site, offering an opportunity to participate in various grant programs for brownfield site cleanup through the EPA and Florida's Brownfield Program.

The RYDBC should explore various incentive programs and finance vehicles, such as the Clean Water State Revolving Fund and Florida's sales and use tax incentive programs.

Stakeholders include the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish & Wildlife, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, St. Johns River Water Management District and the Jacksonville Stormwater Utility.

## Identity/Branding

Historically, industry and workforce housing grew up around the railroad yard. The name Rail Yard District, however, is more of a geographic identity rather than a descriptive name of what happens here with respect to current businesses.

A brand projects something unique about the area and is more than a logo. It is created by what people think about a neighborhood based on their own experiences or what they have heard. Altering the image of the RYD will occur over time as changes to the area are implemented.

The District enjoys several attributes. They include historic ties to rail; past and current businesses, iconic structures and McCoys Creek as well as unique access to major highways. There is an opportunity to brand the District as maker space for manufacturing entrepreneurs. The District also can capitalize on the implementation of the Emerald Necklace, a greenway and trail system that will encircle Downtown Jacksonville and will run through the District. In March 2019, the Jacksonville City Council approved a resolution to implement the Emerald Necklace Master Plan as part of Jacksonville's revitalization efforts.

TAP members believe the District would benefit from engaging in a visioning process that includes industrial, commercial, retail and residential stakeholders. A visioning exercise will identify what the stakeholders want the District to be known for, what positive attributes can be enhanced, and what steps are needed to accomplish the vision.

Moreover, the nature and character of the RYD landscape is not uniform. The vision for the eastern portion of the District may not be the same for the more residential areas to the west and to the north. A plan may well include different requirements and design guidelines for each area. Branding and marketing strategies will be determined based on the vision and character of each subdistrict.

The end goal is to promote neighborhood well-being and drive the kind of new businesses and development to each area that fits the vision.



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## Subdistricts

Panelists noted the diverse nature of the District and identified five subdistricts: Beaver Street/N. Myrtle Avenue, Stockton Street, Beaver Street/McDuff Avenue, Edward Waters College/Newtown, and the industrial northwest corner of the District. For discussion purposes, TAP members focused on the first three, which are gateways into the RYD and will likely have a more immediate, positive impact on development than the other two, which are not experiencing the same redevelopment challenges as the three districts highlighted. One is a thriving industrial area and the other is a college/residential area.

### Beaver Street/N. Myrtle Avenue

This subdistrict borders the northeast portion of the Rail Yard District. It is well located with good access from I-95 and Downtown. However, there is a lack of wayfinding and signage on the interstate and other access roads.

The area is characterized by a high concentration of old industrial stock with little to no residential. It includes Beaver Street Fisheries, the Jacksonville Farmers Market, Load King, Engine 15 Downtown Tap Room & Biergarten, The Glass Factory, Jacksonville Transit Authority, and the planned indoor soccer facility, among others.

Buildings on Myrtle Avenue have limited front setbacks; sidewalks are neglected and in a state of disrepair. Conditions of the roads are poor; streets are narrow and cannot accommodate the turning radius of 18-wheel trucks. Flooding is a problem on Beaver Street from Downtown west to the Myrtle Avenue tunnel, as is the tunnel itself. In addition, new retail/food service businesses complain of a lack of parking.







*Load King*



*Engine 15*



*Myrtle Avenue Tunnel*



*Myrtle Avenue Tunnel*

## Land Use

Appropriate categories need to be created in order to allow for repurposing the many vacant warehouses into newer uses. Areas like this, near the central business district with access to transit, provide an opportunity to create an urban mixed-used industrial zone to include retail, events, showrooms, high tech/data and industrial/manufacturing along with residential and open public spaces.

The conversion of industrial and warehouse districts to include mixed-use development is a trend seen across the country. Sacramento's railyard is seeing new life as developers are planning adaptive-reuse projects with residential, retail and office space. New York City's High Line turned a New York Central Railroad spur into a linear park that has stimulated real estate development in adjacent neighborhoods and increased real estate values as part of the so-called halo effect.

***"We are centrally located, so that most employees can get to work in 30 minutes."***

— Chad Grimm, Chief Operating Officer, Load King

Some properties in the Beaver Street/N. Myrtle Avenue subdistrict may be contaminated. Florida's Brownfield Redevelopment Program offers incentives to businesses that locate on a brownfield site when they enter into a Brownfield Site Rehabilitation Agreement (BSRA). The Voluntary Cleanup Tax Credit (VCTC) Program awards tax credits to businesses applicable to Florida's corporate income tax to partially offset the cost of site rehabilitation or solid waste removal. In addition, the District can apply for an EPA assessment or multipurpose grant for planning and revitalizing brownfield sites.



*Vacant Facility*



*Vacant Facility*



*Engine 15 Biergarten*



*Engine 15 Taproom*



## Infrastructure/Identity

There are immediate steps that can have an impact on the area. They include road and sidewalk repairs, interim striping and traffic control measures, as well as landscaping on the major roadways. In addition, gateway point signage and wayfinding can be implemented in the short-term, raising the identity of the area and helping people navigate the area; e.g., finding the S-Line trail.

Bringing in a project-level major anchor that is a destination can attract investment and showcase the uniqueness of the area.

The Tier I trail segment of the Emerald Necklace that runs through this subdistrict has been identified for immediate implementation. The S-Line to Stonewall Street trail will connect from the south end of the existing S-Line, cross Beaver at Eaverson and run through Florida Dwight Memorial Playground to Church Street before passing under I-95. The trail will provide multiple access points for the LaVilla and Brooklyn neighborhoods, bringing cyclists and more pedestrian traffic to the area, and establishing the future opportunity to connect to the McCoy's Creek Greenway.

### Model Project | S-Line to Stonewall Street



Panelists also suggested that the RYDBC should identify spaces for large scale murals and artists for public art, such as Art Republic, which has done multiple murals around Jacksonville. The RYDBC can also partner with the Cultural Council of Greater Jacksonville to commission public art. Various individuals and organizations work to identify neighborhoods in Jacksonville where art isn't present and then raise funds to support public art projects. The Cultural Council has an ongoing initiative to map public art in Jacksonville. The map includes artist information and public art locations for murals.



Mural on West Adams



Mural on West Adams



## Stockton Street

The Stockton Street corridor comprises a mix of industrial, commercial and residential properties. The northern portion of this subdistrict includes Eco Relics, Tabula Rasa Brewing, and Battalion Airsoft Arena, among others. McCoys Creek Greenway separates the heavy industrial north from the residential area to the south. Like other RYD areas, it is characterized by poor roadways and sidewalks that are lacking or in disrepair. Access in and out of the area is primarily by car. It's home to many vacant lots and slabs.



*Stockton/McCoys Creek Blvd Intersection*



*Stockton Bridge*



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## Land Use

This subdistrict has the potential to be a walkable urban mixed-use area. Changing the zoning north of the creek from heavy industrial to urban mixed-use industrial would go a long way in helping to turning this area into a walkable urban “destination.” Some open sites could be transformed into interim parks, sports and recreational areas or food truck venues.

Creating a walkable mixed-use area to the north of McCoys Creek is further supported by the plan for the Emerald Necklace to run along the McCoys Creek Greenway. Currently, McCoys Creek flooding is a problem at the Stockton Street bridge, a key connection between the neighborhoods to the north and south.

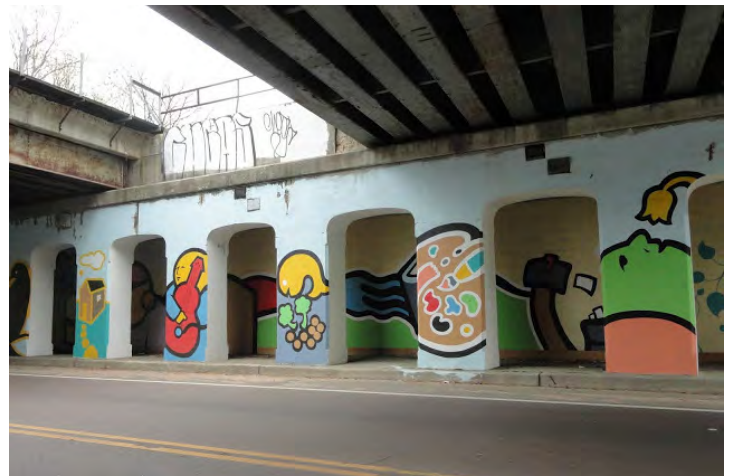
Groundwork Jacksonville and the City of Jacksonville are conducting a stream restoration plan to reduce flooding, restore the creek’s ecosystem health and create a recreational destination along the waterway. The proposed restoration plan will look at realigning the creek, as well as the opportunity to remove the asphalt pavement on McCoys Creek Boulevard and convert the street to open space. The City has budgeted \$60 million over the next three years to fund creek restoration, trail construction and park improvements. A proposed Stockton Trail Head will create a community gathering place and plaza by the Stockton Street Bridge. The creek widens within this zone and is able to host a kayak launch and fishing overlook at its banks.

## Infrastructure/Identity

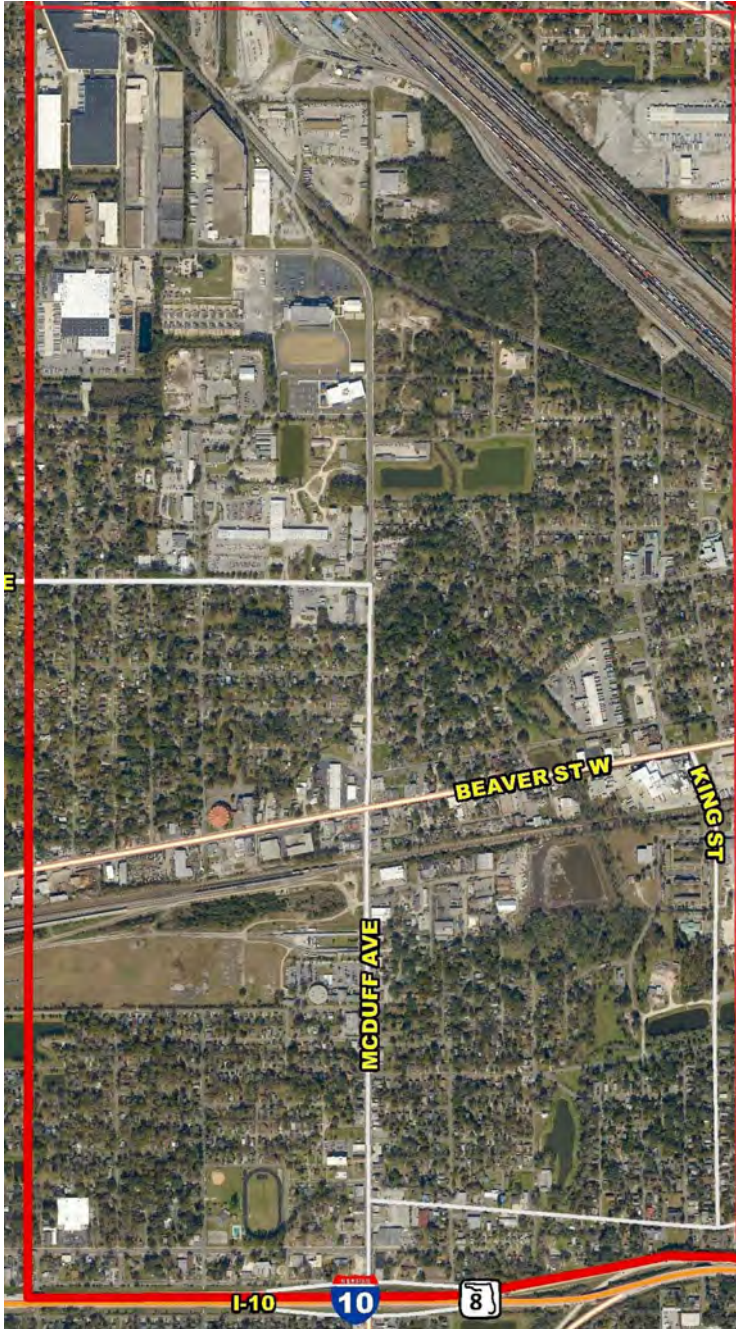
Repairing sidewalks, utilizing open spaces and activating underpasses with murals can have an immediate impact on the area, as well as landscaping. Gateway signage and wayfinding can be implemented in the short-term. There is an opportunity to create a visual focal point or landmark, particularly with the planned Stockton Street Trailhead, as well as the use of paint, art and lighting in the heavier industrial north.



*Underpass Art from New Orleans*



*Underpass Art from Memphis*



## Beaver Street/McDuff Avenue

Located in the western portion of the RYD, the area has good access to and from I-10 at McDuff Avenue. This subdistrict includes the highest concentration of residential properties. There is little surviving retail or commercial businesses in the neighborhood. Mixed in with the residential is some smaller industrial properties as well as large facilities, including Coca-Cola Beverage and CSX. Public School 10 is an abandoned property that could be repurposed.

Of note is the KIPP Jacksonville campus which was converted from a greyhound racing track. The school opened in 2010. It serves more than 1,100 elementary and middle school students from Jacksonville's North and Westside communities and has a waiting list of several hundred. KIPP Jacksonville is part of the KIPP non-profit network of college-preparatory, public charter schools.

The art of food preservation is alive at the Duval County Canning Center, a collaboration between the City of Jacksonville and the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS). The center provides an institutional kitchen and all equipment necessary for canning. It is open to all Duval County residents who are canning for themselves, their families, churches or non-profit organizations. The center also conducts educational tours for school children.



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## Land Use

The potential for developing multifamily housing should be evaluated for this area. There is a fair amount of vacant commercial property that could be converted to a more desirable mixed-use/multifamily to provide a life-work option. Any redevelopment should maintain housing affordability.

In addition, vacant public assets, such as Public School 10, can potentially be repurposed. Zoning consideration should also be given to urban agriculture, community gardens and hydroponic operations.

## Infrastructure /Identity

There is opportunity for adding signage and wayfinding, improving sidewalks on select roads, and adding murals to the I-10 underpass.

In terms of priorities, however, the other two subdistricts offer greater potential for impact. Improvements here will build on the redevelopment to the east. In addition, the vision for this area, as previously noted, will in all likelihood be different from the other two subdistricts given its more residential character. As the District goes through the visioning process, the community will determine what makes most sense for its residents.



*Kipp Campus*



*Public School 10*



*Residential Property*



# Recommendations

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The goals of improving infrastructure, promoting economic development and changing the Rail Yard District's image will require a long-term commitment. To be successful, the RYDBC must be able to illustrate that proposed changes support the mayor's strategic objectives, will increase the tax base and serve to improve the lives of local residents as well as existing and future businesses.

## Overarching Recommendations

### Engage a consultant

There is an immediate need to hire an individual who can identify long-term stakeholders, organize resources, develop a unified vision, prioritize projects and move redevelopment plans forward.

- The appropriate candidate must be well versed in zoning, planning and community redevelopment to assist in putting together a redevelopment plan and to identify someone who is capable of assisting with zoning and permitting issues.
- Funding sources to cover the cost of a consultant and RYDBC operations should be identified from among the stakeholders, philanthropic organizations, City of Jacksonville Community Block Grant, corporate grants, a Tax Increment District and/or creation of a Business Improvement District (BID).

### Develop a Neighborhood Action Plan

The Neighborhood Action Plan should address all the issues the RYD is currently facing, including land use, rezoning, transportation infrastructure, drainage and stormwater management, as well as streetscapes and design elements. The plan could outline an overlay district that focuses on specific areas.

- Review the 2001 Kings Road/Beaver Street Neighborhood Action Plan.
- Work with the Planning and Development Department's Community Planning Division.
- Find a sponsor on the City Council to move the plan forward.
- Seek support from the mayor's office and the Departments of Finance, Parks and Recreation, Planning and Development, and Public Works in an effort to get projects included in the City's budget and Capital Improvement Program.

### Identify Zoning Classification and Requirement Changes

Work with the City to identify possible changes in zoning classifications and requirements to allow and accommodate for mixed use and adaptive reuse structures.

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## Issues to be addressed

### Land Use

- Develop an agreement with the City of Jacksonville to create business-friendly environment for new businesses entering the area and expansion of current businesses.
  - Develop a District-funded program to support expediting and streamlining city review of development plans or improvements.
  - Engage an individual who is familiar with the zoning department as a point of contact who can assist new businessowners with zoning and fire code issues.
  - Work with the City to relieve investors from liens on abandoned properties.
  - Revise current requirement for minimum parking; enable shared parking.
- Seek allocation from the sustainability programs administered by EPA, DOT and HUD to enable infill and transit-oriented development (TOD) so as to create a positive pro forma.
- Apply for an EPA assessment or multipurpose grant for planning and revitalizing brownfield sites

### Infrastructure — Transportation

- Conduct a traffic study to document current conditions; include pedestrian access.
- Develop a transportation infrastructure plan that will achieve the goals identified in the visioning exercise and Neighborhood Action Plan, including design documents covering sidewalks, setbacks, and speeds.
  - Engage public and private stakeholders, including Jacksonville's Transportation Planning Division, state and federal transportation agencies, NFTP, Jacksonville Transportation Authority, rail and existing businesses.
  - Consider creating a financial vehicle for phased improvements; e.g., a Community Redevelopment Agency.

### Infrastructure — Stormwater

- Conduct a study of stormwater infrastructure, flood control and water quality.
- Identify immediate and long-term steps needed to alleviate existing conditions using best management practices (structural, vegetative or managerial) to treat, prevent or reduce water pollution.
- Seek code refinement and incentives to achieve water quality and stormwater management objectives.
  - Hardscape vs. infiltration gallery incentives as a function of future development
  - Use of risk-based corrective action principles for contaminated sites supported by the Florida Brownfield Program
  - Green space credit for investors removing slabs
- Work with Groundwork Jacksonville to support current plans for McCoys Creek revitalization.
- Stakeholders include Florida Department of Environmental Protection, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, St. Johns River Water Management District, and the Jacksonville Stormwater Utility.

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## Identity/Strategic Vision

- Conduct a visioning exercise
  - Include industrial, commercial, retail and residential stakeholders.
  - Each subdistrict may have different requirements and goals that can be incorporated into a Neighborhood Action Plan.
  - Focus on historic ties to the railyard; past, current and future businesses; iconic structures; Emerald Necklace.
- Identify historic structures
  - Partner with the City to apply for publicly funded grants for preservation.
  - Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives program rewards private investment in rehabilitating historic properties.

## Subdistrict Recommendations

### Beaver Street/N. Myrtle Avenue

- Land Use
  - Create an urban mixed-used industrial classification to allow for repurposing vacant warehouses into retail, event, showroom, high tech/data and industrial/manufacturing spaces along with residential and open public spaces.
- Infrastructure
  - Apply to the EPA for an assessment grant or multipurpose brownfields grant.
  - Work with the Public Works Department to implement road and sidewalk repairs, interim striping and traffic control measures.
  - Work with the Public Works Department on landscaping and maintaining public rights of way.
- Identity
  - Initiate gateway point signage and wayfinding; promote trailhead connectivity.
  - Partner with the Cultural Council of Greater Jacksonville on commissioning murals.

### Stockton Street

- Land Use
  - North of McCoys Creek create an urban mixed-use industrial classification to allow for repurposing vacant warehouses into retail, event, showroom, high tech/data and industrial/manufacturing spaces along with residential and open public spaces.
  - Consider less intense mixed-use industrial in residential area.
  - Activate open spaces/vacant lots with interim recreation, food trucks.
- Infrastructure
  - Work with the Public Works Department to implement road and sidewalk repairs.
  - Apply to the EPA for an assessment grant or multipurpose brownfields grant.
- Identity
  - Initiate gateway point signage and wayfinding.
  - Promote McCoys Creek Greenway/Emerald Necklace.
  - Create a visual focal point at Stockton and McCoys Creek Boulevard; art, lighting, etc.
  - Beautify underpasses with murals.



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## Beaver Street/McDuff Avenue

- Land Use
  - Add medium density residential to the mix to enable the conversion of vacant commercial properties into mixed-use/multifamily developments.
  - Add zoning for community gardens, commercial gardens, hydroponics.
  - Propose re-use for Public School 10.
- Infrastructure
  - Work with the Public Works Department to implement road and sidewalk repairs on select roads.
- Identity
  - Initiate gateway point signage and wayfinding.
  - Beautify I-10 underpass with murals.

## Other Recommendations with Global Impact

### Establish a more experienced workforce.

- Partner with local colleges/schools for job training/education.
- Partner with local businesses for internships/apprenticeships/mentoring programs to improve economic opportunities for residents.

### Promote a more business-friendly environment to increase economic activity.

- Collect and use employee demographics from RYDBC membership in commercial marketing.

## Conclusion

The Rail Yard District offers a unique opportunity for Jacksonville to reclaim a once vibrant industrial warehouse area as part of a smart growth land use strategy. The EPA notes that “Smart growth land use strategies can make redevelopment more cost effective by allowing brownfield properties to redevelop with a mix of uses or encouraging more efficient land use. Directing infrastructure spending to roads and water and sewer lines on brownfield properties can also make these sites more attractive to developers.”

Transforming the RYD will take a long-term commitment. To succeed it must be able to garner the support of City Hall, the Jacksonville City Council, philanthropic organizations and the business community. The end result, however, could lead to the emergence of a truly unique District, greater economic development for Jacksonville and a better quality of living for RYD residents.

# About the Panel

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**Douglas Booher, TAP Chair, Vice President and Counsel, Fidelity National Title**

Douglas Booher is vice president and counsel for Fidelity National Title's Atlanta National Commercial Services (NCS) operation and is based at the company's headquarters in Jacksonville, Florida, focusing on Florida and Southeast commercial customers. He joined the Fidelity Companies in 2009 and has served as the company's chief claims counsel, managing a team of 95 attorneys and 60 support personnel, as well as the company's national underwriting development counsel, focusing on building a strong and deep team of talented underwriting counsel for the Fidelity Companies across all markets.

Previously, Booher spent 11 years in private practice as a real estate and business litigation attorney and seven years as an in-house real estate attorney with a large land development company in Jacksonville.

He has extensive experience in nearly all aspects of real estate development and operations, including land and building acquisitions, title and underwriting issues, permitting and entitlements, construction, financing, leasing, management, marketing and disposition of commercial, office, retail, industrial and multifamily properties.



**Cherie Bryant, AICP, Planning Director, Tallahassee-Leon County Planning Department**

Cherie Bryant has served the Tallahassee-Leon County Planning Department for 18 years, the last three years as director. Her experience includes site, comprehensive and transportation planning. Prior to that, she specialized in infrastructure grant writing and grants management for both a private consulting firm and the State of Florida.

Bryant received a bachelor of arts degree in political science from Birmingham-Southern College and a master of urban and regional planning degree from Florida State University.



**Tony Ong, Senior Vice President, Commercial Real Estate Division Manager, Ameris Bank**

Tony Ong has more than 37 years of experience in the banking and financial services industries. During his career he has served in a number of regional and footprint-wide executive leadership roles and has built and led lending, credit, retail, consulting and operations teams. His expertise includes commercial lending, credit, commercial real estate, strategic planning and organizational restructuring.

Ong graduated from Stanford University with a bachelor of arts degree, and additionally earned both MBA and JD degrees from Emory University. He has served on the board of numerous community organizations, including Junior Achievement, United Way and the Tampa Hillsborough Economic Development Council and the Tampa Bay Partnership.



**Elias Rashmawi, Vice President, Brownfield and Community Development, Stantec**

Elias Rashmawi has more than 30 years' experience and is a leading brownfield redevelopment strategist and practitioner with numerous landmark projects to his credit. Among his notable projects, he has been engaged in the largest brownfield mixed-use infill project in the United States, the Sacramento Railyards, the historic western terminus of the Transcontinental rail line. There, Elias has served as Director of Land Redevelopment for the previous owner, overseeing procurement, design and construction until 2010.

Subsequently, he became consultant to the City of Sacramento and the various new Railyards owners, supporting numerous high impact development. Bridging land use, planning and design with the practicality of feasibility of constructible projects, Rashmawi has supported development of major infrastructure, active rail facilities, several bridges and tunnels, historic buildings, a major hospital, a soccer stadium, a state courthouse, residential and commercial development, parks and a waterfront district.



**Kevin J. Vonck, Ph.D., Development Director, City of Green Bay, Wisconsin**

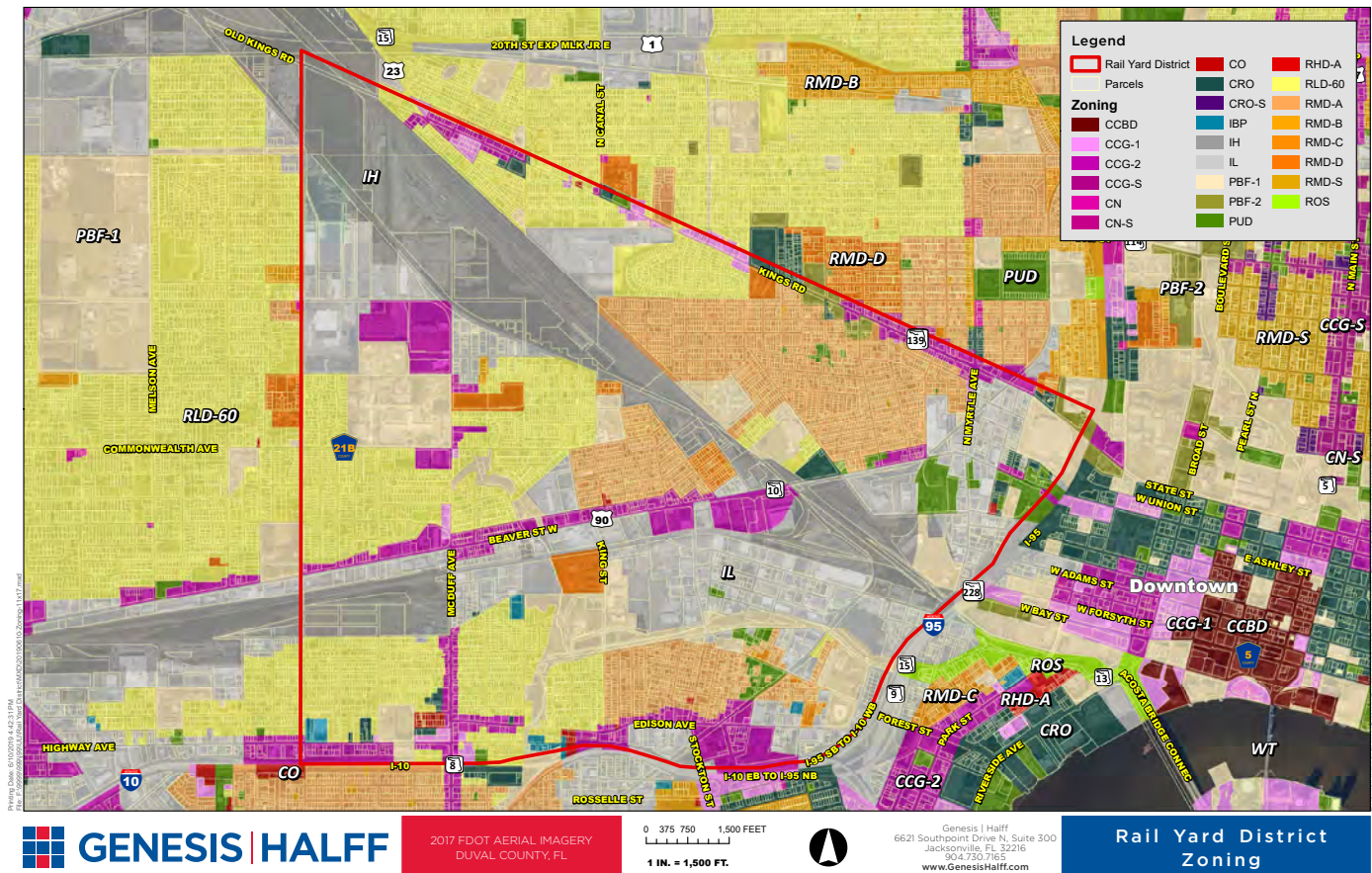
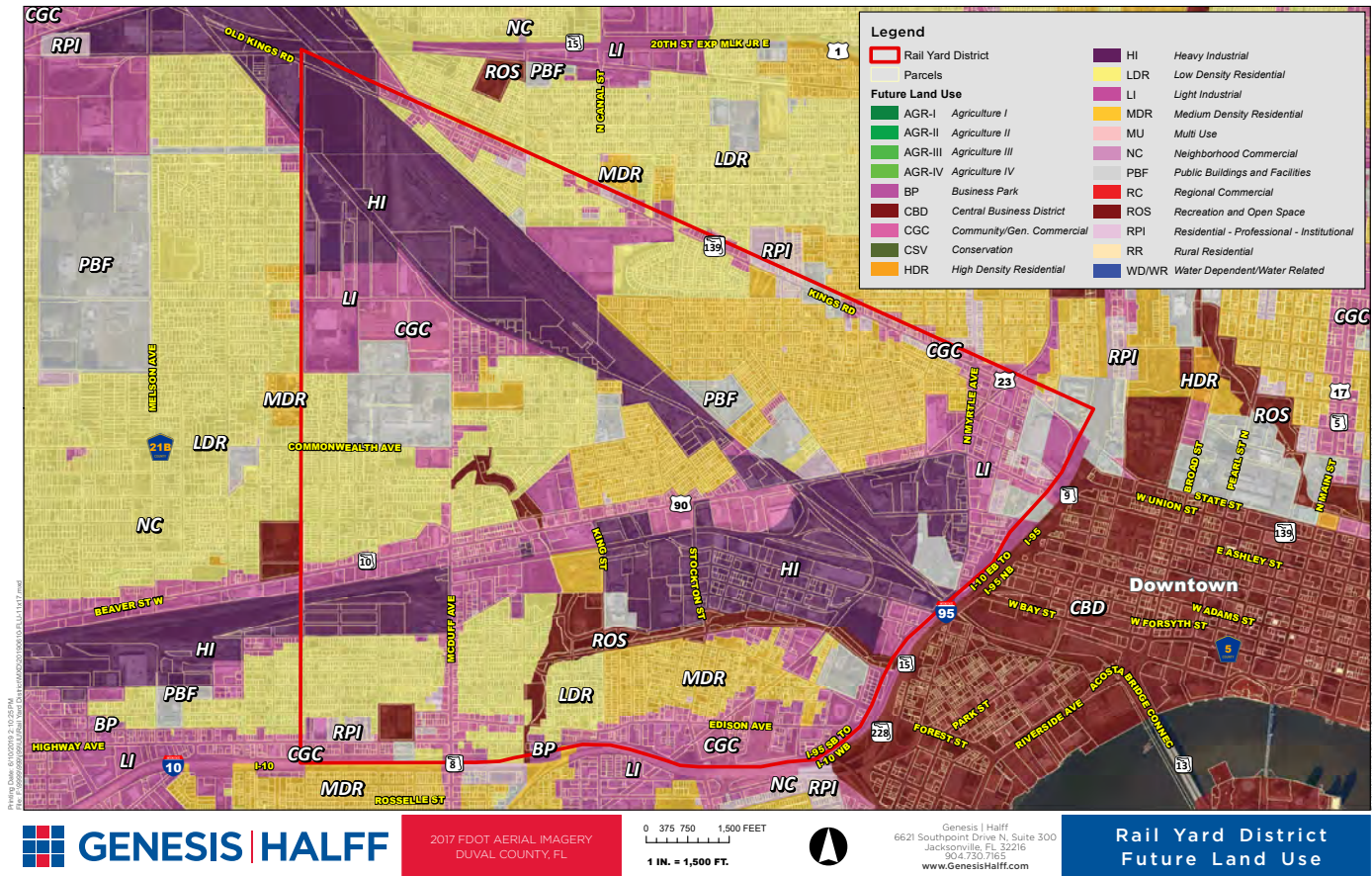
Dr. Vonck leads the City of Green Bay's Department of Community and Economic Development, which works to cultivate a community that is safe, accessible, productive and innovative through strategic activities: connecting valuable people, adopting effective policies, enhancing public programs, and improving City properties.

Prior to joining the City in 2015, Dr. Vonck served as a community and economic development educator with the University of Wisconsin – Extension and as the economic development coordinator for the Town of Grand Chute, Wis. He has also worked as an independent consultant and adjunct college lecturer.

Dr. Vonck earned a Ph.D. in urban affairs and public policy and a master's degree in public administration from the University of Delaware; he completed his undergraduate work in geography, history, and environmental studies from the University of Wisconsin – Madison.



# Appendix









The mission of the Urban Land Institute is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide.