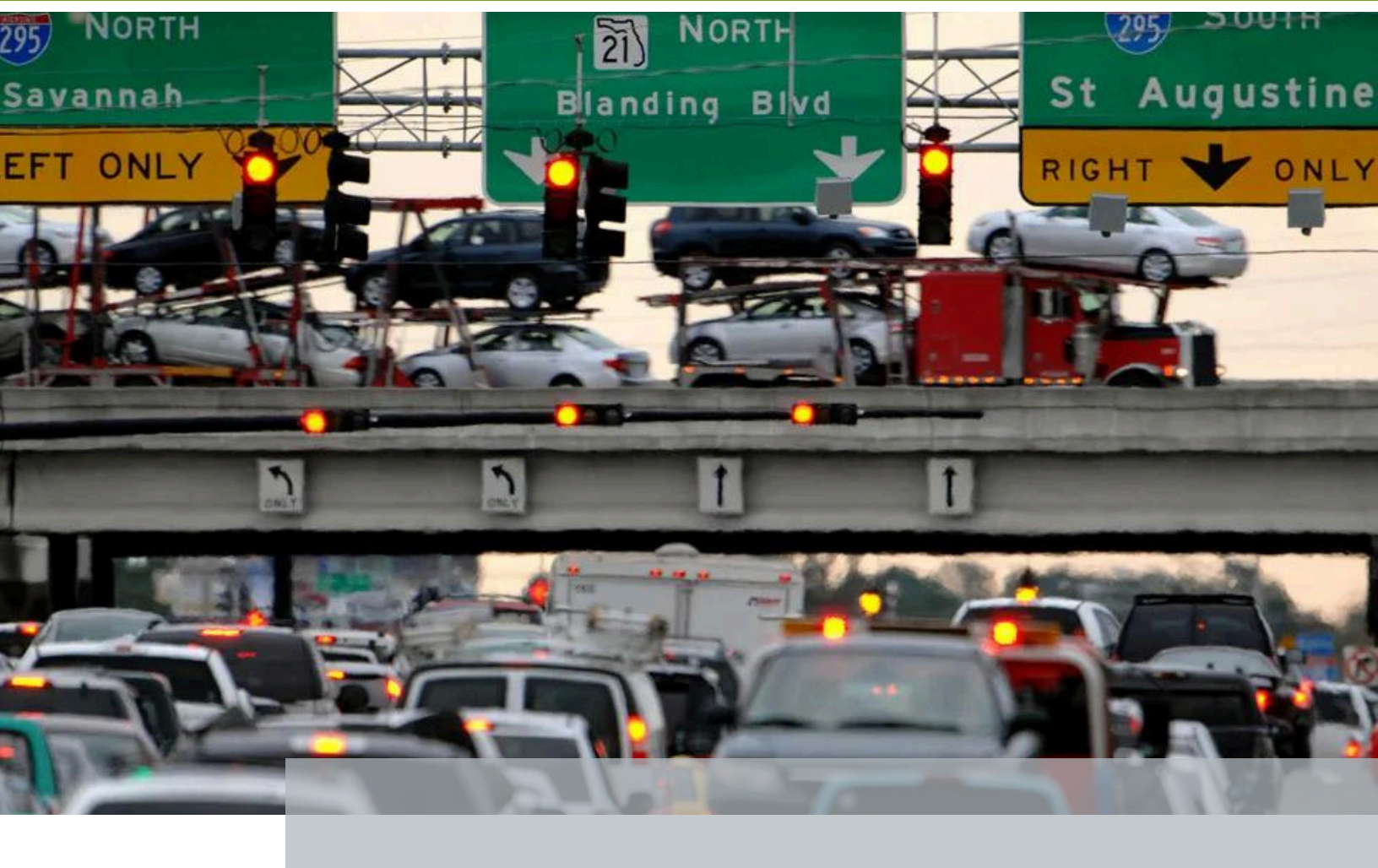


THE BLANDING BOULEVARD CORRIDOR



About the Urban Land Institute (ULI)

The Urban Land Institute (ULI) is a nonprofit education and research institute supported by its members. Its mission is to shape the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide. Established in 1936, ULI has more than 48,000 members worldwide representing all aspects of land use and development disciplines. The North Florida District Council was formed in 2005 and has nearly 600 members serving 34 counties, including the cities of Jacksonville, St. Augustine, Gainesville, Tallahassee, Panama City and Pensacola.

What are Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs)?

The Technical Assistance Panel program is an advisory service available to a community, nonprofit, public entity or private enterprise that is facing real estate or land-use issues. Typically, a two-day session, the TAP program brings together a cross-section of experts who do not have a vested interest in the project to examine the issues from multiple angles and produce recommendations and implementation strategies based on market conditions, sound information, community realities, and best practices.

The District Council assembles a panel of ULI members chosen for their knowledge of the issues facing the client. The interdisciplinary team may include land planners, architects, market and financial analysts, developers, engineers, appraisers, attorneys and/or brokers who are well qualified to provide unbiased, pragmatic advice on complex real estate and land-use issues.

To ensure objectivity, panel members cannot be involved in matters pending before the client, currently work for the client or solicit work from the client during the six months following the TAP program. In addition, they 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.

How Does the Program Work?

TAP members are briefed on the issues facing the client and receive detailed information relevant to the assignment including project history, detailed maps of the study area, relevant 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 (business owners, city council members, etc.), and work collaboratively to produce preliminary findings and recommendations which are presented at the end of Day 2 to the client. A complete report follows within about six to eight weeks with detailed recommendations.

ULI Advisory Services identify creative, practical solutions for complex land use and development challenges.

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TAP SCOPE OF WORK & PANEL PROCESS

TAP SCOPE

Clay County engaged the ULI North Florida District Council to convene a Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) to study County-owned property between Wells Road and College Drive on Blanding Boulevard. This study area currently houses shopping centers, grocery stores, hotels, restaurants, medical facilities, many parking lots, small businesses and neighborhoods.

The TAP was asked to recommend:

1. A long-term vision and development program for the study area that would promote economic growth, revitalization, sound development practices, and livability;
2. Highest and best uses for the study area, including identifying a range of uses that would be compatible with existing, committed, and planned uses and public facilities within the Blanding Corridor area as a transition corridor between Wells Road and College Drive; and
3. Strategies for public facilities to promote mobility to, from, and within the study area, as well as any resulting adjustments to current land use, transportation, and traffic patterns and issues.



PHOTO: Panel during meeting

PANEL PROCESS

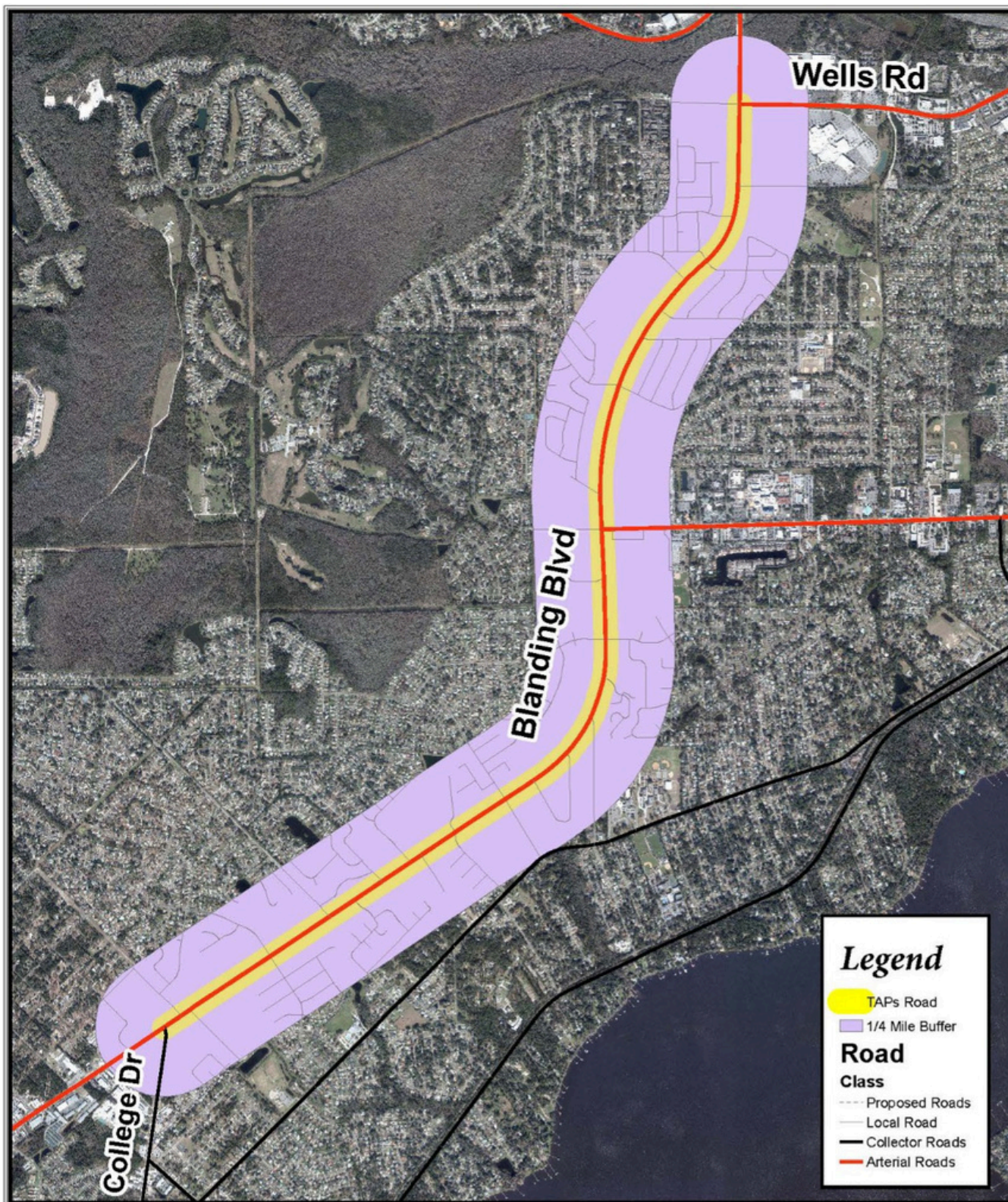
The ULI North Florida District Council assembled a group of accomplished ULI members who have expertise in real estate development, land planning and transportation, making for an intensive two-day workshop to address the challenges facing Blanding Boulevard.

Prior to convening, TAP members received information on the initiative, including the County's 2040 Comprehensive Plan, transportation and traffic studies, tourism and other pertinent data.

Orientation on Day 1 included an introductory presentation by Clay County representatives, including James Renninger, Vice Chair, Clay County Board of County Commissioners; Howard Wanamaker, Clay County Manager; Troy Nagle, Assistant County Manager; Chereese Steward, Assistant County Manager; Beth Carson, Chief Planner, Economic and Development Services; and Gabrielle Gunn, Director of Community and Social Services.

Panelists toured the TAP study area and conducted individual interviews with various stakeholders to hear their assessments of the community and attendant issues. Interviewees included Clayton Levins, Smart North Florida; James Renninger, Clay County Commissioner; Randy Bowman, General Manager, Orange Park Mall, Washington Prime Group, Inc.; and Howard Wanamaker, County Manager.

At the end of Day 2, the ULI panel shared their observations and recommendations with Clay County representatives and stakeholders.



Legend

- TAPs Road
- 1/4 Mile Buffer

Road Class

- Proposed Roads
- Local Road
- Collector Roads
- Arterial Roads



This information is provided as a visual representation only and is not intended to be used as legal or official representation of legal boundaries. The Clay County Board of County Commissioners assumes no responsibility associated with its use.

File Name: Blanding_Blvd_Wells_Rd_to_College_Dr_TAPs_Buffer

Blanding Blvd TAPs Map From College Dr to Wells Rd



Created By: GIS Department
Map Prepared: 9/7/2023



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Blanding Boulevard between Wells Road and College Drive is a major arterial roadway serving local commercial traffic as well as commuters traveling to employment centers in northern Clay County and Jacksonville. Along with hubs such as the Orange Park Mall, Orange Park High School and large retailers like Walmart, the corridor is home to a hodgepodge of aging and vacant shopping centers, fast food restaurants, gas stations, car washes, medical offices and numerous other types of commercial establishments seemingly built with little planning and regulation. Disparate signs, transient retail, abandoned gas stations, vacant properties and a sea of parking lots create visual clutter and blight.

Among the largest of many vacant properties is Sears at the Orange Park Mall located at Blanding and Wells Road. The Sears building and auto center front Blanding Boulevard and have been vacant for three years. This creates the appearance of a struggling retail center and significantly contributes to the visual blight along the corridor. The vested parties have been unable to coalesce around any development proposal. Sears's reciprocal easement agreement with the mall ownership expires in 2024.

Most new economic and residential development is moving elsewhere in the County. To preserve the Blanding Boulevard corridor's value and improve quality of life, revitalization will require beautification, improved mobility, growth, and coordination with public and private partners.

Panel recommendations include the adoption of a sign ordinance requiring property and business owners to adhere to new design criteria limiting the number of signs and establishing aesthetic criteria.

In addition, the panel recommends creating a Blanding Zoning District between Wells Road and College Drive to influence the built environment by addressing the specific characteristics, needs and problem areas of the corridor over time. The County's land development code should provide design standards and encourage mixed-use development with multifamily housing, program uses such as upscale food and beverage and small office, development closer to the street, parking in the back, increased height, greater density around transit stops and incorporation of bike/trail connections.

To foster revitalization, the panel recommends that the County fast-track permitting for conforming uses and provide tax incentives, bonuses for density and grants for property improvements, such as signage and building facades. The panel also recommends creating a Business Improvement District (BID) to help fund improvement efforts within the district's boundaries.

Other recommendations include inventorying properties for sale and engaging a study on local market dynamics, the area's susceptibility to change, and population access in order to understand the business case for change as well as the needs of existing residents and business owners. The panel recommends the County activate vacant properties by providing owners with an incentive to allow temporary use as a pocket park, food truck Friday, farmers market or art exhibit.

Safety is a prime concern given the number of accidents on Blanding Boulevard involving cars, pedestrians and cyclists. The intersection at Wells Road is prone to congestion during peak hours. The FDOT has proposed access management changes to the intersection that are expected to relieve congestion, enhance safety and improve traffic flow.

The panel suggests the County consider a Blanding Boulevard access management study to evaluate the location of existing curb cuts and median openings, which contribute to the number of vehicular accidents, consolidating the number wherever possible. Other traffic and safety measure recommendations include upgraded signals, lighting and special emphasis crosswalks.

As it currently exists, Blanding Boulevard is not a walkable corridor. However, opportunities exist to develop quarter-mile nodes of mixed-use activity around Blanding Boulevard's intersections with Wells Road, Kingsley Avenue and College Drive that are walkable, livable and attractive social hubs. Likely developed by the County as a public-private partnership, a node including multifamily housing, retail, commercial and entertainment offerings, central open green space, outdoor dining and parking in the back may provide a catalyst to this area. Once nodes are developed, a special trolley bus service enabling passengers to get on and off anywhere along the route will promote mobility between nodes and the nodes that develop on College Drive.

Pushing the recommendation concepts even further, the panel suggests creation of a vibrant town center at Kingsley Avenue, which is the midpoint of the Blanding Boulevard study area and includes Orange Park High School's 53-acre campus. The school's enrollment has been declining since 2006, although most recently there has been an increase due to a redistricting of Argyle to relieve capacity issues at Oakleaf High School. While it is important to note that Clay County District Schools has spent about \$6.5M in campus improvements in current or recent years, Orange Park High School's aging facility may be nearing its life expectancy. Relocation of the school may be difficult. However, when anchored by a performance venue and/or convention center, development at the school site will prove catalytic and further spur corridor development. Commercial/residential mixed-use development there could accommodate 24 to 60 units an acre and provide higher-end restaurants, cafés and open public space.

In general, revitalizing and redeveloping Blanding Boulevard will be a protracted effort, requiring a long-term commitment on the part of the County, participation by the private sector, other County and state agencies, as well as forward thinking and planning.



PHOTO: Panel presentation

Summary of Recommendations

Near-term

Public Sector

- Revise and adopt the draft signage ordinance, deleting Section 7-A.4.b. Prior Approved Permit.
- Create a Blanding Corridor Zoning District between Wells Road and College Drive to encourage transit-oriented mixed-use development, co-locating retail and multifamily residential, greater height and density, and parking in the rear or to the side of buildings with no minimums.
- Develop incentive programs to encourage infill, redevelopment and revitalization.
- Conduct an access management study to evaluate where curb cut consolidation can occur. Work with FDOT and private owners to assess where median openings can be closed.
- Inventory existing vacancies and conduct a market study to assess local market dynamics, the area's susceptibility to change and population access in order to develop a business case for change.
- Work with FDOT to implement traffic and safety measures such as upgraded signals, special emphasis crosswalks and lighting. Seek funding through various state and federal programs.
- Develop a public-private partnership strategy to set redevelopment efforts in motion.

Private Sector

- Create a Blanding Boulevard Business Improvement District between Wells Road and College Drive.
- Work with the County on a public-private partnership.

Long-term

Public Sector

- Work with private sector to develop quarter-mile nodes of mixed-use activity around Blanding Boulevard's intersections with Wells Road, Kingsley Avenue and College Drive.
- Collaborate with Clay Electric to convert overhead utilities to underground.
- Work with regional transportation agencies on improving safety, mobility and future modes of transportation.
- Add open space/greenspace and connect to the County's trail/bike/multipath network wherever possible.

Private Sector

- Implement the Business Improvement District and a Quality Assurance/Quality Control.
- Leverage Clay County's economic development to spur future growth.

Outside-the-box ideas

- Launch a hop-on, hop-off trolley bus that circulates between developed nodes.
- Activate vacant properties, providing property owners with an incentive for temporary use.
- Relocate Orange Park High School and establish a mixed-use town center on the school's 53-acre site. Make it a destination for high-end restaurants, a convention center and entertainment with open public green space, cafés and multifamily residences.

BACKGROUND

The 4.3-mile stretch of Blanding Boulevard (SR 21) from College Drive to Wells Road is a six-lane, arterial roadway serving local commercial and high-volume commuter traffic with a posted speed limit of 45 miles per hour. The corridor provides a major connection to I-295 and Jacksonville. Blanding Boulevard’s annual average daily traffic (AADT) count at Wells Road is 78,000, according to Florida Department of Transportation’s (FDOT) 2022 data. The AADT drops to 72,500 at Kingsley Avenue and 61,000 at College Drive.

Public transportation is provided by the Red Line bus, one of four lines operated by Jacksonville Transit Authority (JTA) in partnership with Clay County. The Red Line links Orange Park and Middleburg along Blanding Boulevard and College Drive. However, infrequent service requires long rider waits.

Blanding Boulevard is densely populated with retail and other commercial establishments, including the Orange Park Mall, Walmart, shopping centers, fast food restaurants, gas stations, car washes, public storage facilities, medical offices and myriad other businesses. It also is home to a cemetery and Orange Park High School.

Several vacant properties dot the Blanding Boulevard corridor, including Sears at the Orange Park Mall, the Rooms to Go Outlet and a number of abandoned gas stations. The County unsuccessfully applied for a brownfield grant to clean up the gas station properties, which remain an eyesore.

Residential areas are located east and west of the boulevard, including the Orange Park Country Club, a gated neighborhood of 627 single-family homes. The latter’s golf course was recently purchased after being shut down for nearly five years due to default. The new owner plans to restore the course and its amenities.

Most new home construction currently occurs in the central portion of Clay County, and nearly 50% of Clay’s total working residents travel to Jacksonville for employment, according to a 2023 Clay County transit study. Major Clay County employment centers include Orange Park Mall (Blanding Boulevard and Wells Road) and Orange Park Medical Center (Kingsley Avenue near Blanding Boulevard). Blanding Boulevard is a major route for those commuting to these employment centers.



PHOTOS: Fast food restaurant, carwash, storage units along the Blanding corridor

About 3,000 people are employed at the Orange Park Mall. The center boasts 180 tenants and a 98% occupancy rate. Traffic hovers at 37,000 a day and 50,000 on weekends. In addition, the mall hosts carnivals, car shows, the annual Freedom Festival and other special events in its parking lot, drawing thousands of visitors.

The mall's Sears property has been vacant since 2020. It includes the 186,331-square-foot store and a free-standing 33,486-square-foot auto building. The site is listed for lease, and there is interest from retailers and others for redevelopment. Currently, any proposal must be approved by the four parties that own the mall's buildings and land. They include Sears, Washington Prime Group, Dillard's and Belk. However, Sears's reciprocal easement agreement expires in 2024.

The mall's location at Blanding Boulevard and Wells Road is highly trafficked and prone to congestion during peak hours. The FDOT has proposed access management changes to the intersection. The changes include a hybrid type of design that combines a partial displaced left-turn (PDLT) on the east leg and a partial median U-turn (MUT) on the north leg. In addition, a median opening on Blanding Boulevard into the mall will be closed. The new configuration is expected to relieve congestion, enhance safety and improve the flow of traffic.

“Blanding is a state road. We can make suggestions to them but we can only control so much.”

— James Renninger
Clay County Commissioner



PHOTO: Sears property that is vacant and available for lease is shown in red



PHOTO: Abandoned Sears property

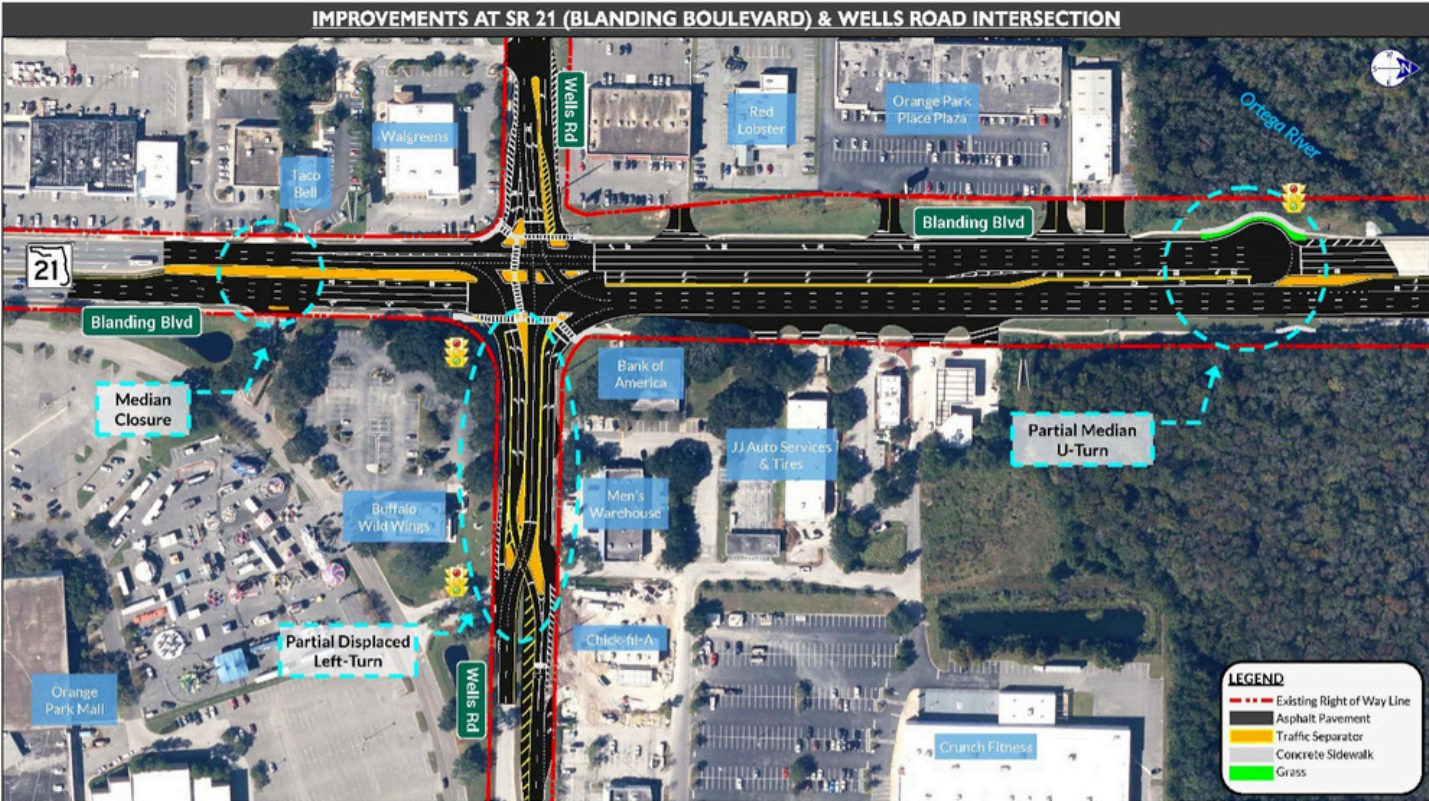


PHOTO: FDOT proposed changes to the Blanding Boulevard/Wells Road intersection

ANALYSIS

WHAT WE HEARD

“Pedestrian safety”

“Traffic”

“abandoned
gas stations”

Housing diversity

“revitalization”

“aesthetics”

“BLIGHTED”

“hodgepodge”

“Smart Streets”

“car washes”

“No park or green space”

“overlay”

“signage”

Blanding Boulevard exemplifies an auto-oriented, single-use development pattern. The stretch of road under study could be defined as a “stroad” – a word coined by the nonprofit organization Strong Towns to describe when “a street (a place where people interact with businesses and residences, and where wealth is produced) gets combined with a road (a high-speed route between productive places).”

While the corridor provides residents with access to jobs and a variety of retail, commercial and medical facilities, development appears to have occurred haphazardly, with little to no control and a lack of cohesiveness. As a result, the road is characterized by visual clutter with a proliferation of signs of different types and sizes, inconsistent building design and setbacks, expansive concrete parking lots and little green space. While replete with strip malls, the corridor lacks desired upscale restaurants and amenities that encourage people to congregate and spend time there.

Many of the commercial strip centers are aging, further contributing to the roadway’s blight. There are a number of abandoned gas stations and some vacant and/or transient businesses. Empty stores like Sears indicate that the area is in decline.



PHOTO: Gas station on Blanding Boulevard

STRENGTHS

- Access/centrality
- Activity
- Captive residents
- Commercial proximity to residents
- Diversity of offerings
- FDOT road
- First Coast Expressway Jobs
- OP Mall occupancy
- Pedestrian signals
- Roadway connector
- Sidewalks
- Tax base
- Transit
- Vehicular capacity
- Medical offices

WEAKNESSES

- Concrete
- Curb cuts
- Disconnectedness
- Lack of amenities
- Lack of multifamily housing
- Lack of offices/other uses
- No alternative routes
- Visual chaos
- No parks/green space/civic space
- No street trees
- No upscale restaurants
- Sears
- Signage
- Too many car washes
- Traffic
- Transit convenience

OPPORTUNITIES

- Beautification
- Co-locating
- Community Redevelopment Area
- Design control
- Multi-use
- Sears
- Identity
- Incentives
- Infill
- Trails
- Innovation
- Intersection improvements
- Landscaping
- Multimodal
- Pedestrian crossing
- Regional competitive advantage
- Safety
- Transit-oriented development thinking

THREATS

- Continued inactivity at Sears
- Excessive density
- Increased traffic
- FDOT Intersection improvements
- Regional competition
- Too many gas stations
- Uses not matching consumer trends



LEFT: Abandoned Blanding Medical Center at 921 Blanding Boulevard; RIGHT: Proliferation of signs on Blanding

Without some intervention, Blanding will continue to decline economically as development moves elsewhere in the County. To preserve the corridor's value and improve quality of life, revitalization efforts require beautification, improved mobility, growth, and coordination with public and private partners.

Revitalization efforts

A drafted, unadopted ordinance establishes design and technical standards for new and replacement signs in Clay County's unincorporated areas to mitigate blight. The draft ordinance curtails the size and number of signs to the minimum reasonably necessary. It also includes guidelines promoting aesthetic and functional qualities in design and placement.

However, Section 7-A.4.b. Prior Approved Permits of the draft ordinance allows signs that were approved under a previous permit to be replaced consistent with the prior approval. This section appears to negate the overall purpose and intent of the ordinance and should be deleted. If a space or asset is being re-tenanted, under renovation or a sign is damaged, the new sign must conform to the new criteria.

Currently, the County is also in the process of updating its land development code. Adoption of a revised zoning code is expected in the latter part of 2024. There is an opportunity to restructure land use and development patterns along the Blanding Boulevard corridor. Consideration should be given to creating a Blanding Zoning District to influence the built environment, allowing the corridor to evolve over time, with future growth and redevelopment occurring cohesively and in line with the County's vision.

The zoning district should prescribe restricted uses, increase height and density, eliminate parking minimums, and provide standards for façades, signage, landscaping, setback, pedestrian/bike infrastructure, curb cuts, streetscape design, open space and parking location (back or structured).

Draft sign ordinance Section 7-A.4.b. Prior Approved Permits negates the purpose and intent of the ordinance and should be deleted.

Ideally, the code will encourage mixed-use development, multifamily housing, a notable change in program uses (upscale food and beverage/small office), development closer to the street, greater density around transit stops and incorporation of bike/trail connections wherever possible.

Mixed-use development offers an opportunity to co-locate residential units with ground-floor retail (e.g., three floors of residential over one commercial), helping to expand workforce housing. Such development supports Florida's Live Local Act, which became effective July 1, 2023. The Act is designed to incentivize development of much-needed affordable, multifamily housing units through tax incentives and low-interest loans. Under the law, a county must allow multifamily and mixed-use residential in any area zoned for commercial, industrial, or mixed use if at least 40 percent of the residential units in a proposed multifamily rental development are, for a period of at least 30 years, affordable as defined in the state statute.

To foster revitalization, the County has a number of tools at its disposal:

- Fast-tracking permitting for conforming uses, saving developers time and money;
- Bonuses for density;
- Tax incentives for infill, adaptive reuse and/or redevelopment; and
- Grants to businesses for sign replacement, façade improvements and activating underutilized parking lots with green space, parklets or other placemaking activities.

At the same time, the County and the private sector can work together to create a Business Improvement District (BID). The special assessment collected from district property owners and businesses would solely fund improvement efforts within the district's boundaries. A BID can be a critical tool in helping to ensure that property values continue to rise for all property owners and businesses in and around Blanding Boulevard. Typical BID services include security, sanitation, capital improvements, and marketing and economic development activities.

There are some properties for sale, including a 9-acre site near Kingsley Avenue. While the 84,180-square-foot retail building is currently occupied by Old Time Pottery, the property could be ripe for redevelopment.



PHOTO: The 9-acre site occupied by Old Time Pottery could be ripe for redevelopment.

There is value in the County inventorying existing properties for sale and engaging a study on the local market dynamics, the area's susceptibility to change, and population access to understand the business case for change as well as the needs of existing residents and business owners.

In the meantime, vacant properties can lend themselves to activation, e.g., a pocket park, food truck Friday, a farmers market or an art exhibit. County-private owner partnerships lead to effective and transformational use incentives.



PHOTO: Vacant properties can be activated; e.g., Food Truck Fridays.

Safety improvements

As with a typical "stroad," Blanding Boulevard is not conducive to or safe for cycling or walking due to the road's traffic, speed limit, and abundant curbs-cuts. Sidewalks are narrow with no buffer between walkers and speeding vehicles.

Between January 1, 2018, and June 29, 2023, there were 4,034 crashes on Blanding Boulevard between Wells Road and College Drive. They included:

- 16 fatal crashes (5 pedestrian, 7 left-turn or angle, 2 rear-end, 1 bicycle, 1 off road);
- 32 serious injury crashes (incapacitating injury), and 2 non-traffic fatalities;
- 25% crashes at night, 75% crashed during the day;
- 13% crashes during wet roadway conditions, 87% crashes during dry roadway conditions;
- 56% rear-end, 13% sideswipe, 16% left-turn or angle;
- 68 pedestrian crashes (2%), 33 bicycle crashes (1%).

In addition, there are 47 openings – streets and medians – and more than 200 curb cuts between Wells Road and College Drive. Curb cuts are known to contribute to the number of vehicular accidents. A national study found that increasing access points from 10 to 20 per mile on major arterial roads increases the crash rate by about 30%.

One strategy to improve safety is to consolidate curb cuts wherever possible so that businesses share one access point. Consolidating curb cuts also frees up space for trees and other landscaping. The County should consider an access management study to evaluate existing locations to determine where consolidation can occur.

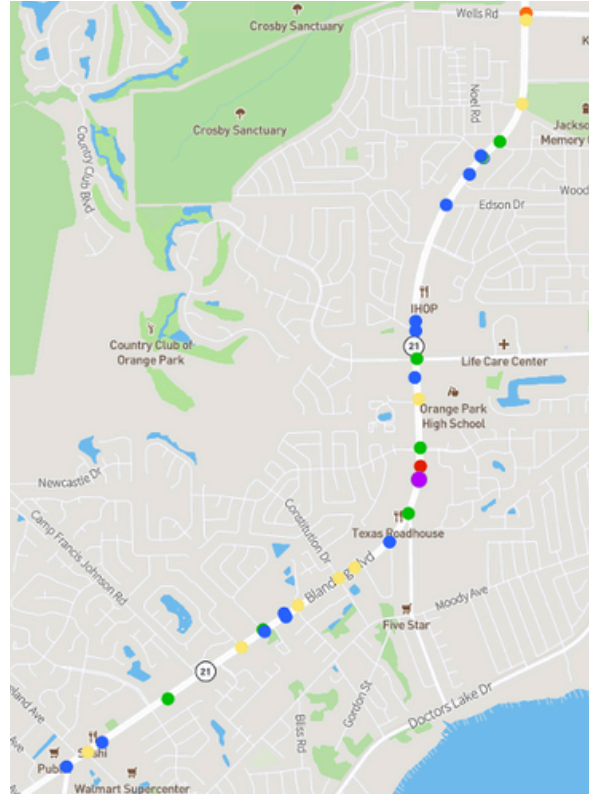


IMAGE: Bicycle Crashes on Blanding Boulevard

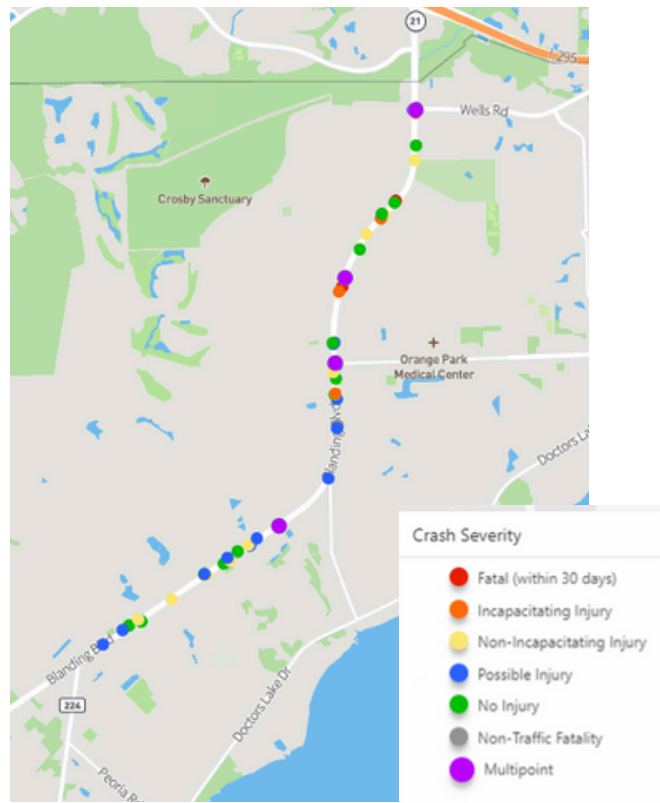


IMAGE: Pedestrian Crashes on Blanding Boulevard

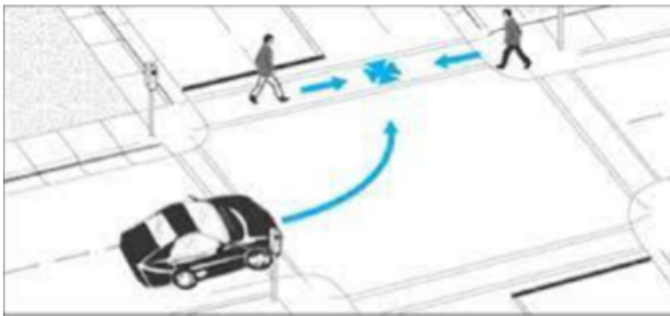


IMAGE: Fatal crashes on Blanding Boulevard (1/1/2018 – 6/29/2023)

Public realm improvements drive private development. Beyond streetscapes and beautification, near-term efforts include traffic and safety measures that improve mobility and reduce crashes. Examples include:

- **Leading pedestrian interval (LPI) signal at intersections**

LPI prioritizes pedestrians over turning vehicles. Pedestrians receive the walk indication before the start of the green indication for adjacent vehicular movements. LPI reportedly reduces crashes by 59%.



- **Retroreflective backplate added to a traffic signal head**

The retroreflective backplate improves the visibility of the signal's illuminated face and is proven to reduce total crashes at an intersection by 15%.



- **4-section flashing yellow arrow for left-turns**

This signal device can reduce crashes by 20%.

- **Pedestrian hybrid beacon (PHB)**

This traffic control device is activated by a pedestrian desiring to cross the street midblock. Nearly 74% of pedestrian fatalities occur midblock at non-intersections, with vehicle speeds a major contributing factor, according to the Federal Highway Administration.



- **Lighting**

Lighting reduces nighttime injury pedestrian crashes at intersections by 42%.

- **Special emphasis crosswalks**

Highly visible crosswalks can reduce crashes by 40%.



Several funding sources are available:

- FDOT's County Incentive Grant Program provides grants for county improvements made to a state road.
- FDOT awards subgrants from National Highway Traffic Safety Administration funding for county programs and activities that improve traffic safety and reduce crashes, serious injuries and fatalities.
- Safe Routes to School Program (SRTS) is focused on planning, design, and construction of infrastructure-related projects that will substantially improve the safety of students in grades K-12 to walk and bicycle to school.
- Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) discretionary program grants fund initiatives to prevent roadway deaths and serious injuries. The Fiscal Year 24 Notice of Funding Opportunity for SS4A is expected to open in Spring 2024.

Concentrated development nodes

While Blanding Boulevard is not a walkable corridor, there is an opportunity to develop quarter-mile nodes of concentrated mixed-use activity around Blanding Boulevard's intersections with Wells Road, Kingsley Avenue and College Drive. Like town centers, these nodes are walkable, livable and attractive social hubs of multifamily housing, retail, commercial and entertainment offerings, featuring wider sidewalks, landscaped buffer zones between people and traffic, central open green spaces or pocket parks, park amenities, outdoor dining and parking in the back. In addition, the nodes should connect to bike and multiuse paths/trails wherever possible. Developing a node as a public-private partnership is strongly recommended.

Anchors for nodes can include:

- Park
- Plaza
- Cinema
- Convention center
- Performing arts/venue
- Museum
- Office
- Gym/Recreation
- Municipal building
- Food hall
- Entertainment district (Bars)
- Amphitheatre

Improvements such as a pedestrian hybrid beacon, mid-block crossings, a textured crosswalk pad and gateway landscaping as cars enter the intersections to signal drivers to slow down are proven measures to increase pedestrian safety. Implementation of a special trolley service that enables passengers to get on and off anywhere along the route would promote mobility between nodes and the nodes that develop on College Drive.

Think outside of the box

Kingsley Avenue is the midpoint of the Blanding Boulevard study area and includes Orange Park High School's 53-acre campus. Anchored by a performance venue and/or convention center, a vibrant town center on the school site would be a catalyst, furthering corridor development. Commercial/residential mixed-use development in this area could accommodate 24 to 60 units an acre and provide higher-end restaurants, cafés and open public space.

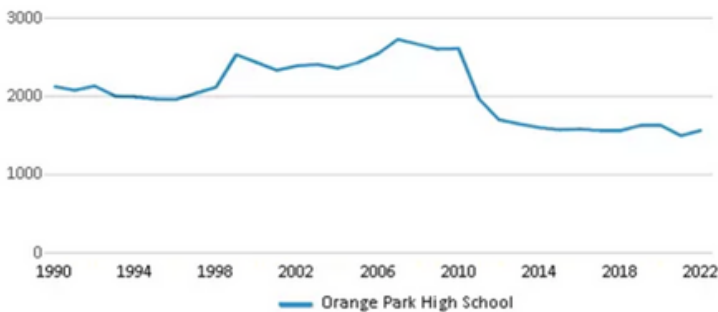
In addition, the high school property sits diagonally across from a 9.4-acre site that is for sale. Lease on the retail building currently occupied by Old Time Pottery expires in 2030. The property provides a prime opportunity for redevelopment in conjunction with the school site.



Relocating the school may be expensive and difficult. However, redevelopment at the site through a public-private partnership along with private redevelopment of the Old Time Pottery property could dramatically alter the tone of Blanding Boulevard and bring new life to the corridor.

In general, revitalizing and redeveloping Blanding Boulevard will be a protracted effort, requiring a long-term commitment on the part of the County, participation by the private sector, as well as some out-of-the-box thinking.

The school is not contextual to the Blanding Boulevard corridor and is in need of significant investment. More than 23% of students are in temporary quarters. The aging school building may be nearing its life expectancy, and it may no longer be cost effective to reconfigure or renovate it. For the 2023-24 academic year, there are 1,928 students enrolled in grades 9 through 12.



Source: Public School Review

RECOMMENDATIONS

Near-Term

Public Sector

- Revise and adopt the draft signage ordinance. Delete Section 7-A.4.b. Prior Approved Permit from the ordinance prior to adoption as it negates the purpose and intent of the new standard.
 - Create a Blanding Corridor Zoning District between Wells Road and College Drive to restructure land use and development patterns in keeping with the County's vision. The zoning standards should encourage transit-oriented development, mixed-use, co-locating retail and multifamily residential, greater height and density, and parking in the rear or to the side of buildings with no minimums.
 - Develop incentive programs to encourage infill, redevelopment and revitalization. Focus revised language on fast-track permitting for conforming uses, bonuses for increased density, tax incentives and grants for improvements, such as signage, landscaping, parking lot, building façade, public/greenspace and eliminating curb cuts.
 - Conduct an access management study to evaluate existing curb cut locations and determine where consolidation can occur. Work with the FDOT and private owners to assess which median openings can be closed as part of a strategy to reduce accidents.
 - Conduct a market study to inventory existing vacancies and assess local market dynamics, the area's susceptibility to change and population access in order to develop a business case for change.
- Work with FDOT to implement traffic and safety measures that improve mobility and reduce crashes; e.g., retroreflective backplates, special emphasis crosswalks, upgrade PED signals, 4-section flashing yellow arrows, leading PED Intervals (LPI), pedestrian lighting and midblock crossings where needed. Seek funding through various state and federal programs; e.g., FDOT's County Incentive Grant Program, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration subgrant, Safe Routes to School Program, and Safe Streets for All.
 - Develop a public-private partnership strategy as a way to set redevelopment efforts in motion.

Private Sector

- Create a Blanding Boulevard Business Improvement District between Wells Road and College Drive, establishing a dedicated and sustainable funding source that supplements County efforts to improve the corridor, e.g., branding, signage, economic development, design standards (beautification) and marketing.
- Work with the County on mixed-use development through creation of a public-private partnership.

Long-Term

Public Sector

- Work with private sector to develop quarter-mile nodes of mixed-use activity around Blanding Boulevard’s intersections with Wells Road, Kingsley Avenue and College Drive. Include multifamily residential, retail, commercial, civic and entertainment uses, outdoor dining, green space and parking in the back. Incorporate pedestrian safety features such as crosswalks with a textured pattern, signals and gateway landscaping at intersections.
- Collaborate with Clay Electric to convert overhead utilities to underground. Underground utilities provide more space to widen sidewalks, add landscaping, and increase storm resiliency.
- Work with regional transportation agencies, including North Florida Transportation Planning Organization and Jacksonville Transportation Authority, on improving safety, mobility and future modes of transportation.
- Add open space/greenspace and connect to the County’s trail/bike/multipath network wherever possible.

Private Sector

- Implement the Business Improvement District and a Quality Assurance/Quality Control plan to ensure proper organizational structure and responsibilities and monitor progress.
- Leverage Clay County’s economic development to spur future growth.

Out-of-the-box ideas

- Launch a hop-on, hop-off trolley bus that circulates between developed nodes on Blanding at Wells, Kingsley and College Drive and connects to developed nodes on College Drive.
- Activate vacant properties. Provide property owners with an incentive for the property’s temporary use for a pocket park, food truck Friday, a farmers market or art exhibit.
- Relocate Orange Park High School and establish a mixed-use town center destination for high-end restaurants, convention center and entertainment with open public green space, cafés and multifamily residences. This transformational effort requires long-term planning and funding based on the continued and/or sunsetting life expectancy of the school facilities and continued stagnation/ reduction in enrollment.



Pedestrian Walkability Plan For Activity Nodes

	Walkable Activity Area
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ¼ mile radius walking area • Pedestrian crossings with textured pattern • Landscaping gateway at entering intersection • Landscaped sidewalk area • Greenspace/pocket park
	Corridor Gateway Feature
	Interparcel / backside connection
	Existing Traffic Signal
	New Future Signal or Pedestrian Crossing (Stamped Concrete or Paver Pattern)
	Signal with Emphasized Pedestrian Crossing (Stamped Concrete or Paver Pattern)

ABOUT THE PANEL



Patrick Krechowski, TAP Chair

Balch & Bingham LLP | Jacksonville, Florida

Patrick W. Krechowski has more than 20 years of experience in real estate, land use, environmental, governmental, administrative litigation, appeals and title insurance law. He is board certified by the Florida Bar in city, county and local government law. His practice focuses on all aspects of zoning and land use law, real estate due diligence, environmental permitting (including sovereign submerged lands and riparian rights), environmental remediation, water use permitting and planning, beach nourishment projects, coastal construction and due diligence before local governments and federal/state agencies, including associated administrative and civil litigation.

Krechowski has represented various state agency boards and local governments, including serving as the City Attorney for Neptune Beach, Florida, and as Port Attorney for the Ocean Highway and Port Authority, Nassau County, Florida. This experience not only enables him to assist local governments with virtually any aspect of their operations, it also gives him a unique insight into how best to navigate challenges that his private clients often encounter in seeking local and state approvals for their real estate projects.

He has extensive public speaking and teaching experience and is a published contributing author to a book focused on international climate change.

Krechowski holds a bachelor of science degree from Florida State University and a juris doctor degree from Nova Southeastern University, Shepard Broad Law Center.



Neha Baraskar, LEED, AP, ND

LS3P | Raleigh, North Carolina

Neha Baraskar is a senior urban designer in LS3P's Raleigh office, working with the Urban Environments team across the firm. In her previous work with other regional architecture and landscape firms, she led numerous land planning design efforts across multiple sectors including retail, hospitality and multifamily. She has honed a keen focus on placemaking by creating outdoor public spaces that are vibrant and pedestrian oriented.

Baraskar holds both a master of urban design from the University of Michigan and a bachelor of architecture from University of Pune, India. She is a registered licensed architect by the Council of Architecture in India.



Richard Fangmann, PE, PTOE

Pond & Company | Atlanta, Georgia

Richard Fangmann serves as vice president of transportation for Pond & Company. He has 30 years of broad-based experience in transportation planning, traffic engineering and transportation design.

Fangmann has worked on many projects involving the integration of multiple travel modes to maximize the movement of people while maintaining safety. He has also worked on land use and redevelopment plans for improvements along transportation corridors and town centers. His projects emphasize the integration of multiple travel modes along with safety to support redevelopment in walkable communities.

A graduate of Georgia Institute of Technology, Fangman holds both a master of science and a bachelor of science degree from GIT.



Michael McNaughton, RPA, SCLS, CRX, CCIM

Sleiman Enterprises | Jacksonville, Florida

Michael McNaughton joined Sleiman Enterprises in September 2018 as chief operating officer. He oversees all departmental facets of the organization with a focus on maximizing returns and driving growth of the enterprise as a leading privately held real estate organization in the United States.

Prior to joining Sleiman, McNaughton served as senior vice president of U.S. development for the Westfield Corporation in New York City. Key projects included The World Trade Center (Port Authority of New York and New Jersey) and the Fulton Transit Center (NY-MTA) in Lower Manhattan, along with oversight of all facets of expansion, intensification, and the incorporation of mixed-use elements into Westfield’s existing U.S. portfolio.

McNaughton was the founder and chief operating officer for New York City based Rouse Properties (NYSE: RSE), taking the organization public in January 2012. Prior to that, he was a founding member and partner of Coro Realty Advisors, an Atlanta-based real estate investment owner/advisor.

He is a member of the International Council of Shopping Centers and Urban Land Institute. He is a Real Property Administrator, Senior Certified Leasing Specialist, Certified Retail Property Executive, and Certified Commercial Investment Member.



Blake Reeves, AICP

LS3P | Atlanta, Georgia

Blake Reeves is a senior urban designer within LS3P’s Urban Environments Practice. In service of robust community building, he has led and advanced significant urban projects across the world. Reeves specializes in master planning and strategy, where his proficiency for robust idea generation allows him to address complex challenges with innovative solutions that drive meaningful and effective change.

Reeves is a champion for community development. He has created a wealth of comprehensive plans and small area plans that employ regulatory frameworks to capture and enable the collective vision of a people. His work has been critical in shaping vibrant, inclusive and welcoming mixed-use districts that provide more just and equitable outcomes for all.

Before joining LS3P, Reeves worked on prestigious international commissions with a global firm. Through the Future of Places program, he also aided in crafting the public space recommendations for Habitat III, the United Nations’ third bi-decennial summit on cities, towns and villages.

Reeves holds both a master of science in urban design and a master of city and regional planning from Georgia Tech.



Russell Yaffee, PE, PTOE

Peters and Yaffee, Inc. | Jacksonville, Florida

Russell Yaffee is a highly experienced principal traffic engineer with a career spanning more than three decades. His expertise encompasses a wide array of skills and responsibilities in the transportation field, making him a versatile and accomplished professional.

Yaffee's professional journey includes:

- **Traffic Impact studies:** Proficient in the preparation of comprehensive traffic impact studies, he has a proven track record in assessing the effects of various developments on traffic patterns and safety.
- **Signal Design:** Yaffee is skilled in designing traffic signals to manage traffic flow and enhancing intersection safety.
- **Signing and Pavement Marking Design:** He is well-versed in designing road signs and pavement markings, ensuring clear and consistent traffic guidance.
- **Safety Advocate:** He is dedicated to designing and implementing safety measures, such as rectangular rapid flashing beacons, pedestrian hybrid beacons, and mid-block traffic signals, to enhance pedestrian and cyclist safety.
- **NCUTCD Involvement:** Yaffee is a respected member of the National Committee on Uniform Traffic Control Devices. He serves on the guide sign and motorist information technical subcommittee, actively contributing to the standardization of traffic control devices for improved safety and consistency nationwide.

With a career dating back to 1991 and a strong educational foundation in civil engineering from Tulane University, Yaffee brings a wealth of experience and knowledge to every project he undertakes.



The mission of the Urban Land Institute is to shape the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide