Cover Photo: Celebration in Hemming Park, downtown Jacksonville.

PHOTO CREDIT: RYAN KETTERMAN, VISIT JACKSONVILLE
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The National Trust for Historic Preservation is a privately-funded nonprofit organization that works to save America’s historic places for the next generation. We are committed to protecting America’s rich cultural legacy and to helping build vibrant, sustainable communities that reflect our nation’s diversity. We take direct action to save the places that matter while bringing the voices of the preservation movement to the forefront nationally.

A department of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Preservation Green Lab strengthens the connections between historic preservation and sustainability. Founded in Seattle and now with additional staff in Denver and Washington, DC, the Preservation Green Lab conducts research and promotes policy innovation to support healthy, equitable, and resilient communities.

The Jessie Ball duPont Fund works to expand access and create opportunity by investing in people, organizations and communities that were important to Jessie Ball duPont. Across its work, the Fund organizes its resources around these focus areas: Building the Capacity of Eligible Organizations; Building the Assets of People, Families and Communities; Strengthening the Independent Sector.
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Executive Summary

Jacksonville is rediscovering the value of its older urban core. This report from the Preservation Green Lab of the National Trust for Historic Preservation highlights how Jacksonville’s older buildings and blocks are already outperforming newer areas of the city across many sustainable development metrics. But they can become even stronger. Analysis of data from city, state, and national sources points to numerous areas of the city with high potential for successful reinvestment and revitalization. Unlocking this potential requires stronger incentives, innovative new policies, and increased awareness and capacity in the nonprofit, government, and private sectors.

Using a methodology developed by the Preservation Green Lab, this study includes an analysis of all of Jacksonville’s existing structures to assess the connections between the character of the city’s building stock and more than 30 measures of neighborhood livability, economic vitality, and diversity. Key findings from this research include:

**Jacksonville’s areas of older, smaller, mixed-age buildings power the local economy.**

There are 27 percent more jobs in small businesses, as well as significantly higher percentages of jobs in new businesses and creative industries in areas of the city that are characterized by older, smaller buildings and mixed-age blocks. In areas where at least half of the buildings were constructed before 1920, 15 percent of the jobs are in creative industries, compared to a citywide average of about eight percent.

**Entrepreneurs of all backgrounds can get their start in areas with older, smaller buildings.**

There are 27 percent more women and minority-owned businesses in areas of older, smaller buildings and mixed-age blocks than in areas with mostly large, new buildings of a similar age.

**Areas with older and historic buildings are home to Jacksonville’s top restaurants.**

Sixty-one percent of the city’s favorite restaurants, as identified by Jacksonville Magazine, are in areas with older, smaller buildings and mixed-age blocks. Although only five percent of Jacksonville’s buildings were built prior to 1920, 20 percent of the top-rated restaurants are in buildings of that vintage.

**It’s easier to find shade in Jacksonville’s older neighborhoods.**

Areas of the city with more older buildings also have significantly greater tree cover. For instance, areas where half of the buildings were constructed before 1945 have an average of 65 percent tree canopy, compared to 50 percent in areas where most of the buildings were constructed in the 21st century.

**Character-rich areas of Jacksonville provide space for community engagement.**

Nearly 60 percent of the city’s community-serving “civic commons” spaces are in areas with older, smaller buildings and mixed-age blocks. This includes 76 percent of the city’s libraries, 60 percent of its community centers, and 55 percent of its...
museums and art galleries.

Different generations live together in the city’s neighborhoods of older, smaller buildings.

A greater mix of millennials and baby boomers live in the areas with older, smaller buildings and mixed-age blocks. Using the Resident Age Diversity Index (RADI), a metric developed by the Preservation Green Lab, the research team found significantly higher diversity of resident age in these areas; over 90 percent have a higher RADI score than the citywide average.

Jacksonville’s blocks of older, smaller, mixed-age buildings have greater population density and more housing units.

Nearly 60 percent of urban Jacksonville’s population lives in the half of the city with relatively older, smaller, mixed-age buildings. These areas include 44 percent more housing units than areas with mostly large, new buildings.

BARRIERS TO REUSE

These findings highlight the valuable role that older, smaller buildings play in supporting Jacksonville’s neighborhood livability, economic vitality, and social diversity. What can be done to leverage these strengths and accelerate building reuse and neighborhood revitalization? Are there obstacles getting in the way? Through interviews and focus groups with over 30 local stakeholders, several key barriers were identified, including:

- Weak market conditions and a lack of amenities in urban neighborhoods.
- High up-front costs to rehabilitate long-vacant and deteriorated older structures.
- Lack of sufficient local and state incentives to foster building reuse and infill at a large scale.
- Zoning that is out-of-sync with market needs, particularly in historic commercial and mixed-use areas.
- Parking requirements that make adaptive use more expensive and less feasible.
- Lack of capacity and experience with historic rehabilitation projects, including use of tax incentives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The stakeholders suggested several strategies to overcome these barriers and unlock the potential of Jacksonville’s older buildings and blocks.

Strengthen Incentives

The overall market for reuse in Jacksonville’s urban core is still relatively weak, particularly for larger rehabilitations. To overcome these challenges, current incentives could be strengthened and new incentives added. Recommendations to strengthen incentives in Jacksonville include:

- Support project planning and up-front rehabilitation costs for downtown projects through greater capitalization of the Downtown Historic Preservation and Revitalization Trust Fund.
- Leverage HUD funding, including CDBG grants and Section 108 loan guarantees, to benefit housing and commercial rehabilitation projects in urban core neighborhoods.
- Expand the current property tax incentive to include not just designated structures, but adaptive use of older buildings generally (50 years or older) for commercial and multi-family residential use. Streamline the review and approval process for projects involving these non-designated structures.
- Support efforts to establish a Florida rehabilitation tax credit in the next legislative session. Look to examples in Texas and Tennessee for ways to structure a credit in a state without an income tax.
- Join national and state advocacy efforts to retain and strengthen federal rehabilitation tax incentives.
- Work with the JEA to promote energy efficiency for small commercial and
New businesses are opening in small, early 20th century buildings along older commercial corridors such as Edgewood Avenue in the Murray Hill neighborhood.
multi-family residential buildings through incentive programs targeting low-cost/no-cost measures to reduce operating costs.

**Remove Regulatory Barriers**

As cities across the country experience renewed interest in older neighborhoods, many are finding that the regulatory regime guiding development in these areas is out-of-sync with visions for a more vibrant urban future. Removing regulatory barriers—from building and zoning codes to parking requirements—can make the right thing easier to do and even the playing field for adaptive use and infill development. Recommendations to remove regulatory barriers include:

- Create a dedicated city position to promote, facilitate, and expedite the review and permitting process for adaptive use projects.
- Create Adaptive Reuse Overlay zones to support context-sensitive reuse of vacant and underused commercial and industrial structures.
- Recalibrate parking requirements for historic commercial/mixed-use areas outside of downtown to address the concerns of developers and residents.
- Support state legislation to reduce minimum seating requirements for approval of restaurant liquor licenses. Reduced seating requirements would encourage small-scale adaptive use projects that fit well in older buildings and neighborhoods.

**Build Awareness and Increase Capacity for Community-Led Projects**

While completing high-profile projects is important, smaller-scale, incremental development helps create a culture of reuse that is sustainable over the long run. This work takes time, leadership, and sustained funding. Recommendations to build awareness and increase capacity for community-led projects include:

- Develop a database of vacant and underused downtown properties, including information from the recent Downtown Jacksonville National Register District designation, current conditions assessments, and applicable project incentives.
- Develop and promote case studies of successful rehabilitation and infill projects in the downtown and urban core areas.
- Bring the Florida Main Street Program to Jacksonville to increase organizational capacity, provide access to new resources, and connect to state and national networks.
- Provide project development training for small-scale developers, community organizations, and public agency staff.
- Create job training programs for Jacksonville residents focused on building rehabilitation trades.

This report provides evidence and support for what many community leaders already know: a new urban era is beginning in Jacksonville. It is hoped that the data, analysis, and recommendations detailed in the following pages will both inspire action and provide practical guidance for the private sector, neighborhood residents, community advocates, and government officials as they lead Jacksonville toward a more vibrant, sustainable, and urban future.
## Jacksonville’s Buildings and Blocks:
### By the Numbers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SNAPSHOT</th>
<th>317,031 BUILDINGS IN THE CITY OF JACKSONVILLE</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spanning 747 square miles, Jacksonville is the largest U.S. city by land area. Not surprisingly, Jacksonville has a low building density with 424 buildings per square mile.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>102,000 BUILDINGS MORE THAN 50 YEARS OLD</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Jacksonville has more buildings built before 1967 than any other Florida city. The median building age is 1981.</td>
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<tr>
<td>OLD BUILDINGS+ THE ECONOMY</td>
<td>27% MORE WOMEN AND MINORITY-OWNED BUSINESSES</td>
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<td></td>
<td>In the areas of Jacksonville with more older, smaller buildings and mixed-age blocks, the average number of businesses that are women or minority-owned is 27% higher than areas with concentrations of newer, larger, similarly aged development.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>33% MORE SMALL BUSINESS JOBS</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Significantly higher proportions of jobs in businesses with fewer than 20 employees are in areas with older, smaller buildings and mixed-age blocks, compared to areas with mostly larger, newer buildings.</td>
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<tr>
<td>COMMUNITY, CULTURE, AND ENTERTAINMENT</td>
<td>NEARLY 60% OF CIVIC COMMONS SPACES</td>
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<td>Within the urban area, 60% of all civic commons spaces—including 76% of libraries, 55% of museums and art galleries, and 63% of community centers—are in areas with more older, smaller buildings.</td>
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<tr>
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<td>MORE THAN 60% OF TOP RATED FOOD AND DRINK ESTABLISHMENTS</td>
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<td></td>
<td>More than 60% of the city’s best restaurants and bars (as listed in Jacksonville Magazine) are on blocks of older, smaller, mixed-age buildings.</td>
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<tr>
<td>POCKETS OF DENSITY</td>
<td>46% GREATER POPULATION DENSITY</td>
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<td>Older, smaller, mixed-age buildings and blocks contain higher population densities than newer, larger, similarly aged areas of the city. When Jacksonville’s suburban areas are included, high Character Score areas have 77% greater population density than lower scoring areas.</td>
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*National Trust for Historic Preservation Green Lab*
Popular events such as the Jacksonville Art Walk bring attention and people back to Jacksonville’s historic core.

PHOTO CREDIT: METRO JACKSONVILLE
Introduction

A new era of urban redevelopment is underway across the nation. For the first time in generations, cities are experiencing growth and renewed interest in their traditional downtowns and older neighborhoods. Adaptive use of existing buildings, from ornate mansions to simple warehouses, is an increasingly common practice. Developers, entrepreneurs, and civic leaders alike are seeing the benefits of reinvesting in older buildings and blocks to create healthier, more resilient communities.

In Detroit, for example, federal rehabilitation tax credits helped bring to life more than 80 once-vacant downtown buildings as new offices, residences, and businesses. In downtown Los Angeles, an innovative adaptive reuse ordinance spurred the rehabilitation of more than 60 vacant buildings to create apartments for over 14,000 new residents. Similar success stories are found in smaller cities as well, from the conversion of historic warehouses to create an innovation district in Durham, North Carolina to the rehabilitation of hundreds of older homes in Macon, Georgia to provide affordable housing.

Despite its reputation as a suburban-oriented city, Jacksonville is no exception to these trends. Several older, close-in neighborhoods have become highly desirable and others are experiencing significant new investment. Businesses are opening in formerly vacant structures and high-profile rehabilitations are underway or planned for downtown. At the same time, many older areas of Jacksonville have yet to experience revitalization. Thousands of older properties remain vacant or underused, providing ample opportunity to grow the movement toward reuse and reinvestment.

**REURBANISM: A STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Looking to the future, city leaders are seeking innovative ways to stimulate economic development, increase employment, provide affordable housing, and decrease carbon emissions—all while keeping budgets balanced. How does historic preservation fit in among these major urban challenges and priorities?

The National Trust for Historic Preservation has launched a new initiative, called ReUrbanism that seeks to demonstrate how the conservation and reuse of older buildings, combined with thoughtful new construction, can help cities achieve their goals for a healthier, more equitable, and more resilient future.

Our research shows how conserving older buildings can help cities meet ambitious goals. For example, the Preservation Green Lab’s 2012 report, *The Greenest Building: Quantifying the environmental value of building reuse*, documents how building reuse is a powerful strategy to conserve energy and natural resources and reduce carbon emissions. Using a life-cycle assessment methodology, the study compares the relative environmental impacts of building reuse and renovation versus demolition and new construction. The results show that it takes between 10 and 80 years for a new building to overcome, through efficient operations, the negative impacts related to the demolition and construction processes.

Another Preservation Green Lab report, *Older, Smaller, Better: Measuring how the character of buildings and blocks influences urban vitality*, examines the relationship between the physical character of existing buildings and a range of social and economic performance data. Based upon statistical analysis of the
built fabric of Seattle, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C., this research confirms long-held preservation beliefs stemming from urban advocate Jane Jacobs’ claim that “Cities need old buildings so badly it is probably impossible for vigorous streets and districts to grow without them.”

The Preservation Green Lab continues to gather data on the connections between older buildings and blocks and a range of sustainable development metrics for cities across the country. The recently released Atlas of ReUrbanism includes analysis of buildings and blocks in 50 cities across the country.

The findings in the Atlas point to the value of older buildings, blocks, and neighborhoods across a diverse set of cities. These are places where development has occurred incrementally, over many decades, resulting in a texture, richness, and distinctiveness that we call character (see pages 19-20 for an explanation of how the Green Lab defines building character). Blocks in these neighborhoods are lined with smaller, mixed-age buildings with many older structures still in use. This variety provides space for a diverse and dense mix of residents and enterprises. Local businesses thrive in these neighborhoods, and the streets are full of activity, day and night. Older buildings with layers of history and flexible floorplans attract companies large and small. The ability of cities to attract and retain talented young workers is closely tied to the presence of vibrant, diverse, and character-rich places.

There was a time when areas like these were defined as blighted and even targeted for demolition through urban renewal. We now have the data to rewrite formulas about what makes a successful city. Instead of fodder for the bulldozer, blocks of older, smaller buildings are in fact valuable assets that should be stewarded carefully.

GOALS OF THIS STUDY

This study applies a previously established Preservation Green Lab methodology and builds on work carried out in partnership with the Urban Land Institute district councils and local preservation partners in Los Angeles, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Detroit. The Green Lab completed similar research in Tucson and Louisville as well.

Taken together, this research creates a foundation of data and insight about the contributions of older buildings to the health and vitality of cities. These studies have inspired local partners to take action and have led to new policies and initiatives that support building reuse.

For Jacksonville, the Green Lab gathered data on the physical character of the city’s existing buildings and tested the correlations between building age and scale against a range of social, economic, and demographic measures. Interviews with more than 30 community experts and stakeholders added critical qualitative insights.

The goals of this study are to:

- Increase understanding and awareness of the value of Jacksonville’s older buildings.
- Summarize key barriers to successful building reuse.
- Identify areas of opportunity for building reuse and neighborhood revitalization.
- Develop recommendations for how to overcome barriers and realize opportunities.
- Highlight relevant best practices from other communities.
- Inspire local action and implementation of new policies and programs.
- Foster a culture of reuse and support the growth of local leadership.
10 PRINCIPLES OF REURBANISM

The National Trust for Historic Preservation is working in cities across the country to make building reuse the default choice and demolition the option of last resort. Our efforts are guided by these 10 Principles of ReUrbanism.

1. **Cities are only successful when they work for everyone.** People are at the center of our work. Preservation projects can create opportunities for community residents at all income levels to live, work, and play in a diverse and thriving environment.

2. **Older places provide the distinctiveness and character that engender success.** Older buildings give cities a sense of identity, history, and authenticity—which is the most important competitive advantage they can have in today’s economy.

3. **Older neighborhoods are economic engines.** Research shows that neighborhoods with a mix of older and newer buildings perform better along a number of social, economic, cultural, and environmental metrics than areas with only new buildings.

4. **New ideas, and the New Economy, thrive in older buildings.** All over America, the most innovative companies of the 21st century are choosing to make their homes in older buildings. These buildings fuel creativity by being distinctive, character rich, endlessly adaptable, and often low cost.

5. **Preservation is adaptive reuse. Adaptive reuse is preservation.** Historic preservation is not just about keeping old buildings around. It is about keeping them alive, in active use, and relevant to the needs of the people who surround them.

6. **Preservation is about managing change.** Healthy, dynamic neighborhoods are always in the process of change. Historic preservation is about managing change: unleashing the enormous potential of older buildings to improve health, affordability, prosperity, and well-being.

7. **Cities are for people, not vehicles.** Reclaiming city streets and making them more amenable to pedestrian, bicycle, and transit use can help neighborhoods reacquire activity and thrive once more.

8. **The greenest building is the one that’s already built.** It takes energy to construct a new building—it saves energy to preserve an old one. It simply does not make sense to recycle cans and newspapers and not recycle buildings.

9. **There are many ways to achieve density.** Areas with a mix of older and newer fabric tend to be denser than new-only neighborhoods, and they achieve that density at a human scale.

10. **Every community has stories and places that matter.** The places worth saving are those where communities choose to come together and that represent the local stories they treasure and wish to see preserved.
Development History and Building Reuse Tools

Founded in 1832, Jacksonville initially grew as a port community along the St. Johns River. The city became an important southern rail center in the late 19th century and was the most populous city in Florida by 1880. An extensive fire in 1901 resulted in the loss of more than 2,300 structures in and around downtown. The city center was largely rebuilt in the coming decades, with many new buildings designed by prominent architects and constructed using modern concrete and masonry techniques.

Jacksonville boomed in the early 20th century, sprawling north, west, and eventually south, across the river. Much of this development was facilitated by the construction of an extensive network of electrified streetcar lines. The built legacy of the streetcar era can be seen today in the surviving blocks of older, smaller commercial structures found in neighborhoods throughout the city.

In 1968, the city of Jacksonville and Duval County merged, creating a new municipality covering 747 square miles and making Jacksonville the largest city by land area in the continental U.S. With an estimated 2015 population of 868,031, Jacksonville is the nation’s 12th most populous municipality.

This report addresses building reuse issues related to all existing structures in the municipality of Jacksonville, not just those designated as historic at the local, state, or national level. Based on available city data, there are 317,031 existing buildings in Jacksonville. Of this total, just under two percent were built before 1920 and another eight percent were built between 1920 and 1945. More than 32 percent of the existing structures in Jacksonville—some 102,000 buildings—are at least 50 years old, more than in any other city in Florida.

While population figures for Jacksonville show a pattern of growth throughout the postwar period, this masks a trend toward decentralization and population loss among neighborhoods in the urban core that only recently has begun to slow. There are more than 10,000 vacant parcels in Jacksonville, with the majority located within the pre-consolidation boundaries of the city. These include vacant lots, homes, commercial buildings, and even portions of large malls, such as Regency Square in Arlington. A mothballing ordinance was passed in 2011 to encourage measures to stabilize, weatherize, and secure vacant historic structures, but to date it has impacted less than two dozen properties.

In 1990, Jacksonville passed its first historic preservation ordinance, establishing a process for designating individual landmarks and landmark districts. About 2.5 percent of the city’s buildings are locally designated as individual landmarks or within landmark districts.
Downtown Jacksonville in its heyday before World War II. Postcard image of Forsyth Avenue, between 1930-1945. PHOTO CREDIT: BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY LICENSED BY FLICKR CREATIVE COMMONS 2.0
percent of Jacksonville buildings (approximately 8,000 primary structures) have been designated through this ordinance, which includes a review process for proposed exterior construction work. The vast majority of Jacksonville’s locally designated buildings are located in two large historic districts: Riverside/Avondale and Springfield.

The average percentage of locally designated buildings among the 50 cities included in the Atlas of ReUrbanism is 4.3 percent.

In addition, 2.3 percent of the city’s existing buildings are listed individually or within districts on the National Register of Historic Places. In other cities documented through the Atlas of ReUrbanism, the average is 6.8 percent. The new Downtown Jacksonville Historic District, established in 2016, adds 176 contributing buildings to the National Register of Historic Places, making them eligible for federal rehabilitation tax incentives.

**REHABILITATION INCENTIVES**

The federal rehabilitation tax credit—a key redevelopment incentive that has resulted in more than 41,000 rehabilitation projects and over $106 billion of investment nationwide—has made an impact in Jacksonville as well. Since 2000, 40 projects using the federal rehabilitation tax credit have been completed in Jacksonville, including several with affordable housing units.

Florida does not yet have a state rehabilitation tax credit. Thirty-four states have created rehabilitation tax credits of some kind, including Texas, which like Florida, does not have a state income tax. Many of the cities that have seen the largest number of buildings saved and rehabilitated using the federal tax credits—such as St. Louis and New Orleans—are in states with strong tax credit incentive programs.

Jacksonville has several local financial incentive programs to support the reuse and rehabilitation of historic buildings. In 1992, the city adopted a local property tax incentive to encourage investment in historic and underused properties, providing a 100 percent exemption for 10 years on the value of improvements made to locally designated properties. There are 23 properties currently using the property tax exemption, representing more than $50 million in private investment.

In addition, several incentives managed by the Downtown Investment Authority encourage the reuse of vacant or underused buildings. These include the Downtown Retail Enhancement Grant Program, which supports tenant improvements for small and creative business development, as well as the Downtown Historic Preservation and Revitalization Trust Fund. Established in 2002, the Trust Fund is being tapped to support projects ranging from the $6 million conversion of the Bostwick Building for a new restaurant to the $89 million redevelopment of four long-vacant historic buildings: the Barnett Bank, Marble Bank, Florida Life, and Brisbee buildings. Finally, there are five Community Redevelopment Areas in Jacksonville, including two in Downtown Northbank, Downtown Southbank, Arlington, King Soutel Crossing, and the airport. These designations bring additional incentives that can support building reuse, including Tax Increment Financing.

**There are more buildings 50 years or older in Jacksonville than any other city in Florida.**
The Bostwick Building adaptive reuse project, soon to house a new restaurant, underway in downtown Jacksonville.

PHOTO CREDIT: FLORIDA TIMES UNION
Methodology: Measuring the Urban Landscape

Using geographic information systems (GIS) and spatial statistics, the Preservation Green Lab research team tested the hypothesis that building age, greater diversity of building age, and smaller-sized buildings are associated with greater livability, economic vitality, and diversity in Jacksonville. The study identified significant statistical links between the city’s older and historic neighborhoods and commercial districts and several key measures related to thriving neighborhoods and successful cities. It includes maps that spotlight sections of the city where these statistical links are especially prominent, as well as areas of opportunity to leverage existing built character to achieve community development goals.

This study extends the methodology established in the Preservation Green Lab’s Older, Smaller, Better report, published in 2014, and later expanded and validated through peer-reviewed publication in the 2016 article “Jane Jacobs and the Value of Older, Smaller Buildings” in the Journal of the American Planning Association. To date, Older, Smaller, Better analyses have generally focused on cities with heightenened development pressure—Seattle, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C.—as well as one mid-sized Southwestern city: Tucson, Arizona.

To statistically assess the relationship between characteristics of the built environment and measures of livability, economic vitality, and residential density and diversity, this study focuses on 200-meter by-200 meter sections of Jacksonville. For each grid square, Preservation Green Lab researchers analyzed parcel and building information using GIS software to compute the median age of all buildings in the section, the diversity of building age for all buildings in the section, and the number of buildings (or partial buildings) that fall within the boundaries of the section.

The Preservation Green Lab analyzed this data using spatial regression models, including spatial lag and spatial error analysis, to assess the relationships between the predictors of building age, diversity of building age, and the average building size, or granularity, of the built environment on various outcome measures of social and economic density and diversity. In keeping with the methodology established in the original Older, Smaller, Better study, the research team also combined data on key characteristics of building fabric into a composite “Character Score” that served as a single measure for testing the role of older, smaller buildings and mixed-age blocks. To statistically control and parse out other key predictors of vitality, statistical models also accounted for private investment in construction and median income.

More information on the report data, methodology, and analysis can be found in the Appendices included with the online version of the report.

STUDY AREA AND CONTEXT

Jacksonville represents a very different geographical and real estate market context when compared to most other cities where the Preservation Green Lab has conducted Older, Smaller, Better analyses. As noted in the previous section of this report, Jacksonville today occupies a very large land area and has relatively little building stock built before 1920. Rather than analyze the entire land area of the city, the research team opted to focus on a more limited study area, defined by the Downtown, Urban, and Urban Priority development areas, as identified by the City of Jacksonville Planning Department. This smaller study area, capturing about 25 percent of the complete land area and about one-half of the city’s population, allows sharper analysis and more fine-grained distinctions to be drawn within areas with reasonably similar built fabric.
STUDY AREA

The area selected for the focus of this study includes the Downtown, Urban, and Urban Priority areas, as identified by the City of Jacksonville. While only capturing 25 percent of the total city land area, the study area contains 46 percent of Jacksonville's building stock and nearly half of the city's population. Its buildings are some of the oldest and most historic in the city: 68 percent are 50 years or older, four percent were built prior to 1920, and over five percent fall within a historic district. Jacksonville's urban and historic core, the study area is indicated by the dashed lines on the right.
**Methodology:** What is the Character Score?

**BUILDING AGE**
In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs points to the importance of older buildings in part because they offer more affordable rents for small and start-up businesses. As she wrote: “Old ideas can sometimes use new buildings. New ideas must use old buildings.” For this study, data on building age is drawn from the Florida Department of Revenue’s tax records database for Duval County. The measure for building age for each grid square represents the median age of all primary buildings in that grid square.

**DIVERSITY OF BUILDING AGE**
Related to the concept of retaining older buildings is Jacobs’ idea that healthy neighborhoods and communities must “mingle buildings that vary in age and condition, including a good proportion of old ones.” This contrasts with districts that are constructed all at once and points to the importance of allowing neighborhoods to change over time at an incremental rate. Diversity of building age is also drawn from Florida Department of Revenue’s tax records database. Once building age data was built into the grid squares, the Preservation Green Lab team analyzed and compared the range and distribution of building age within each grid square. The measure of diversity of building age is equivalent to the standard deviation of building ages within a grid square.

**GRANULARITY**
Granularity refers to the size of buildings and the size of the parcels upon which they are located. Areas of high granularity have many small buildings on small lots, while areas of low granularity have fewer, bigger buildings occupying large lots, sometimes in the form of superblocks. Areas of high granularity, where there is a fine-grained set of small parcels, are often associated with greater variety and quantity of property owners, businesses, and uses. By having many small parts and greater diversity of property owners and commercial uses, high granularity may be linked to greater social and economic resilience.
**CHARACTER SCORE**

The Preservation Green Lab’s composite “Character Score” represents the statistical aggregation of median building age, diversity of building age, and granularity metrics. The Character Score is generated by summing the z-standardized values for each of these three-component metrics, a process which positions the stock of the city, block-by-block, in relation to other parts of the city. Thus, a high Character Score indicates blocks of older, smaller, mixed-age buildings, and a low Character Score indicates areas with mostly large, new buildings.
Methodology: Character Score Illustration

**LOW CHARACTER SCORE**

Low Character Score areas contain a city’s newest, largest, and least age-diverse building stock. The image below provides an example of a low Character Score area just south of Downtown, across the Main Street Bridge.

**HIGH CHARACTER SCORE**

High Character Score areas host a city’s oldest, smallest, most age-diverse buildings and blocks. The image below takes an example of a high Character Score area in Five-Points.
Performance Findings

In Old, Smaller, Better and the Atlas of ReUrbanism, Preservation Green Lab research drew strong statistical connections between the presence of older, smaller buildings in American cities and a variety of social, economic, and cultural vitality metrics.

Using these reports as a foundation, the Green Lab's performance analysis of Jacksonville shows that older, smaller buildings and mixed-age blocks support greater neighborhood livability, residential diversity and density, and economic vitality than newer, larger, similarly aged districts. These high Character Score areas host more spaces where residents can attend cultural events, civic discussions, or religious celebrations, enjoy a top-rated meal, or find shade on a hot day. The city's small-scale buildings and parcels also harbor surprising density, and provide a home to residents in many stages of life. They generate new jobs, host high proportions of jobs in Jacksonville's creative sector, and provide space for small business owners of diverse backgrounds. Correlating with the trends of many other American cities, the results of this analysis demonstrate yet again how older buildings punch above their weight class, by contributing extensively to the richness and vitality of Jacksonville’s urban life.

The following pages provide further explanation of these findings, beginning with measures of livability, moving to results related to residential density and diversity, and ending with measures of economic vitality. Accompanying maps illustrate higher performing areas in shades of red and lower performing areas in shades of blue. Likewise, warmer colors tend to indicate older, smaller, mixed-age areas, whereas cooler colors suggest newer, larger, similarly aged development. Use these maps to understand the current contributions of high Character Score areas in Jacksonville, and to identify where the city's older building stock is being leveraged most effectively.

Older buildings punch above their weight class, by contributing extensively to the richness and vitality of Jacksonville’s urban life.
Livability

Preservation Green Lab analysis demonstrates that Jacksonville’s older, smaller, and mixed-age buildings and blocks are livable and vibrant, providing space for neighborhood amenities, cultural and civic engagement, and entertainment. Specifically, the analysis reveals:

**Older, smaller areas are the right environment for Jacksonville’s best restaurants.**

Older, smaller areas host some of the most popular restaurants in Jacksonville’s growing food scene. Of the 50 best restaurants chosen by Jacksonville Magazine, 28 fall within the urban area—61 percent of which have set up shop in high Character Score areas. Despite the fact that only 20 percent of buildings in Jacksonville’s urban area were built prior to 1945, 64 percent of top restaurants operate out of buildings built prior to that date. Though only five percent of Jacksonville’s buildings were built before 1920, 20 percent of the city’s top-rated restaurants are found in buildings from that period.

**High Character areas provide space for community, cultural, and civic engagement.**

Older, smaller, mixed-age blocks have significantly more private and public spaces where residents of Jacksonville can come together for various purposes. These “civic commons” spaces include: community and fraternal associations; community centers and libraries; veteran’s, women’s, and youth organizations; aquariums, zoos, arboreta, planetariums, and gardens; theaters, performing arts centers museums, and art councils. Out of 206 civic commons spaces found within the urban area, nearly 60 percent are situated in high Character Score areas. Parsing civic commons spaces out by category, the analysis reveals that older, smaller areas also claim 76 percent of Jacksonville’s libraries, 60 percent of its community centers, and 55 percent of its museums and art galleries.

**Older, smaller areas host more places of worship.**

Over 900 religious institutions are located within Jacksonville’s urban area, and 75 percent of those religious spaces are found in areas with older, smaller, mixed-age buildings. Twice as many of these institutions are found in grid squares where the median building age is older than that of the study area, which is 1962. Four times as many are located within areas of high building age diversity.

It’s easier to find shade in Jacksonville’s older, smaller areas.

In the Sunshine State, shady spots contribute to neighborhood livability and higher quality of life. Using tree canopy data constructed from high-resolution aerial 3D-laser scanning (LIDAR) data from the U.S. Geological Survey, the Preservation Green Lab research team found a statistically significant relationship between tree cover and high Character Score areas. Areas where half of the buildings were constructed before the end of World War II have an average of about 65 percent tree canopy, compared to about 50 percent in areas where the majority of the buildings were constructed in the 21st century.

The map on the right displays Civic Commons spaces, top-rated restaurants, and the Character Score of the areas where they are found. The term ‘Civic Commons’ refers to both public and private spaces that provide opportunities for community gatherings and public access. Restaurant rankings were originally published by Jacksonville Magazine in 2016.
CIVIC COMMONS AND TOP RESTAURANTS

- Civic Commons Space in High Character Score Area
- Civic Commons Space in Low Character Score Area
- Restaurants in High Character Score Area
- Restaurants in Low Character Score Area

Basemap: Stamen Toner
Density and Diversity

As is the case in other American cities, older, smaller, and mixed-age buildings in Jacksonville have hidden density and diversity both in terms of population and housing stock. Findings for Jacksonville reveal:

*High Character areas are home to young and old residents alike.*

Resident Age Diversity Index (RADI), a metric developed by the Preservation Green Lab, indicates areas where there is an equal representation of residents from different age groups. High Character Score areas have significantly higher RADI scores than low Character Score areas. 90 percent of high Character Score areas have a RADI higher than the study area average.

*More residents live in high Character Score areas.*

Somewhat counterintuitively, older, smaller areas in most U.S. cities contain higher population densities than blocks of newer, larger, similarly aged buildings. In Jacksonville, 59 percent of the urban area’s population lives in high Character Score areas. 53 percent of high Character Score areas have a population density above the citywide average.

*High Character Score areas offer a higher volume of housing units.*

Consistent with findings on population density, older, smaller, and mixed-age areas of Jacksonville offer a higher concentrations of housing units than lower Character Score areas. 44 percent more units situate in high Character Score areas, constituting 59 percent of all units found within the study area.

*High Character score areas are not more racially diverse than newer, larger areas of Jacksonville.*

The Racial and Ethnic Diversity Index (REDI) indicates areas where there is an equal representation of residents of different ethnicities: White, African-American, Asian, Latinx, and other races (includes Native American and Asian Pacific Islander). Although high Character Score areas house higher proportions of non-white residents on average, low Character Score areas report higher racial heterogeneity. The difference is not extreme, however: 49 percent of high Character Score areas report above average REDI scores, compared to 51 percent of low Character Score areas.

The map on the right illustrates the strong relationship between high population density and high Character Score areas. Colored squares show areas of the city with above average population density. The red squares indicate those areas that also have a high Character Score.
HIGH CHARACTER, HIGH DENSITY

- High Character Score, Above Average Population Density
- Low Character Score, Above Average Population Density
Economic Vitality

Consistent with past Preservation Green Lab research and the ideas of respected urban thinkers like Jane Jacobs, older, smaller, and mixed-age neighborhoods are economic engines, punching above their weight class when compared to areas of newer, larger construction in the city. In order to focus our analysis, this section only includes commercial areas of Jacksonville: grid squares containing at least one job and 50 commercial square feet. The following are major findings from the study area:

High Character areas contain greater proportions of jobs in small businesses.

Older, smaller, mixed-age neighborhoods and blocks in Jacksonville play a critical role in supporting small businesses and the jobs they provide. In commercial areas, there are 27 percent more jobs in small businesses in high Character Score areas than low Character Score areas. In areas with above average percentages of small business jobs, there are also more older buildings.

New businesses and creative industries are concentrated in Jacksonville’s high Character areas.

Areas that attract new businesses and creative industries tend to have older, small-er, mixed-age buildings. There are higher percentages of jobs in newly launched businesses and businesses in creative industries in high Character Score areas, compared to areas with mostly large, new buildings. In areas where at least half the buildings were constructed before 1920, 15 percent of the jobs are in creative industries, compared to a citywide average of about eight percent.

Women and minority-owned businesses locate in older, smaller areas.

Across U.S. cities, high Character Score areas provide opportunity for business owners of all backgrounds. In Jacksonville, there are significantly more women and minority-owned businesses in high Character Score areas. Across Jacksonville’s urban area, there are 27 percent more women and minority-owned businesses in high Character Score areas than areas with mostly large, new buildings.

The map on the right focuses on commercial areas of Jacksonville. It illustrates the relationship between small business jobs and high Character Score areas. Red squares have a high Character Score and above-average numbers of small business jobs. Blue squares have a low Character Score and above-average numbers of small business jobs.
The “Laura Street Trio” of vacant, historic downtown buildings poised for reuse.
Barriers to Building Reuse

In addition to the quantitative analysis and mapping of performance metrics, this study includes an assessment of building reuse issues and opportunities, based on engagement with more than 30 local practitioners and stakeholders. During focus groups and interviews with individuals from diverse backgrounds, participants were asked to share their views and insights about what is preventing or slowing building reuse in Jacksonville. These conversations were organized around four types of barriers:

- **Market barriers** related to the supply and demand for various building types and uses.
- **Financial barriers** involving project costs, sources of equity, lending practices, and financial incentives.
- **Technical barriers** that arise related to building location, site, design, construction, and materials.
- **Regulatory barriers** such as zoning and development standards, building codes, seismic codes, and other review processes, requirements, permits, and fees.

The following is a summary of the insights from local stakeholders regarding key barriers to building reuse in Jacksonville.

### MARKET BARRIERS

All stakeholders highlighted market barriers to building reuse in Jacksonville. There are pockets of high market demand in older, centrally located neighborhoods like Riverside, San Marco, Springfield, and Brooklyn. Many other urban core markets, including downtown, are viewed as weak or still emerging. Many participants pointed to the basic challenge of low rents and high property acquisition and development costs. Market barriers are the most difficult to meaningfully address through this process, yet they cannot be ignored. Because many comments focused specifically on downtown, those points are called out separately in the summary below. Market barriers include:

#### Citywide market issues

- Large areas of land are still available in the city, reducing the pressure to redevelop the urban core.
- Greenfields in suburban edge communities are viewed as easier to develop than older, built-up areas.
- Low densities are found across much of the city, making it hard to create the type of walkable, mixed-use urbanism that attracts many younger, new residents.

- Market demand overall is limited by unemployment and a lack of high paying jobs in the city.
- There is a perceived lack of safety in Jacksonville’s close-in neighborhoods; some areas have real challenges with crime.
- Blighted properties hurt the image of certain blocks and neighborhoods and discourage investment.
- Jacksonville’s older urban core still has a poor image overall.

#### Downtown market issues

- Downtown is very large and dispersed, with many surface parking lots and few streets of human-scaled, architecturally-rich, pedestrian-level interest.
- The demand for urban living is still limited by a lack of amenities—cultural attractions, shopping, nightlife—that are needed to create a neighborhood and get beyond a nine-to-five use pattern.
- There are not enough school options for families considering a move to the greater downtown area.
• Downtown lacks transit alternatives and remains auto-oriented. Residents, businesses, and visitors need and expect convenient parking.

**FINANCIAL BARRIERS**

Related to these market challenges is the specific difficulty of financing reuse projects. Many interviewees pointed to the cost of rehabilitating long-vacant and deteriorating buildings. Early project financing is particularly difficult to secure. Incentives are generally oriented toward later phases and operating costs. Some interviewees highlighted the political challenges of creating new incentives when the city is already struggling with financial issues. Financial barriers include:

**High up-front costs**

• Purchase costs for older buildings can be surprisingly high, especially if the selling party purchased the property before the recession.

• Many older buildings are long-vacant and in need of significant investment just to stabilize and deal with basic issues such as collapsed roofs, water damage, missing infrastructure, etc.

**Lack of incentives**

• Traditional bank financing is still limited; many developers must rely on private equity sources or self-funding for their projects.

• There are not enough incentives for buildings that are simply “old,” but not designated as historic.

• The most difficult financing is for pre-development and up-front construction costs; many incentives help later in process.

• The property tax incentive review and approval process is overly cumbersome in relation to the benefit it provides; it helps with operating, but not start-up and project development costs.

• To date, the city’s economic development incentives have not been allocated fully to support development in the urban core.

• There is no state rehabilitation tax incentive in Florida to pair with the federal rehabilitation tax incentives.

**TECHNICAL BARRIERS**

Local experience with building reuse projects is still in its early stages. Most of the comments related to technical issues referenced either poor building and site conditions or a lack of local capacity to carry out these types of projects. Technical barriers include:

**Building and site conditions**

• Many of the available vacant buildings are in very poor condition and need significant investment just to make them safe for occupancy.

• The physical infrastructure to support and facilitate building reuse is lacking, with several interviewees pointing to challenges downtown with flood management, a lack of immediately adjacent parking facilities, and a lack of street amenities for pedestrians.

• The challenge of providing for a second means of building egress is problematic for many small projects.

• Many projects encounter environmental contamination issues that can be expensive to mitigate, including termites, asbestos, lead paint, and...
contaminated soils (including contamination related to the Jacksonville Ash Superfund Site).

Lack of capacity

• There are not enough skilled local contractors with expertise in specialized trades like window repair.

• The many unknowns associated with building reuse projects can be costly.

• Many contractors are not experienced with this type of work and thus it can be hard to get good cost estimates.

REGULATORY BARRIERS

Many interviewees shared positive comments about their experience with city preservation and code officials, noting their orientation toward finding solutions. Florida’s state building code offers flexibility for adaptive use of older and historic buildings. The most frequently mentioned regulatory barrier was parking. Downtown zoning is flexible and does not require parking. In high demand neighborhoods, there are increasing conflicts between what kinds of development is allowed under current zoning and proposed adaptive uses. Regulatory barriers include:

Process

• Preservation and code officials are solutions-oriented. However, the process of securing city approvals for rehabilitation projects can be opaque and time-consuming, especially to novice and small-scale developers.

Zoning and Parking

• Zoning outside of downtown needs updating to support the emerging market demand for mixed-use projects in older buildings.

• The need for a zoning variance is triggered too often and is time-consuming, risky, and discouraging to potential developers.

• There are a growing number of conflicts over non-residential uses, often restaurants, in some historic districts. There is a need for more tailored overlay districts along pre-World War II era commercial corridors.

• Parking requirements outside of downtown are controversial. Some developers say they are too high, while some residents say they are too low.

• The state laws governing liquor licenses require restaurant seating minimums that encourage large-scale projects and limit small-scale projects.

The Preservation Green Lab’s research and experience in cities across the country shows that removing barriers and strengthening incentives can even the playing field for reuse. The Recommendations section in this report includes strategies for addressing many of the obstacles identified by Jacksonville stakeholders.
Opportunities for Building Reuse

The Preservation Green Lab’s Reuse Opportunity Model uses data from the Florida Geospatial Data Library, the City of Jacksonville, and the U.S. Census to identify areas of the city that are well-positioned for successful building reuse and would benefit from targeted policy and programmatic support. The Reuse Opportunity Model spotlights areas that have concentrations of older, smaller buildings, access to neighborhood amenities, and signs of social and economic vitality. The model expands on methodologies developed by the Preservation Green Lab and other partners through the Partnership for Building Reuse in cities such as Philadelphia, Chicago, and Detroit.

The Reuse Opportunity Model uses the Character Score (see pages 19-20) for each 200-meter-by-200-meter grid square in the city as the baseline for analysis. Areas with high Character Scores are those sections of the city with high percentages of older, smaller buildings and mixed-age blocks. Grid squares with above average Character Scores are included in the opportunity model, while areas with low Character Scores are excluded. In high Character Score areas, performance was assessed using a range of social, economic, real estate, and demographic measures (see chart at right).

In applying the Reuse Opportunity Model in Jacksonville, the Preservation Green Lab generally focused on areas that rank in the middle-third of social, economic, real estate, and demographic indicators. The rationale for this approach is that top-third performing areas have may not need additional programmatic or policy assistance to support building reuse and investment. Similarly, other neighborhoods may be dealing with such fundamental issues (crime, high unemployment, very low property values) that policies and programs to support building reuse may have limited impact at this time. The Reuse Opportunity Model includes some measures that are focused on the top third of performance, however, particularly for economic conditions. This recognizes the opportunity to build on success and support continued reinvestment in areas with growing opportunity.

The chart at right details how various social, economic, real estate, and demographic metrics are used to create the Reuse Opportunity Model. The map on page 34 show the results and highlights specific grid squares with potential for reinvestment and reuse.

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**REUSE OPPORTUNITY MODEL: EVALUATION METRICS**

**Social Metrics and Neighborhood Amenities**
- **Top third**: Percent of residents with a sub-20-minute commute to work
- **Proximity to good schools**: Located within a mile of a “top school” as rated by The City of Jacksonville’s School Board

**Economic Metrics**
- **Top third**: Number of private sector jobs that are in small businesses
- **Top third**: Number of private sector jobs that are in new businesses
- **Top third**: Change in number of jobs that are in new businesses

**Real Estate Metrics**
- **Middle third**: Total dollars invested in alteration and renovation permits, 2010-2015
- **Top third**: Number of demolition permits less the number of new construction permits, 2010-2015
- **Middle third**: Average property value per square foot

**Demographic Metrics**
- **Middle third**: Percent of population that newly moved to Duval County in the previous year, 2014
- **Middle third**: Change in the size of the population between 2000 and 2010
- **Middle third**: Change of the computed Racial and Ethnic Diversity Index between 2000 and 2010
- **Middle third**: Change in median income between 2009 and 2013
This map highlights in red and orange areas which our Reuse Opportunity Model indicates have strong potential for successful building reuse.
In 2015, the Jessie Ball duPont Fund worked with The Reinvestment Fund to evaluate Jacksonville’s housing market. The resulting Block by Block Study categorized census block groups from strong to weak markets by combining residential real estate data with measures of transportation accessibility, job market strength, and median income.

The Preservation Green Lab’s Reuse Opportunity Model and The Reinvestment Fund’s Block by Block Study offer vital but differing insights into Jacksonville’s neighborhoods. Comparing the two models reveals interesting areas of overlap, while illuminating important differences as well. Fundamentally, methodological differences divide the results. While the Block by Block Study incorporates comprehensive measures of Jacksonville’s real estate environment at the census block group level, the Reuse Opportunity Model includes existing building age and size at the 200-meter-by-200-meter grid square level.

The Block by Block Study spotlights strong markets in both suburban areas and thriving urban neighborhoods. The Reuse Opportunity Model, meanwhile, draws attention to urban blocks with relatively dense concentrations of older, smaller buildings and tipping-point performance on a variety of social, economic, real estate, and demographic measures. Although current markets may not yet be strong in some of these areas, the Reuse Opportunity Model suggests that successful investment and reuse is possible, especially when supported by development programs and incentives.

Places where the Block by Block Study and the Reuse Opportunity Model overlap show some of the methodological similarities between the two models. Both analyses value low-commute times, job characteristics, resident income, demographic shifts and dynamics, and generally positive real estate trends. Areas where the Block by Block Study and the Reuse Opportunity Model both showed strong potential include several visibly thriving, close-in neighborhoods of Jacksonville’s urban core: Riverside/Avondale, San Marco, sections of downtown, and southern sections of Springfield. These are well-established areas, known for their vibrancy, investment opportunity, and steady growth. As seen in the map at right, the Reuse Opportunity Model also spotlights the potential of additional areas outside the strong market neighborhoods.

The map on the right spotlights in red and orange the areas of reuse potential that fall outside of strong-market areas defined in the Block by Block analysis. The “Strongest Market Areas” that are shaded pink on the map are blocks that rated “A”, “B”, or “C” in the Block by Block Study. (Note that only blocks within the urban core study area are included in this map.)
MARKET VALUE AND REUSE OPPORTUNITY

- Low Reuse Opportunity
- Medium Reuse Opportunity
- High Reuse Opportunity
- Strongest Market Areas
Older buildings form a beloved commercial corridor along Park Avenue in the Five Points area just west of downtown.
Recommendations

The Reuse Opportunity Model points to specific neighborhoods in the city where there is strong, intact physical fabric along with stable or improving market conditions to support investment. The resulting map provides a tool that can inform decisions about public and private investments and help target policies and programs. In addition to identifying geographic areas of opportunity, this study engaged community leaders regarding possible new ideas to encourage building reuse and foster investment in the city’s urban core.

The following recommendations are offered to help spark reuse and reinvestment in Jacksonville and to overcome the barriers identified earlier in the report. These recommendations are based on conversations with stakeholders as well as lessons learned from Preservation Green Lab experience in other cities.

**Strengthen Incentives**

The overall market for reuse in Jacksonville’s urban core is still relatively weak. It remains difficult to build viable project pro-formas, particularly for larger rehabilitations. To overcome these challenges, current incentives could be strengthened and new incentives added. Experience in other cities demonstrates the potential of strong incentives. In Philadelphia, significant property tax incentives—both for rehabilitation of existing buildings as well as new residential construction—has led to thousands of reuse and infill projects, transforming many Center City neighborhoods. Smaller incentive programs can help as well, such as the Motor City Match program in Detroit, which directs CDBG grant funds to support business start-ups in vacant commercial buildings in neighborhoods throughout the city. Recommendations to strengthen incentives in Jacksonville include:

- Support project planning and up-front rehabilitation costs for downtown projects through greater capitalization of the Downtown Historic Preservation and Revitalization Trust Fund.
- Leverage HUD funding, including CDBG grants and Section 108 loan guarantees, to benefit housing and commercial rehabilitation projects in urban core neighborhoods.
- Expand the current property tax incentive to include not just designated structures, but adaptive use of older buildings generally (50 years or older) for commercial and multi-family residential use. Streamline the review and approval process for projects involving these non-designated structures.
- Support efforts to establish a Florida rehabilitation tax credit in the next legislative session. Look to examples in Texas and Tennessee for ways to structure a credit in a state without an income tax.
- Join national and state advocacy efforts to retain and strengthen federal rehabilitation tax incentives.
- Work with the JEA to promote energy efficiency for small commercial and multi-family residential buildings through incentive programs targeting low-cost/no-cost measures to reduce operating costs.

**Remove Regulatory Barriers**

As cities across the country experience renewed interest in older neighborhoods, many are finding that the regulatory regime guiding development in these areas is out-of-sync with visions for a more vibrant urban future. Removing regulatory barriers—from building and zoning codes to parking requirements—can make the right thing easier to do and even the playing field for adaptive use and infill development. Examples of innovation in this area include adaptive use ordinances in Los Angeles and Phoenix, where the removal of code barriers, lightened review processes, and reduced fees have helped spur reuse of dozens of formerly vacant
buildings. In Detroit, planners and neighborhoods are considering regulatory “pink zones” that remove as much regulatory review as possible to speed approvals for small rehabilitation and infill projects. Recommendations to remove regulatory barriers include:

- Create Adaptive Reuse Overlay zones to support context-sensitive reuse of vacant and underused commercial and industrial structures.
- Create a dedicated city position to promote, facilitate, and expedite the review and permitting process for adaptive use projects.
- Recalibrate parking requirements for historic commercial/mixed-use areas outside of downtown to address concerns of developers and residents.
- Support state legislation to reduce minimum seating requirements for approval of restaurant liquor licenses.

Reduced seating requirements would encourage small-scale adaptive use projects that fit well in older buildings and neighborhoods.

**Build Awareness and Increase Capacity for Community-Led Projects**

Too often in the past, cities have relied on big project approaches to urban revitalization. When it comes to building reuse, there may be a large “white elephant” building that is the focus of much attention and concern. Completing high-profile projects is important and represents visible change. But the smaller-scale, everyday improvements are equally important in creating a culture of reuse and ReUrbanism that is sustainable over the long run. This is part of the overall importance of building awareness, engaging community members, and developing institutional capacity among nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and the private sector. This work takes time, leadership, and sustained funding. Recommendations to build awareness and increase capacity for community-led projects include:

- Develop a database of vacant and underused downtown properties, including information from the recent Downtown Jacksonville National Register District designation, current conditions assessments, and applicable project incentives.

- Develop and promote case studies of successful rehabilitation and infill projects in the downtown and urban core areas.

- Bring the Florida Main Street Program to Jacksonville to increase organizational capacity, provide access to new resources, and connect to state and national networks.

- Provide project development training for small-scale developers, community organizations, and public agency staff.

- Create job training programs for Jacksonville residents focused on building rehabilitation trades.

**Removing regulatory barriers can even the playing field for adaptive use.**
Smaller-scale and community-led projects are equally important in creating a culture of reuse that is sustainable and equitable.
# Recommendations Summary

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<td>Create Adaptive Reuse Overlay zones to support context-sensitive reuse of vacant</td>
<td>Zoning and parking issues</td>
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<td>Lack of capacity</td>
<td>Louisville Preservation Trades Network</td>
<td>LISC Jacksonville, Riverside/Avondale, SPAR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rehabilitation trades.</td>
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A mural on the recently renovated Lerner building on Adams Street in Downtown Jacksonville.

PHOTO CREDIT: MICHEL CURI, FLICKR CREATIVE COMMONS CC 2.0
Conclusion: Jacksonville’s New Urban Era

This study highlights the outsized contributions of older, smaller buildings and mixed-age blocks within the vast extent of the city of Jacksonville.

When contrasted to areas of newer and larger-scale development across the city, Jacksonville’s urban core neighborhoods perform very well. These areas contain more jobs in small businesses, more start-up businesses, more creative companies, and more women and minority-owned businesses than areas of newer, larger construction. They are more densely populated and home to residents of greater diversity of ages, from young singles to families and retirees. The streets in these areas are more likely to be shaded by tree cover, which makes walking more comfortable in warm weather. The majority of the city’s religious centers are located in areas characterized by older, smaller buildings and mixed-age blocks. They are home to more community centers, fraternal organizations, cultural institutions, libraries, and other places where civic life thrives.

In interviews with a diverse range of stakeholders, many pointed to older areas of the city that are thriving with activity. From the well-known urban neighborhoods of Riverside and Springfield to newly emerging areas like Murray Hill, Durkeeville, and the Beaver Street corridor, Jacksonville is rediscovering the “original urbanism” that is part of the city’s built heritage.

Yet at the same time, many older areas face challenges and have not yet experienced significant investment and revitalization. Vacant properties are still numerous in neighborhoods near the center of the city, from East Springfield to Arlington. While several important reuse and new construction projects are underway or planned for downtown, much work lies ahead to create a more vibrant urban center.

The Reuse Opportunity Model developed for this report identifies areas of the city where there is a combination of intact blocks of older, smaller buildings and positive market conditions that may support successful investment and adaptive use, beyond already thriving areas. This model provides a tool for prioritizing where policies and programs, including ideas highlighted in the recommendations section, could make a difference and extend revitalization to more neighborhoods in Jacksonville.

Finally, the development of this report has revealed a high level of interest, passion, and optimism about Jacksonville’s urban core among city leaders, residents, community groups, business owners, and other advocates. The energy and commitment of this group can help bring about new, inclusive prosperity for the older neighborhoods of Jacksonville, setting the city on a path to a more sustainable and resilient future.
Project Participants

Many local professionals, community representatives, city staff, and civic leaders contributed their insights and ideas to the development of this study. Each brought a valuable perspective to questions about how to unlock the potential of building reuse to create a stronger, more sustainable Jacksonville. The following stakeholders participated in this study through interviews, focus groups, and other meetings:

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