



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Jacksonville City Council Approves Innovative Partnership with Jax Riverfront Alliance to Steward the Downtown Riverfront

Independent nonprofit to steward, program, and enhance downtown's riverfront parks, expanding the riverfront's role as an economic engine and cultural destination

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (August 12, 2026) — The Jacksonville City Council has approved a public-private partnership between the City of Jacksonville and the Jax Riverfront Alliance, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that will work closely with the City's Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department (JaxParks) to steward, program, and enhance the parks and public spaces along the downtown riverfront on both banks of the St. Johns River.

The partnership represents a strategic shift for the riverfront, building on the City's ongoing investments by leveraging the dedicated resources, industry expertise, and private funding that a focused, independent nonprofit can deliver. The Jax Riverfront Alliance was created to bring world-class stewardship to the riverfront, helping it reach its full potential as an economic engine and cultural destination for Jacksonville.

"This exciting partnership represents the next phase in our successful revitalization of Jacksonville's riverfront," said Mayor Donna Deegan. "We are thrilled to elevate these popular, dynamic new spaces as a destination for everyone to enjoy. The Jax Riverfront Alliance is the key component to activating free family fun on what I like to call our city's front porch – our downtown parks and public spaces along the water."

The Jax Riverfront Alliance will implement year-round activation and programming such as events and festivals, fitness classes, food and beverage offerings, markets, educational programs, and pop-up entertainment on the riverfront. The organization will also manage fundraising and stakeholder engagement, and over time, begin providing enhanced operations and maintenance. It will report annually on key metrics and activities to the City of Jacksonville. The City retains ownership of every park and continues to lead capital repairs and construction, utilities, flood management, security, and major infrastructure.

This partnership approach and division of responsibilities reflect years of research and study by Jacksonville community leaders, and builds on proven models implemented nationwide, including Buffalo Bayou in Houston, Gathering Place in Tulsa, The Underline in Miami, and the Memphis River Parks Partnership. These models, which have been adapted deliberately for Jacksonville's unique character and needs, have shown how dedicated, independent stewardship of parks and public spaces builds community, enhances quality of life, and drives tourism and economic development.

The City Council approval dedicates \$1.57 million from the City of Jacksonville FY25-26 budget to riverfront stewardship, including \$570,000 to the Jax Riverfront Alliance for new

activations and programming and \$1 million to JaxParks for near-term operations and maintenance.

The Jax Riverfront Alliance kicks off its stewardship with activation and programming at Riverfront Plaza and the Riverfront Music Garden this fall. It will start expanding its responsibilities and activities to the Northbank and Southbank Riverwalks and other public spaces throughout 2027 and 2028, with the opportunity to add new parks still in development later. This staggered approach ensures the Jax Riverfront Alliance can effectively maintain and operate each space at the high standards that Jacksonville residents expect and deserve.

The Jax Riverfront Alliance is led by a board of directors with deep roots in Jacksonville and strong cross-industry experience. The board hired Linzee Ott, a Jacksonville native with extensive public and nonprofit service, as interim director while conducting a national search for a founding CEO. Ott previously served as CEO of Build Up Downtown, where she advocated for smart development, historic preservation, and great public spaces downtown, and spent nearly eight years prior as director of community impact for the Jacksonville State Attorney's Office. The Board expects to complete the CEO hiring process by early 2027.

“Jacksonville’s riverfront is one of the city’s most valuable assets and a key driver of our downtown’s continuing revitalization,” said Jax Riverfront Alliance Board Chair Dave Sweeney. “Through our partnership with the City, we aim to build on the significant City investment already made in these parks. Our job now is to translate that investment, through proactive and dedicated stewardship, into a riverfront that residents enjoy, businesses benefit from, and visitors remember.”

The agreement between the City and Jax Riverfront Alliance spans 10 years, with public funding determined annually by City Council. The Jax Riverfront Alliance will begin implementing a fundraising plan designed to support the organization and its riverfront efforts through corporate, philanthropic, and community investment.

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About the Jax Riverfront Alliance

The Jax Riverfront Alliance is an independent 501(c)(3) dedicated to enhancing Jacksonville’s riverfront parks and pathways. Working with the City of Jacksonville and other valued public, private, and community partners, the Jax Riverfront Alliance seeks to deliver an exceptional riverfront experience through year-round programming and meticulous stewardship. Beginning with two priority parks, Riverfront Plaza and Riverfront Music Garden, the Jax Riverfront Alliance will ultimately oversee the connected system of riverfront parks and pathways along both banks of the St. Johns River. In doing so, the Jax Riverfront Alliance aims to transform Jacksonville’s riverfront into a daily destination for recreation, culture, nature, wellness, and connection to inspire economic growth and community pride. Learn more at jaxriverfrontalliance.org.