

Good morning, it is an honor to be with you today to deliver my first budget for Jacksonville, the city we all love.

A special thank you to Council President Salem for the open door, and for the many conversations and collaborations we've already had, and to Vice President White, who has given me full access to his snack drawer - a decision I suspect he will come to regret.

I also want to thank our interim CFO Mike Weinstein, incoming CFO and past Council President Anna Brosche, and former state senator Audrey Gibson for leading our budget efforts. I'm grateful to Mayor Curry's team and all the department heads who took part in the Mayor's Budget Review Committee. Today's budget would not have been possible without our collective efforts.

I celebrate the accomplishment each city council member has achieved. You earned the trust of the people in your district to represent them. Today, you're meeting their needs, responding to their requests, and advocating for their kids, grandkids, and great grandkids.

I am honored to be serving alongside you. After speaking with many of you over the last few weeks, I know you share my passion for public service and belief in working together for the betterment of Jacksonville. We owe it to our citizens to rise above the cynicism that undermines aspirations; to listen and understand rather than react; and to live up to our nation's motto dating back to 1776: 'E Pluribus Unum. Out of many, one.'

It is fitting that Jacksonville is on the verge of generational opportunity at a time when much of the council is served by women and men whose family trees were planted here two, three, and four generations ago. The budget I'm presenting today makes generational investments of \$1.752 billion from the General Fund budget in addition to nearly \$406 million from the Capital Improvement Plan. I look forward to working with you to put these dollars to work in our community.

With humility and respect for unknowable events, we remain prepared for the future, fiscally responsible, and accountable to taxpayers while making much needed investments. Our CIP includes \$64 million in PayGo funds – a 156% increase from last year – which allows us to pay for projects instead of borrowing funds. The CIP also incorporates shovel ready projects that can be completed over the next year. Our debt ratio numbers are within city targets. All four rating agencies have Jacksonville in good, stable standings. And we've reserved \$20 million for future capital projects. All in all, our fiscal outlook remains strong.

Infrastructure is the foundation for everything even if it's not always glamorous. The investments we are making will improve the quality of life for every family in every district. Resurfaced roads make the drive faster. New sidewalks provide safety. Better drainage and bulkheads help keep our small businesses and homes from being underwater. Removal of septic tanks improves our water quality. When we take care of our public infrastructure, more

companies will want to build and move here. It also means we are finally making good on many of the broken promises of consolidation.

Part of that foundation is ensuring our neighborhoods have better roads and sidewalks to reduce future maintenance costs and to improve safety for drivers and pedestrians alike. There's no reason that Jacksonville should be in the top ten cities for pedestrian fatalities every year. We've added nearly \$26.8 million in roadway projects – a 67 percent increase from the 2022-2023 fiscal year – and \$13.6 million in sidewalk and crosswalk improvements, a 78 percent bump. An additional \$2 million is ensuring ADA compliance for sidewalks across the city. A \$21.7 million mowing budget – which is a 95 percent increase – will increase trimming, edging, and litter pick up so our roads have reduced blight. This budget also increases the mowing cycle in our parks, so they are better maintained and manicured.

The St. Johns River continues to be polluted by decaying septic tanks, which affects the health of our river and the citizens who live nearby. Our budget provides \$17.5 million in funding to continue removal of high priority septic tanks and another \$1 million in education and incentives that will go towards encouraging neighborhoods to participate in the removal process.

Our many improvements will be rendered useless for future generations if that infrastructure ends up under water. We must aggressively address the simple mathematical fact that sea levels are rising. We see it in daytime flooding, and we certainly see it when storms hit Jacksonville. Our budget directs \$10 million for resilience infrastructure and staff positions to implement priorities coming from the vital flood, heat, and vulnerability studies that are currently underway.

The work continues while we await these results from the Chief Resilience Officer. This year's budget puts \$12 million towards drainage systems and stormwater maintenance. Another \$16.5 million funds bridge repair and bulkhead replacement. Stormwater drainage improvements include \$15.2 million for the La Salle Street outfall, \$7 million for the McCoy's Creek outfall, and \$4.5 million for citywide outfall ditches.

Beyond flooding, we also must prepare ourselves for more extreme heat. Our budget includes \$1.5 million for tree maintenance, and we will work to quickly utilize the unallocated \$20 million that separately remains in the Tree Replacement Trust Fund. We shouldn't have neighborhoods that are 10-15 degrees warmer than the rest of the city on hot summer days. Planting more shade trees will beautify our neighborhoods, reduce temperatures, lower energy bills, and provide root systems that soak up water during storms.

It's my belief that investing in our parks, riverfront, and trails will increase the quality of life for our citizens and attract more visitors to our beautiful city. Our budget makes big investments in those areas with a strong focus on creating a series of continuous riverfront parks and trails to bring in people from across the city to live, work, and play in a thriving downtown.

On the Northbank, these transformative downtown projects include \$45 million for the Liberty Street Marina, Shipyards West Park, and the Northbank riverwalk extension from Catherine Street to Metropolitan Park. On the Southbank, \$15 million will fund the riverwalk extension and two new docks.

We're also making more than \$9 million of continued investment into the Emerald Trail. Completion of the Hogan's Creek Greenway, McCoy's Creek Greenway, and Hogan's Creek to Riverwalk segments will connect Springfield, Eastside, Brooklyn, the Railyard District and Westside to the riverfront. I can't wait to see folks walking, running, and biking on the Emerald Trail – not to mention going on a connected trail run myself!

We heard our citizens loud and clear on having more pools open for these sweltering summer days. That's why we've added an additional \$500,000 for pool maintenance and nearly \$4.5 million to complete the First Coast High School pool. Another \$8.5 million will go towards upgrading parks across Jacksonville, including Archie Dickinson, Hanna, and Riverside Parks.

We have the largest urban park system in the United States. Let's make sure it's the greatest.

Beyond our parks, we are also doing more to draw in world class conferences, concerts, and sporting events to Jacksonville. Nearly \$13 million will fund renovations and improvements at the Prime Osborn Convention Center, Ritz Theatre, and 121 Financial Ballpark, home of the Jumbo Shrimp. We're also providing \$250,000 for the Bethune-Cookman vs. Southern University football game and \$184,000 for the Bob Hayes Track Meet. These events bring our community together and deliver an important economic impact.

In a city like ours that is bursting at the seams with creative talent, support for the arts is paramount to our quality of life and our economy. Artists and musicians are our neighbors who have a gift which brightens the lives of all who can see it, hear it, or experience it.

It is our duty to support the arts and venues where we can enjoy them. That is why our budget calls for the Cultural Council to be funded with \$8.25 million, a \$3 million increase. Let's be a more vibrant city where our artists choose to stay.

Public health continues to be an important priority for my administration. Our budget provides \$40 million to UF Health for their services to underserved citizens and another \$25 million for building improvements at the hospital. Our Chief Health Officer is also hard at work looking at ways to better coordinate care across providers throughout Jacksonville.

Keeping our families safe and delivering life-saving emergency service is the noble work of the hardworking women and men in our police and fire departments. To ensure they are staffed and equipped to fulfill that duty, our budget places public safety as a top priority.

I've looked at the numbers, and in a fast-growing city of our size, we absolutely need more police officers on the streets and in our communities. It's a belief I share with Sheriff Waters,

Council President Salem, and many of you. This budget provides the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office with \$7.8 million in additional funding to add 40 police officers and 18 non-uniformed positions. Our increased investment in the City's Motor Pool will provide 66 new vehicles to the force and \$3 million in capital improvements will be funded for the Police Memorial Building and jail.

We are also making robust investments in the Jacksonville Fire and Rescue Department, so response times continue to decrease in the event of a medical emergency or fire. 60 new positions are funded, with 15 of those being posted at the new marine station that is opening next year. Additionally, the Capital Improvement Plan budget dedicates \$31 million for the construction of new fire stations.

As a supporter of organized labor and believer in the heroic work of our women and men in uniform, I'm proud that our budget also makes good on the 4.25% raise that was promised to our police and fire unions two years ago. Our overall public safety investments in staff and equipment show our support for the difficult job they have while keeping pace with the rising public safety needs for our fast-growing city.

Public safety is not only about reacting when things go wrong. It is also about being proactive. It starts with providing safe spaces for kids to play and opportunities to engage young minds. That is why our budget provides an additional \$5 million dollars to expand the number of facilities that service our youth through the Kids Hope Alliance - increasing the reach and effectiveness of their efforts.

When 70% of the people in our jail cannot read at a fourth grade level, it's clear there is an undeniable link between literacy, success, and quality of life. The Jacksonville Public Library will receive \$1.5 million dollars to expand services as well as more than \$4 million dollars for capital improvements in locations around the city. Open access to knowledge, history, entertainment, and the arts is life-changing for our youth. Our partnership with the Kids Hope Alliance and Jacksonville Public Library will be important building blocks as we look to a re-imagined and reinvigorated Jacksonville Journey with a citywide focus on literacy.

When we've taken care of our infrastructure and ensured our citizens are healthy and safe, that is when our local economy can really thrive thanks to the small businesses that drive 80 percent of it. They are family run shops open for generations – just like the restaurants in my own family – and new ventures launched by enterprising entrepreneurs. \$1.25 million is budgeted for small business development support and \$108,000 for the UNF Small Business Development Center.

Our goal is to invest in expanding a business environment where we create jobs that allow for financial security and building generational wealth. Doing this will keep our home-grown talent and attract the best and the brightest from around the country.

Entrepreneurial spirit and ambition are often slowed by a permitting process that is overwhelmed. Time is money for any business. Our budget provides \$21.72 million dollars for

planning, permitting, building inspections, and enhanced technology. Nearly \$1 million in additional funding creates four new positions and provides equipment to improve the process. The return on this investment will be a system which is faster and easier to navigate.

There are so many invaluable non-profit organizations that work on the street level and fill the gaps. Our budget invests \$9 million in public service grants – a \$3 million dollar increase – that reflects the growing reliance on their services, from helping children and adults overcome speech and hearing hurdles to mental health healing and addiction counseling. They work out of the spotlight, but their presence serves as a beacon of hope for those who need them.

During the transition, I created seven task forces to explore policies and action plans that move our city forward: Infrastructure; Health; Economic Development; Public Safety; Arts, Culture and Entertainment; Constituency and Community Outreach; and Military and Veteran Affairs.

As this budget came together, they have been hearing from a grassroots network of more than 200 active and engaged citizens. These are people from every corner of the city and from all walks of life, sharing their experiences and ideas to recommend policies and action plans that move our city forward. With a final report arriving in early September, we have set aside \$25 million to start implementing many of the recommendations that they make.

In addition to the opportunities and challenges that I've already covered today, these task forces will offer solutions to some of our other most pressing issues:

- Ensuring all our neighborhoods receive their fair share of services when the broken promises of consolidation still live with us today.
- Taking decisive action on our housing crisis where 147,000 of our lower income neighbors are on a waiting list for affordable housing. Our budget already includes more than \$3 million for rental and legal assistance, and that's just the beginning.
- Doing more to serve our homeless population and provide services that get them back on their feet.
- Better supporting our military and veteran families in a community where one in four of us have ties to military service.
- Improving transportation options for our fast-growing population which spans more than 840 square miles.
- Finding new ways to merge and coordinate the missions of our non-profits, higher education institutions, and faith communities.

- Engaging the younger generation so they decide to set down roots and continue growing their own Jacksonville family tree.

It is promising to see the City Council looking out into the future with one-, three-, and five-year strategic plans. My hope is that we can also partner on plans that look 10 and even 20 years out. In that spirit, we have included \$7.5 million to fund the health, housing, and homelessness programs that make up the one-year strategic plan – all worthy initiatives that we can build upon. We've also set aside \$3 million in a contingency fund requested by Council President Salem.

This budget reflects the priorities of the people. It invests their money in ways that will create more opportunities to live, earn, learn, and love with a good quality of life. It is intentional. It keeps the promises of the past and builds a city of the future. A city that works for all of us and where our children will choose to stay and raise their own families.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt once said, "To some generations much is given. Of other generations much is expected. This generation of Americans has a rendezvous with destiny." I look forward to answering your questions as we work hand-in-hand to fulfill Jacksonville's destiny. Thank you and may God bless our journey.