**The Jacksonville Greenway Initiative**

By: Aedan Downey | Licensed Florida Real Estate Associate | UNITED Real Estate Gallery

The Jacksonville Greenway Initiative aims to repurpose Jacksonville Electric Authority (JEA) powerline easements into multi-purpose urban greenways. This project represents significant infrastructure initiatives that promote transportation, sustainability, and community health. By effectively utilizing underused land, this initiative offers a cost-effective strategy to tackle Jacksonville’s challenges related to pedestrian safety, increased traffic congestion, and limited access to recreational green spaces.

Gathering inspiration from cities such as Atlanta, Minneapolis, and Houston, this initiative will emphasize tangible economic advantages, improved public health outcomes, and enhanced ecological resilience associated with greenways. Studies have shown that greenways can increase property values by 5–10%, boost local business revenue, and promote a healthier lifestyle. Moreover, greenways also contribute to the reduction of air pollution, mitigation of urban heat islands, and preservation of biodiversity—playing a vital role in sustainable urban development.

In accordance with JEA’s real estate policies, the utility allows compatible third-party utilization of easements. The plan emphasizes the importance of maintaining the integrity of sustainable infrastructure, enforcing public safety, and planning for long-term maintenance, thereby addressing potential concerns while maximizing community benefits.

The Jacksonville Greenway Initiative offers a unique opportunity to enhance mobility, stimulate economic development, and foster a sustainable environment for all residents. To secure funding, this initiative plans to collaborate with JEA, city planners, local business leaders, and community stakeholders.

**Southside Greenway**

Jacksonville’s vast layout presents significant challenges related to transportation inefficiencies, environmental concerns, and limited pedestrian access. The lack of reliable and safe alternatives to automobile transportation creates safety risks for residents.

However, through JEA’s extensive network of powerline easements, a unique solution emerges—one that maximizes underutilized land, minimizes cost, and fosters community revitalization. This urban trail would create a network of interconnected paths, linking to existing pedestrian walkways and bike routes, connecting nearby neighborhoods, commercial areas, and recreational spaces along the way.

**The Greenway’s Cost-Effectiveness & Financial Gains**

Investing in urban greenways serves not only as an environmental initiative but also as a strategy to boost local economic development, physical fitness, and mental well-being. Cities that have integrated greenways have seen rises in property value, increased consumer spending, and surges in private investment.

**Increase in Property Value**

* Homes located near greenways appreciate between 5–15%, contributing to increased property tax revenues for the city. (NAR, 2024)
* In Guangzhou, China, areas surrounding greenways experienced significant economic growth—outpacing cities without similar infrastructure. (Liu et al., 2018)

**Boost in Local Business Revenue *(fhwa.dot.gov and Hennepin.us)***

**Atlanta Beltline Project** *(U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration)*

* From its inception in 2005 to 2017, the Beltline generated $325 million, with the TAD (Tax Allocation District) generating $4.1 billion in private development impact.
* Projections for 2012–2030 estimate the TAD to generate approximately $800 million to $1.4 billion.

**Minneapolis Midtown Greenway** *(Myslajek)*

* Over $750 million in public and private investments
* Thousands of jobs created within the corridor
* Significant increases in cycling activity
* Creation of new park spaces

**Cost-Effective Infrastructure Investment**

* Utilizing JEA easements makes this initiative cost-effective by eliminating the need to purchase new land. (JEA)
* Urban green space interventions often rely on local and state funding, offsetting upfront construction expenses.

Greenways introduce long-term economic advantages—not only by raising property values but also by attracting private investment and boosting local business revenues. (World Health Organization, 2017) By implementing a strategically designed urban greenway, Jacksonville can generate strong financial returns while enhancing the quality of life for its residents.

**Public Health Benefits of Urban Greenways**

More than just scenic paths, greenways promote physical activity, public health, and mental wellness. Research shows that people living near greenways are more likely to engage in regular exercise, helping to reduce obesity and cardiovascular disease.

**Encouraging Physical Activity & Reducing Obesity *(World Health Organization, 2017)***

* A study found that citizens living near urban green spaces were more likely to use them consistently over time (32% usage in year one; 38% in year two).
* Residents living closer to greenways engaged in approximately 15 additional minutes of physical activity per week.

**Lowering Cardiovascular & Mental Health Risk *(Rigolon et al., 2021)***

* Green spaces reduce health disparities by providing equal access to healthy environments:
	+ Impoverished individuals without green space access were 1.93x more likely to die than wealthy individuals.
	+ Cardiovascular disease death rates were 2.19x higher among low-income groups.
	+ With green space access, these rates dropped: all-cause mortality was 1.43x higher (vs. 1.93x), and heart disease rates improved significantly.

Lack of green space is associated with diseases such as Type II diabetes, obesity, and stress-related illnesses.

**Providing Equitable Access to Recreation**

* Greenways offer inclusive access to fitness opportunities for underserved and lower-income communities.

By implementing greenways, Jacksonville can enhance public health outcomes while fostering community engagement and active lifestyles.

**Environmental Benefits of Greenways**

Urban greenways support sustainable urban development by improving air quality, managing stormwater, and enhancing biodiversity.

**Reducing Carbon Emissions & Air Pollution *(Ngo et al., 2018)***

* A study of the Comox Greenway in Canada compared emissions between greenway users (treatment) and non-users (control):
	+ Non-users: 0.32 kg CO₂ per day
	+ Users: 0.37 kg CO₂ per day
	While differences appear small, long-term adoption yields significant emission reductions.

**Stormwater Management & Flood Prevention**

With continued development and the abundance of paved surfaces, Jacksonville’s Southside faces severe stormwater management challenges, including flooding and strain on sewer systems.

Green infrastructure elements like green roofs, rain gardens, bioswales, and pervious pavement offer cost-effective stormwater solutions:

* Research shows these features can reduce runoff by 57–68%, significantly reducing flood risk during Florida’s heavy summer storms.

**Biodiversity & Habitat Restoration *(Bryant, 2006)***

Urbanization leads to habitat fragmentation and biodiversity loss. A greenway along JEA’s powerlines offers a chance to restore ecosystems across the Southside corridor.

**Habitat Conservation**

* The greenway will protect native vegetation and promote thriving ecosystems through strategic planting of native species.
* Greenways serve as safe passageways for wildlife, reducing accidents and allowing biodiversity to spread more freely.

**Community and Policy Integration**

* The project aligns with Jacksonville’s Urban Forestry Program and should coordinate with local environmental and conservation groups.
* Community gardens, environmental education programs, and informative signage will promote awareness and engagement.
* Increased tree canopy coverage will reduce urban heat islands and improve air quality, strengthening climate resilience.

**Jacksonville’s Future Starts Here**

Greenways are more than trail systems—they're city-wide investments in safety, health, economy, and sustainability. They provide safe routes for residents, stimulate local economies, reduce pollution, and mitigate climate impacts.

To realize this vision, collaboration with JEA, city officials, local business owners, and residents is essential. Securing support from local interest groups and government funding will be key. We request a formal meeting with JEA representatives, city officials, and business leaders to begin planning and phasing this project into reality.