

downtown now

Downtown desperately needs shade



We're missing this. Cairns, Australia has lots of heat and rain. Sound familiar? Pedestrians downtown are shielded by large overhangs. Downtown Jacksonville has a few awnings but not enough shade. (Mike Clark/Florida Times-Union)



A pedestrian-friendly city. Some streets in downtown Cairns, Australia are narrow. That tends to reduce speed of cars and it becomes more inviting for pedestrians. Jacksonville could copy some of the lessons here and elsewhere.



mike clark
editorial page editor

Drenched in sweat. Drenched by the rain. This is summer in Jacksonville.

It doesn't take long to realize. Just step off a plane and you're hit in the face by the steamy heat.

So unless you're ready for a workout, you rush directly to your air-conditioned car.

We all know this, right? So why don't we do something about it?

Up North they have underground shopping malls and heated walkways to deal with the cold.

For the heat in Jacksonville? We have cars.

We drive them short distances without thinking about it.

Downtown, we'd rather drive around for a parking place than walk a few blocks. That's still better than getting drenched in sweat or rain in your work clothes.

LESSONS IN AUSTRALIA

We experience this hot, humid weather for much of the year, typically with afternoon thunderstorms.

So why do we have so little shade in this city, especially Downtown?

And why do we plant so many palm trees in this city when they provide so little shade?

The fact is that Downtown is not set up for pedestrians. The lack of shade is just one obvious example.

This all came to mind a few years ago when my wife and I traveled to Cairns, (pronounced "cans") Australia, the embarkment point for tours of the Great Barrier Reef.

Cairns is located in the tropics. The population of the region is just 160,000.

Take a walk in downtown Cairns and you'll notice that the sidewalks are entirely shaded from the tropical sun and the rain. And many of the downtown blocks have interior corridors where you can cut through between blocks. One of those corridors has a nightly marketplace.

Try a lunch in Downtown Jacksonville when one of our afternoon thunderstorms hits early.

You arrive back at work drenched. Yes, some of the areas Downtown have

a few awnings, something that becomes painfully noticeable in the middle of a downpour. We just need many more of them.

Yet here is one of the many assets that Jacksonville's Downtown has not taken advantage of in comparison to the suburbs.

The St. Johns Towns Center lacks shade.

The city and Downtown merchants need to join forces and begin implementing a plan to introduce shade Downtown.

It should start along logical corridors, say from City Hall along Laura Street to the Landing.

It also should run from the Florida Theatre-duPont Center area to local parking garages.

Once the shade is created it ought to encourage other improvements.

Shade is one obvious way to get people out of their cars.

SHARING UMBRELLAS

Another idea along those lines: It's common for American cities to offer bicycle-sharing services. You pick up a bicycle in one location and drop it off at another location.

How about an umbrella sharing service Downtown? If you're caught in a surprise rainstorm — you know the ones that come and go in an instant but still leave you drenched — what would you pay to have access to an umbrella rental for a few minutes?

A dollar or two? Sure. Better than showing up at the office looking like a wet collie.

That small fee could be used to pay for those few people who abscond with umbrellas.

Or it could be managed with an honor system. Most people in Jacksonville have umbrellas but never at the right time.

The umbrellas could have bright drawings illustrating Jacksonville history. Some people might want to buy them.

The umbrellas could even include some advertising to defray costs.

Downtown ambassadors could oversee the system.

Downtown can never be truly pedestrian-friendly until pedestrians are protected from the heat and rain.

Other cities do it. We can, too.

viewpoint

JaxPort members set to waste money



ron littlepage
times-union columnist

Did you vote to elect Jim Citrano to a position of power over your tax dollars?

How about Ed Fleming, John Falconetti, John Baker, John Newman, Joe York and Jamie Shelton?

The answer is no to all of them.

These board members of the Jacksonville Port Authority are appointed by the mayor and governor.

Yet these unelected officials are on the verge of committing to a \$484.6 million project to dredge the St. Johns River shipping channel.

That includes federal and state money, as well as up to \$150 million from the city.

The people you did elect to make decisions on spending local taxpayer money — the members of the City Council — won't really have a say in the matter because of the devious funding formula JaxPort is proposing.

The plan is to begin deepening the channel later this year with federal, state and JaxPort money.

The same financing would hold true in 2018 and 2019.

The first ask for city taxpayer money — a \$30 million installment — wouldn't come until 2020.

By then, more than \$151 million will have been spent. What's the City Council to do when JaxPort comes banging on its door, say no?

That would amount to a colossally expensive dredge to nowhere.

Now we couldn't let that happen, could we, boys and girls?

Sam Mousa, Mayor Lenny Curry's chief administrative officer, once told me that JaxPort wouldn't be taking on any debt for the dredge — the plan calls for \$23 million in bonds next year — until all of the financing for the project is in place.

JaxPort's interim executive director, Eric Green, has said pretty much the same thing. He told the Times-Union earlier this month that "we're planning on making sure that we know where the money for the entire project is

coming from so we can publicly explain that."

There's no money in the proposed federal budget for 2018 or in the years after that, and there is no source of money identified for the \$150 million from Jacksonville's taxpayers.

There's also another little problem.

When JaxPort comes pleading for city money in 2020, there will be at least eight new members on the City Council because of term limits.

Let me count the times — I'll run out of fingers and toes — that we've been told during the last several years while paying off the city's pension debt was debated that the current City Council can't dictate the spending decisions of a future council.

But that's exactly what will happen if this plan put in play by unelected officials is carried out.

A resolution in support by the current council wouldn't help either because the final decision would be made by a future council.

And what if the electorate in 2019, upset about those unelected officials spending so much money on a project that doesn't make economic sense and also harms the river's health, elects council members who have the courage to say no, not on our dime?

Some current council members are less than thrilled that they are being cut out by JaxPort.

The council may be able to force a more public debate on the dredge during the budget process this summer.

The City Council's Finance Committee reviews the proposed budgets of JaxPort and the other independent authorities and routinely rubber-stamps them. But it doesn't have to be that way.

It will be interesting to see if the council rolls over and plays dead in the face of support for JaxPort by Curry and the JAX Chamber, or if it asserts its role as an elected body when unelected officials are trying to spend a bundle of taxpayer dollars.

That's money, by the way, that could be used to finally take care of the needs in neighborhoods that have been neglected for too long.

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Has McCain left the Republican Party?

Viral posts claim John McCain has quit the Republican Party.

The facts: Sen. John McCain is still a Republican despite fake stories that claim otherwise.

A story posted on WashingtonFeed.com says: "Senator McCain has definitely renounced any affiliation with the Republican Party."

It quotes the Arizona senator as saying, "I am and always will be opposed to Donald Trump. In fact, I've decided that any party that supports him supports the worst America has to offer. For that reason, I'm leaving the GOP and Caucusing [sic] as an independent with the Democrats."

FactCheck.org works with Facebook to help identify and label fake news stories flagged by readers, and it was the social media users who flagged this post.

The senior senator from Arizona has not switched parties. The above quote first appeared in an April 13 story by America's Last



FACT CHECK

Want something checked out? If you see or

hear about something that needs a Fact Check, email carole.fader@jacksonville.com

Line of Defense, which claimed that McCain made the announcement on "Fox and Friends."

We have previously identified America's Last Line of Defense as a site that publishes fake stories as satire. Its disclaimer reads: "America's Last Line of Defense is a satirical publication that may sometimes appear to be telling the truth. We assure you that's not the case. We present fiction as fact, and our sources don't actually exist."

Yet people still want to believe them and pass along their rubbish.

As FactCheck.org has pointed out before, fake news sites often copy content from one another. In this case, the Washington Feed copied its story from the Conservative Patriot

blog, which published a paraphrased version of the fictional story from America's Last Line of Defense.

ConsPatriot.com's disclaimer says, "All the information on this website is published in good faith and for general information purpose only. Conspatriot.com/ does not make any warranties about the completeness, reliability and accuracy of this information."

News releases on McCain's Senate website still refer to him as a Republican, as do his official Twitter and Facebook pages. There also has been no mainstream news coverage of a switch, such as there was when the late Arlen Specter, a longtime Republican senator from Pennsylvania, joined the Democratic Party in 2009.

Rumors of McCain leaving the Republican Party are not new. He has previously denied legitimate mainstream media reports that he had considered switching parties in the early 2000s.

Standing ovation for J, Downtown mag

Bravo, applause, kudos for the great new Downtown magazine, J.

I have some reading to do, and I'm looking forward to it. Now that I know locations of local restaurants we might be more inclined to attend an event downtown.

The critique of the pluses and minuses is eye opening.

It will take some time to absorb it all. Some personal observations, the one-way streets are a pain. Often if I go to EverBank Field I am routed to the Northside.

Lighting in many places is terrible. I had the occasion to have to walk from a location on Bay Street to the Omni to find a cab. It was dark and late at night, and I was not sure of the area. Never again.

When I first came to town 27 years ago, the Landing was in full tilt. My wife and I would bring family down and take them to Hooters or a local seafood establishment. Now it is not even on my radar.

I talked to a recent attendee of a concert at Daily's Place and was told to wait until fall; it was sweltering in the late afternoon, early evening.

Shad Khan is a Jacksonville treasure. Where would Jacksonville be without

him?

A shout out to everyone at the Times-Union who had a hand in producing this great material.

Rick Mansfield, Jacksonville

COMMENTS ON T-U FACEBOOK PAGE

• From Charles Jenkins: We've been caring about Downtown for years and can't wait for the talking to cease and bring about change.

• From Kevin Borovsky: Please get Downtown rocking! A large ferris wheel by the river by the stadium for example.

• From Caroline Hernandez: If anyone can do it, Shad Khan can.

• From Annette Alexander: It is a breath of fresh air. I am checking it out slowly. Next issue in three months. Some of my favorite writers are on the staff.

• From Susie Thomas Newton: Until we have secured parking and increased police security, Downtown will not see a revival.

• From Amanda Dillard: I love living Downtown! I have no issue walking around at night. I walk my dog after dark, walk home from local bars and events. It's convenient and perfectly safe.

Another view David Fitzsimmons Arizona Daily Star

ITEM: WONDER WOMAN INVITED TO WHITE HOUSE.

