

opinion

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A VERSE FOR TODAY
 ... If God is for us, who can be against us?
Romans 8:31

District: The big idea deserves support

Nobody said Downtown development was easy. And that's an understatement.

Yet the Downtown Investment Authority board did a fine job Wednesday in balancing two goals:

- Develop the property once used by JEA's Southside Generating Station as a catalyst for development.
- Protect the taxpayers to prevent the re-occurrence of previous disasters like the Shipyards.

Aundra Wallace, CEO of the Downtown Investment Authority, explained a complex financial plan for The District. Rather than sell the property to developers and leave the city vulnerable to another Shipyards fiasco, Wallace's plan retains city ownership of the land, which would be turned over to the developers parcel by parcel.

The plan includes an additional property tax of 1.25 mills for the development that would be used to fund infrastructure improvements to the property — such as an extension of the Southbank Riverwalk.

JEA would turn over ownership of the land to the city and the Downtown Investment Authority. There would be about \$45 million in public works invested in the city. The city would be obligated to contribute \$26.4 million toward this.

The deal provides a series of performance benchmarks while giving maximum flexibility to the developers as market conditions change. The city would pay JEA in installments up to about \$18.6 million till 2040.

This is a change from the original deal that called for developers to pay \$18 million for total ownership of the property. But Wallace makes a convincing case that this arrangement better protects the taxpayers.

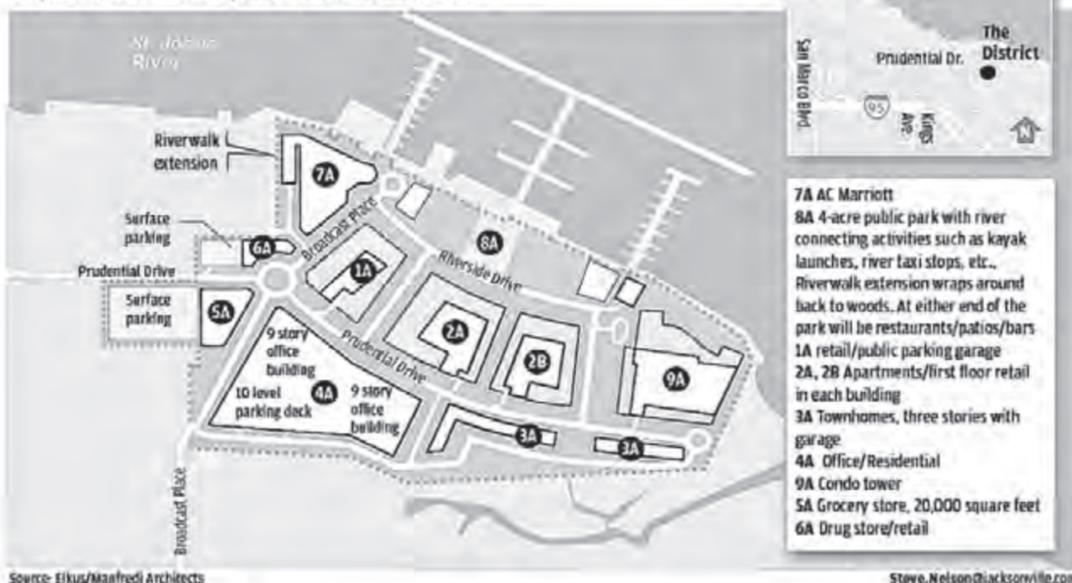
Tax increment financing has long been used to develop major areas. In fact, it has been used to finance the Miami World Center, the Kansas City Power & Light District and Atlantic Station Atlanta.

Noting this change in financing, some critics want JEA to rebid the project. But they're overlooking the big idea.

As developer Peter Rummell explains, the District is based on a healthy living synergy that is built into the en-

Details emerging on The District

Everything about the mixed uses on the 30-acre tract, the former Southside Generating Station, is designed to work together. The St. Johns River is the focus, not a backdrop. An invitation to the public to come on down is part of the nature of The District.



tire project. In addition, it's designed to invite the public to visit with its riverfront park and a riverwalk that will surround the development.

Downtown Investment Authority board members were concerned that they were taking on all of the risks with the project — and there were some suggestions that JEA should assume its share of risk.

That was understandable.

But this is a big deal.

It is a \$433 million development for Downtown. And as board member Jack Meeks said, Jacksonville has done so little with so much for so long.

Approvals will still be needed by the JEA board and City Council.

But city leaders need to move forward with this project — while doing so with their eyes wide open.

Florida's Constitution

Proposal aimed at "protecting" environment is not necessary

The sanctity of Florida's Constitution is violated when we seek to fill it with feel-good amendments that are often vague, duplicative and trigger unintended consequences.

For this reason, Florida's Constitution Revision Commission should reject Proposal 23, which promotes additional and potentially frivolous environmental litigation.

As a former secretary of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, I had the privilege of working with Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch, the sponsor of Proposal 23, to identify restoration projects designed to reduce harmful algal blooms and freshwater discharges in Martin County.

She was a terrific partner.

And Thurlow-Lippisch's efforts to improve Florida's environment are genuine and appreciated.

However, this proposed amendment to allow an individual to disregard our environmental laws and place environmental decision making in Florida's courts is not the answer.

Current law already allows affected citizens to be involved in development permits and to take legal action to stop any person or company from "violating any laws, rules or regulations for the protection of the air, water and other natural resources of the state."

JUST ANOTHER VAGUE AMENDMENT

A constitutional amendment creating another right to sue is not the purpose of a constitution and would add to the litany of vague and duplicative amendments in Florida's Constitution.

Environmental restoration could also be jeopardized by this proposed amendment and would certainly be an unintended consequence.

For example, communities served by septic tanks along the Indian River Lagoon and our springs have recognized that septic tanks are contributing to the degradation of those water bodies.

Many of these communities are now investing in new or expanded central wastewater treatment systems to improve our springs and important watersheds.

But those new wastewater treatment systems are a source of "pollution."

This proposed amendment would give disgruntled homeowners who don't want to give up their septic tanks another litigation avenue to block a new wastewater treatment system.

DON'T ADVANCE THE PROPOSAL

When the Constitution Revision Commission last convened in 1997-98, it, too, was asked to consider a similar vague proposal about environmental rights.

And it appropriately decided not to advance the proposal.

The Constitution Revision Commission committee now considering Proposal 23 would be wise to follow suit.

Herschel Vinyard, Jacksonville
Vinyard is former secretary of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

Another view: Tom Stiglich Creators Syndicate



Letters from Readers

OIL DRILLING OFF OUR COAST

DON'T LET IT HAPPEN

In response to the proposal by President Donald Trump administration's to allow oil drilling along the U.S. coastline — including the waters off Florida — I urge Floridians to rally around my bipartisan Florida Coastal Protection Act.

It is co-sponsored by U.S. Rep. Francis Rooney (R-Naples). It would ban drilling off the Florida coast permanently.

The BP Deepwater Horizon disaster served as a wake up call regarding the harm from drilling and its detrimental impact on tourism, fishing and the health of our economy and environment.

Our state's long-term economic health is dependent on clean beaches and oceans.

And we must act now to prevent the opening of our beautiful shores to oil drilling.

I've been encouraged by the bipartisan calls to oppose the drilling plan.

It is a serious risk to Florida, our local economies and our national security.

U.S. Rep. Kathy Castor, Tampa

A Democrat, Castor represents Florida's 14th Congressional District.

OLDER AMERICANS

DON'T WASTE THEIR TALENTS

Medical science is now allowing senior citizens to not only live longer, but to also be stronger mentally and physically than ever before at ages 65 and older.

Yet many 65-year-olds are required to retire even if they would like to continue their duties for at least a few more years.

Yes, it is true that many people 65 and older really would like to retire and enjoy the leisure life of travel, golf and other activities they have long looked forward to doing.

But there are just as many people 65 and older who enjoy their work so much that they want to continue doing it.

They consider their work to be a source of joy — one that they look forward to each day.

When it comes to our population of senior citizens, here is the important issue that should be addressed:

They possess a wealth of knowledge, talent and experience that is not being called upon or utilized.

It is knowledge, talent and experience that could be of great value to so many businesses and organizations.

It is knowledge, talent and experience that is being wasted.

Yes, youth is great. And it is well understood that the value of youth in carrying the torch forward is vital.

But we also need to be smart enough to use both our young and senior citizen populations to maximum advantage to serve our nation, compete with other countries and make the world a better place for everyone.

John Carson, Jacksonville

MAYOR LENNY CURRY

HOGGING THE SPOTLIGHT?

The Jaguars made the playoffs! This was great news for all of us across the city of Jacksonville.

But recently I received an email from the city with the subject headline of "Mayor Encourages Citywide Participation in Jaguars Rally & Celebration."

The email included a picture of Mayor Lenny Curry in sunglasses and a Jaguars hat and appearing to be standing on the sidelines (as though he were coaching the team).

I still don't get the purpose of the email. Why did it feature a picture of Curry instead of Jaguars players like Blake Bortles or Leonard Fournette?

Or head coach Doug Marrone? Or even Jaguars owner Shad Khan? Should the mayor use the city's email system for self-aggrandizement?

Yes, I used to get email like this from the city when Alvin Brown was mayor — but it would always say something like "City of Jacksonville Encourages Everyone to Attend the Jazz Festival." The emphasis was always on the city, not on the mayor.

But it seems now as though Curry is using the city's email system and taxpayer dollars to promote himself — and not the city.

Terry D. Bork, Jacksonville

OPRAH RUNNING FOR PRESIDENT

SHE WOULD BE OBAMA 2.0

America certainly loves celebrities, no matter what their moral fiber, level of intelligence or patriotic stand.

I didn't see Oprah Winfrey's recent speech during the Golden Globes awards telecast.

But from what I've heard, Winfrey's speech was funny in that the bulk of her "anti-oppression of women" remarks were aimed primarily at many of the people sitting in the room — yet they didn't act as though they understood this point. And I'm not sure Winfrey understood it either.

If she ran for president, Winfrey would probably get the same support that former President Barack Obama received — and from the same faction.

That would definitely not be good for America.

Mike Devine, West Jacksonville

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