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# St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Economic Development Council

## 2024–2025 QUARTER 3 REPORT

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The quarter ended one of the most interesting legislative sessions in recent memory. After a six-week delay past the scheduled May 2 adjournment, Governor Ron DeSantis officially signed the \$117.4 billion Florida State Budget for fiscal year 2025-2026. The Legislature finalized the budget and an accompanying tax package on June 16, and DeSantis signed it into law on June 30. The final budget includes several key victories for businesses, infrastructure, housing, and tourism—particularly benefiting St. Johns County

The Chamber also hosted the St Johns County 2025 Health and Wellness Roundtable. This event, attended by over 40 healthcare and education leaders, focused on addressing talent pipeline and attainable housing challenges now and in the future. Key points included the need for 3,500 additional healthcare staff over the next 5-7 years, with projected state-wide shortages in nurses, technicians, therapists, and other critical roles. Educational institutions highlighted their efforts in developing career pathways, establishing clinical partnerships, and offering customized training programs.

The Chamber published an updated [Attainable Housing Report](#). Attainable workforce housing is a critical issue in St. Johns County, impacting not only the local economy but also the fabric of the community. Essential workers — teachers, law enforcement, nurses, manufacturing workers and service industry employees — are the backbone of our economy and contribute to the high quality of life we enjoy in St. Johns County. However, many of these workers are unable to afford to live in the very county they serve due to a severe lack of housing within an attainable price range. The Attainable Housing Coalition is actively working to identify and address these challenges by advocating for policies and solutions that foster the development of attainable housing options.

We congratulate Viv Helwig, owner of Vested Metals, for being named the North Florida Small-Business Person of the year. The SBA North Florida district recognized Viv for his impact and economic contributions to the region. Mr. Helwig earned recognition due to his remarkable entrepreneurial journey—transforming a small, single-office startup into a thriving enterprise with a significant market presence. His leadership overcame early challenges to achieve substantial growth, expanding the company’s footprint and driving impressive sales through innovative marketing strategies.

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL: PURPOSE & ROLE

## PURPOSE

The purpose of the Economic Development Council is multifaceted. It promotes the economic growth of St. Johns County by attracting new businesses and industries, enhancing the growth and expansion of existing ones, and fostering entrepreneurialism and innovation. It also supports workforce development and business education programs. Additionally, the Council serves as the ESF 18 business and industry lead for emergency response and disaster recovery, working in coordination with St. Johns County Emergency Management and Economic Development departments.

## ROLE

The Economic Development Council (EDC) provides support to business owners, executives and entrepreneurs who seek to start, expand or relocate enterprises in St. Johns County.

Our efforts are leveraged by collaboration and cooperation with federal, state, regional and local partners, including St. Johns County Government and the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners.

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION & EFFORTS

## EDUCATIONAL TRAINING & ACTIVITIES

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**Educational Training & Activities – Throughout the first quarter Chamber Staff participated in educational training and activities with partner agencies including:**

Apr. 1	2025 Annual FCTC Career Fair
Apr. 3	CivicServe Training
Apr. 4	Business, Industry, CIS Advisory SJR State Board Meeting
Apr. 7	AI Utilization Training
Apr. 8	FDOT St. Johns/ Putnam Meeting
Apr. 8-10	Cooperative Education and Internship Conference
Apr. 17	JAXUSA Luncheon
Apr. 22	JAXUSA Small Business Summit
Apr. 24	Navigating Hurricane Season Business Webinar
Apr. 24	Dementia Care & Cure Initiative Task Force Meeting
Apr. 25	JAXUSA Regional Partner Meeting
May. 1	ESF18 hurricane event training
May 8	St. Johns County Local Mitigation Strategy Working Group Meeting
May 9	Staff Retreat and Strategic Plan Review
May 13	2025 FIPL Campaign School
May 22	Night of Lights Business Meeting
May 23	EOC: Hurricane Waterloo Training
May 31	St. Johns County Public Library Career Fair
June 2	Habitat for Humanity Open House Celebration
June 23	Jacksonville Transportation Authority Autonomous Vehicle Conference
June 25	Public-private partnerships for affordable housing webinar
June 26	Board of Realtors Housing Presentation



# BUSINESS EDUCATION TRAINING & COMMUNITY OUTREACH EFFORTS

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The Chamber provides training, business education, networking opportunities and outreach activities for its members and the community.

- Apr. 3 Chamber Foundation Gala
- Apr. 9 Economic Development Council Meeting
- Apr. 9 Joint Chamber at Noon with Jax Chamber – Jeff Sheffield
- Apr. 11 EDC Breakfast with Mark Lamping



- Apr. 22 Jax Chamber Small Business Summit
- Apr. 23 The Chamber Radio Hour

- May 1 Woman with Vision Council Meeting – Sidney Clark, Code Ninja's



- May 1 Public Policy Council Meeting
- May 5 Chamber Golf Classic



- May 6 Chamber Foundation Board Meeting
- May 6 Ambassador Meeting
- May 7 Membership Open House Event – St. Augustine
- May 13-14 2025 FIPL Campaign School



May 13 Board of Directors Meeting

May 14 Economic Development Council

May 14 Chamber After Hours: Amason Aesthetics

May 21 Chamber After Hours: Rise at Nocatee

May 23 The Chamber Radio Hour

May 28 Chamber After Hours: Florida Direct Primary Care

June 17 Executive Committee meeting

June 18 Chamber After Hours: Bartram Pointe



June 19 The Chamber Radio Hour

June 25 Chamber Board Meeting

June 25 Chamber After Hours: Retail Revivers and Cabi Independent Fashion



May 28 Attainable Housing Podcast

June 3 Pitch Factory Kickoff

June 4 Chamber After Hours: Intelligence Office Ponte Vedra - Nocatee

June 5 Public Policy Council Meeting

June 10 PV Division Board of Directors meeting

June 11 Economic Development Council meeting

June 11 Chamber After Hours: Sunkissed Lemon Society

June 12 Healthcare Roundtable

June 13 HSAA Council: Florida Black History Museum and Juneteenth history



## RIBBON CUTTINGS, GRAND OPENINGS & GROUNDBREAKINGS

April 3 Florida Direct Primary Care ribbon cutting

April 4 Marissa Lynn Studios ribbon cutting

April 9 AnnAgem ribbon cutting

Apr. 10 The Blake at St. Johns ribbon cutting

April 16 ECoVets Veterinary Specialists & ER ribbon cutting

May 1 Graze Craze – Ponte Vedra Beach ribbon cutting



May 13 Crave Cookies Jacksonville ribbon cutting



May 14 The Bradley St. Augustine ribbon cutting

May 15 Sylvan Learning of St. Johns Central ribbon cutting



May 15 AcceleratePV ribbon cutting

May 20 Panera Bread-Beachwalk ribbon cutting



- May 28 Haley's Court ribbon cutting
- June 4 Intelligent Office Ponte Vedra –  
Nocatee ribbon cutting
- June 5 St. John's Smile Co. ribbon  
cutting
- June 11 Sunkissed Lemon Society ribbon  
cutting
- June 17 Palmetto Infusion ribbon cutting



- June 18 Pine Lake Dental Care ribbon  
cutting
- June 25 Planet Smoothie – St. Johns  
ribbon cutting



# ST. JOHNS COUNTY LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

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## **DeSantis Signs \$117.4 Billion State Budget: Major Wins for St. Johns County Businesses, Infrastructure, and Tourism**

After a six-week delay past the scheduled May 2 adjournment, Governor Ron DeSantis officially signed the \$117.4 billion Florida State Budget for fiscal year 2025-2026. The Legislature finalized the budget and an accompanying tax package on June 16, and DeSantis signed it into

law on June 30. The final budget includes several key victories for businesses, infrastructure, housing, and tourism—particularly benefiting St. Johns County.

### **Major Tax Relief for Businesses**

One of the most significant changes is the elimination of the 2% sales tax on commercial rents, a long-standing priority of the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce. Starting October 1, 2025, Florida businesses will no longer be subject to this tax, which is projected to save \$900 million statewide each year. Local businesses in St. Johns County are expected to benefit greatly from this tax relief, easing financial burdens and promoting economic growth.

### **Tax Package Delivers Broad Relief**

The sweeping tax package includes several new exemptions and permanent savings for Floridians:

- The aviation fuel tax will be repealed starting January 1, 2026.
- The popular Back to School Sales Tax Holiday has been made permanent and will run every August.
- Permanent sales tax exemptions have been approved for essential items like batteries, smoke detectors, generators, bicycle helmets, sunscreen, and admission to Florida State Parks.
- A new Hunting, Fishing & Camping Sales Tax Holiday will run from September 8 through December 31, 2025..

## 2025 HEALTHCARE ROUNDTABLE

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The Chamber recently hosted the St Johns County 2025 Health and Wellness Roundtable. This event, attended by over 40 healthcare and education leaders, focused on addressing talent pipeline and attainable housing challenges now and in the future. Key points included the need for 3,500 additional healthcare staff over the next 5-7 years, with projected state-wide shortages in nurses, technicians, therapists, and other critical roles.



Educational institutions highlighted their efforts in developing career pathways, establishing clinical partnerships, and offering customized training programs. Still, they noted that there is also a shortage of instructors and a limited capacity to expand programs to meet the demand. It was noted that a strategic effort would be needed in local education and recruitment from outside the region to meet the demand.

The discussion emphasized the importance of artificial intelligence, technology integration, and addressing housing and transportation issues to attract and retain talent. The Chamber plans to advocate for increased density and affordable housing to support workforce needs. Several hospitals and other medical facilities addressed the need for some form of public transportation to allow lower-paid employees an opportunity to commute to work from lower-cost-of-living locations. There may be an opportunity to partner with other municipalities to expand public transportation in our county.

Another critical factor is educating students on the wide variety of occupations within healthcare. The Chamber proposed expanding the high school showcase event and establishing a dedicated healthcare table to highlight the various career pathways in the medical field. The goal is to go beyond traditional roles, such as nursing, and show students and parents the diverse opportunities available in healthcare. Healthcare facilities can provide collateral materials, and educational institutions can showcase different career options, salary potential, and academic pathways. By having representatives from hospitals, colleges, and technical schools present, we can provide direct information about job shadowing, internships, and career progression. The key is to demonstrate that healthcare offers multiple entry points and career tracks, not just becoming a doctor or nurse, which can help attract more students to the field.

With the goal of business retention and expansion in mind, the county has a vested interest in ensuring that an adequate workforce exists. This includes the development of the talent pipeline, infrastructure, quality of life concerns, and technology that are important to the targeted demographic. The goal is to create a sustainable, attractive business environment that supports growth and innovation.



The St. Johns County Chamber has published an updated [Attainable Housing Report](#). Attainable workforce housing is a critical issue in St. Johns County, impacting not only the local economy but also the fabric of the community. Essential workers — teachers,

## Attainable Housing Coalition

OF THE ST. JOHNS COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

law enforcement, nurses, manufacturing workers and service industry employees — are the backbone of our economy and contribute to the high quality of life we enjoy in St. Johns County. However, many of these workers are unable to afford to live in the very county they serve due to a severe lack of housing within an attainable price range.

The Attainable Housing Coalition is actively working to identify and address these challenges by advocating for policies and solutions that foster the development of attainable housing options. The current community perspective of “anti-growth” must be realigned to support targeted growth, which is essential for meeting the housing needs of our present and future workforce. Thoughtful, well-planned development ensures that those who work here can also afford to live here, strengthening the local economy and community ties.

Since the Chamber established the Attainable Housing Coalition in 2023, over 70 businesses, representing more than 5,100 employees, have signed on to support these efforts, along with 164 individual residents. Addressing this crisis through the development of workforce housing is imperative to reduce commuter dependency, ease infrastructure strain, and enhance the quality of life for residents and workers alike. The Attainable Housing Coalition is committed to driving meaningful change through several key initiatives, including:

- Advocating for zoning and policy changes to support attainable housing development.
- Encouraging public-private partnerships to increase funding and investment in workforce housing projects.
- Engaging with the community to shift perceptions and highlight the necessity of targeted growth
- Supporting infrastructure improvements that align with housing expansion to create sustainable, livable communities.

By taking proactive steps to expand attainable housing opportunities, St. Johns County can ensure a thriving, balanced community where essential workers are not just contributors — but also residents who can live, work and invest in the future of the county.



## VIV HELWIG NAMED SBA NORTH FLORIDA SMALL BUSINESSPERSON OF THE YEAR

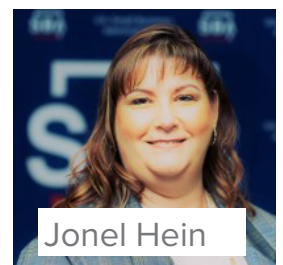


The U.S. Small Business Administration's North Florida district office is celebrating the district's Small Business Person of the Year and 5 additional honorees as it prepares for **National Small Business Week, which will take place May 4-10, 2025**. The SBA North Florida district is recognizing Chamber member Viv Helwig, owner of Vested Metals International as the North Florida Small Business Person of the Year for his impact and economic contributions. Mr. Helwig earned recognition due to his remarkable entrepreneurial journey—transforming a small, single-office startup into a thriving enterprise with a significant market presence. His leadership overcame early challenges to achieve substantial growth, expanding the company's footprint and driving impressive sales through innovative marketing strategies. Helwig's dedication and business acumen exemplify outstanding small-business success in North Florida.



*Viv Helwig, Vested Metals International*

“Our winners exemplify the best of entrepreneurship and small business leadership, contributing significantly to economic vitality across North Florida and beyond. Their vision, resilience, and dedication serve as an inspiration to the entire small business community,” said Jonel Hein, SBA North Florida District Director.



*Jonel Hein*



## ACCELERATEPV HOSTS OPEN HOUSE SHOWCASING ENTREPRENEURS IN NORTHEAST FLORIDA

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The St. Johns County Chamber recently hosted a ribbon cutting for AcceleratePV. They opened their doors to the community on May 15, inviting local business owners, entrepreneurs, investors, and supporters to an open house event highlighting the organization’s mission to support and grow entrepreneurship in Northeast Florida.

Guests had the opportunity to tour the space, meet the AcceleratePV team, and learn more about the programs and mentorship opportunities available to local startups and small businesses. The event also included networking with local leaders and a preview of upcoming workshops and educational sessions.

At its core, AcceleratePV exists to provide hands-on mentorship, expert-led education, and a strong support network for entrepreneurs. The organization’s goal is to create an environment where local businesses can launch, grow, and thrive—with guidance every step of the way.

“This isn’t just a workspace or a program—it’s a community,” said Kate Tunnell, Administrator of AcceleratePV. “Entrepreneurs here are surrounded by people who believe in what they’re building and are willing to walk alongside them.”

The open house reflected the strong momentum and growing interest in entrepreneurship across the region. AcceleratePV’s programming is open to entrepreneurs and business owners looking for practical tools, experienced guidance, and meaningful connections.

AcceleratePV hosts a 12 week educational program designed to help companies build and grow in Northeast Florida. At the end of the program participants pitch their businesses to the local community including investors.

For more information on upcoming events or how to get involved with AcceleratePV, visit [www.acceleratepv.com](http://www.acceleratepv.com)

# FIRST COAST TECHNICAL COLLEGE HASTINGS CAMPUS UPDATE



The Hastings Mainstreet Association's May meeting focused on First Coast Technical College's new Hastings Campus. Dr. Brennan Asplen discussed the renovation of Hastings High School, funded by a \$7.6 million ARPA grant and \$10 million from the school district, totaling \$17 million. The project, expected to be completed by December 2026, includes structural repairs, new windows, and a 1924 roof replacement. The first phase focuses on the building's exterior and a complete renovation of the first-floor interior.



Mr. George Mastordis

Mr. George Mastordis, Director of First Coast Technical College (FCTC), provided an update on the various programs scheduled to be offered on the campus. FCTC will offer programs like early childhood education and development, adult education and testing, medical assisting, cosmetology, and ESL programs. In addition, there will be community space and an early childhood daycare facility for the area. Mr. Mastordis said, "We know some of our students struggle to find childcare so they can attend classes. Having childcare on site will allow those students to succeed and advance their education."

Plans on the campus include an additional 20,000 sq. ft. workforce education building funded by a \$9.4 million EDA grant and \$1.8 million from the district. This project will provide a state-of-the-art training facility with classrooms and hands-on lab space to meet the growing demand for workforce training across the region. Initially, FCTC will offer Diesel Systems with an agricultural focus and a technical program focused on Solar and Alternative Energy. There is also plenty of land for future expansion. The workforce training facility is scheduled to be completed in March 2028.





## THE CHAMBER WELCOMES A SUMMER INTERN

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The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce is proud to welcome an outstanding intern to our team this summer as part of our continued commitment to fostering local talent and supporting workforce development.

**Mayukha Das**, an upcoming senior at Nease High School, is interning with our Economic Development department. During her time with the Chamber, Mayukha will gain valuable, hands-on experience in economic and community development initiatives that shape the future of St. Johns County.

Mayukha shares, *"I chose to intern with the Chamber's Economic Development Department because I'm interested in learning how our local economy grows and how businesses and residents contribute to that growth. Interning allows me to see how economic strategies can be applied to real-world problems."*

We are excited to support Mayukha as she explores her career interests and contributes meaningfully to the Chamber's mission. Her energy, curiosity, and perspective are a welcome addition to our efforts to advance the region's talent pipeline and build a brighter future for our community.

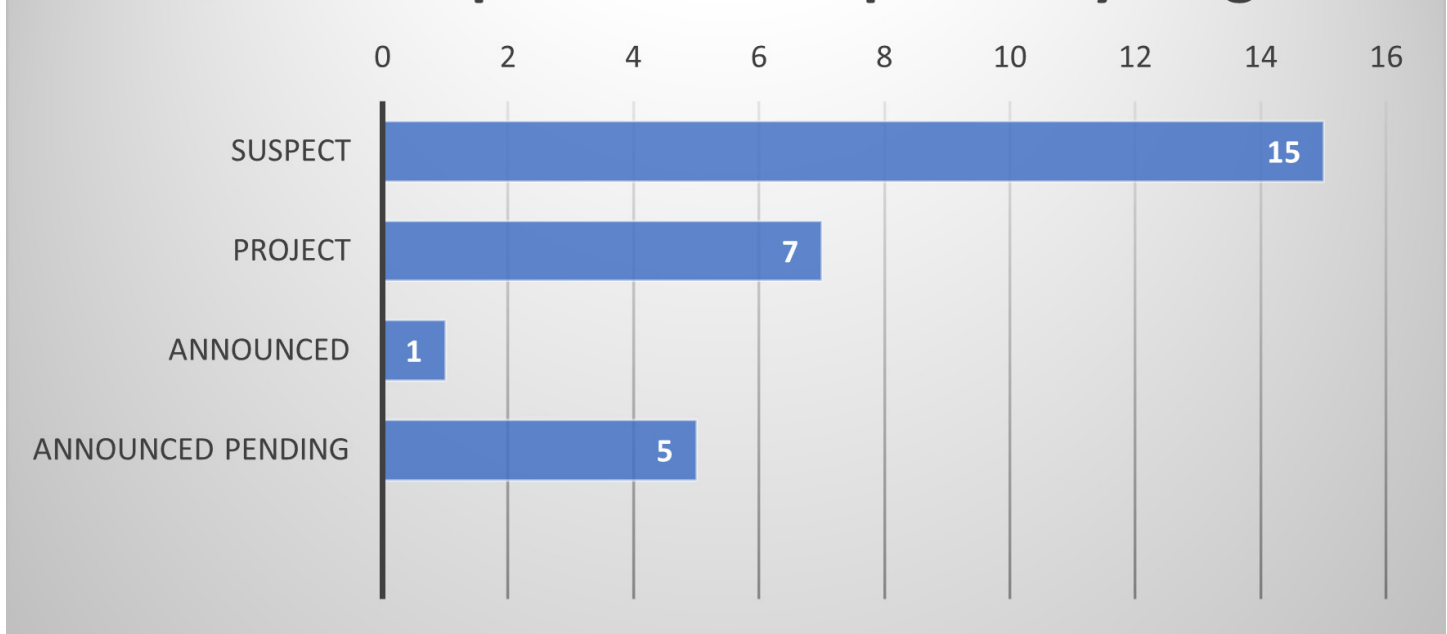
# ST. JOHNS COUNTY PROJECT PIPELINE

## Q3 – ALL PROJECTS IN THE PIPELINE FOR ST. JOHNS COUNTY

### STAGES OF A PROJECT IN THE PIPELINE

STAGE	DESCRIPTION
Suspect	EFI referrals, JAXUSA referrals, Chamber Member/Local Referrals, and Direct Inquiries with at least a 10% potential of moving forward.
Project	The project has real potential to select St. Johns County for new business, relocation, or expansion. The representative either has an existing business, has visited, or plans to visit St. Johns County.
Imminent	St. Johns County has been shortlisted among other potential locations.
Announced Pending	The project has selected St. Johns County and awaiting final approvals from County and other agencies to move forward.
Announced	The project has selected St. Johns County, and all final approvals are complete.

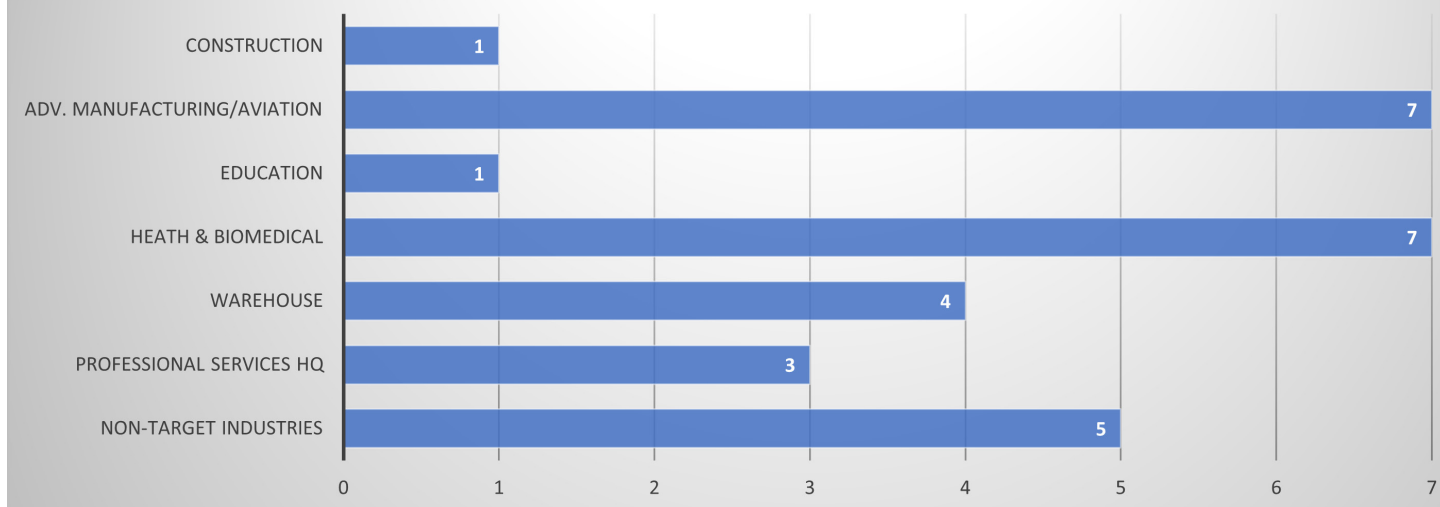
### Q3 All Prospects in the Pipeline By Stage



- At the end of Q3, there were a total of 28 active businesses in the pipeline. The announced pending project should be revealed in quarter three.
- These projects represented a wide variety of industrial types.

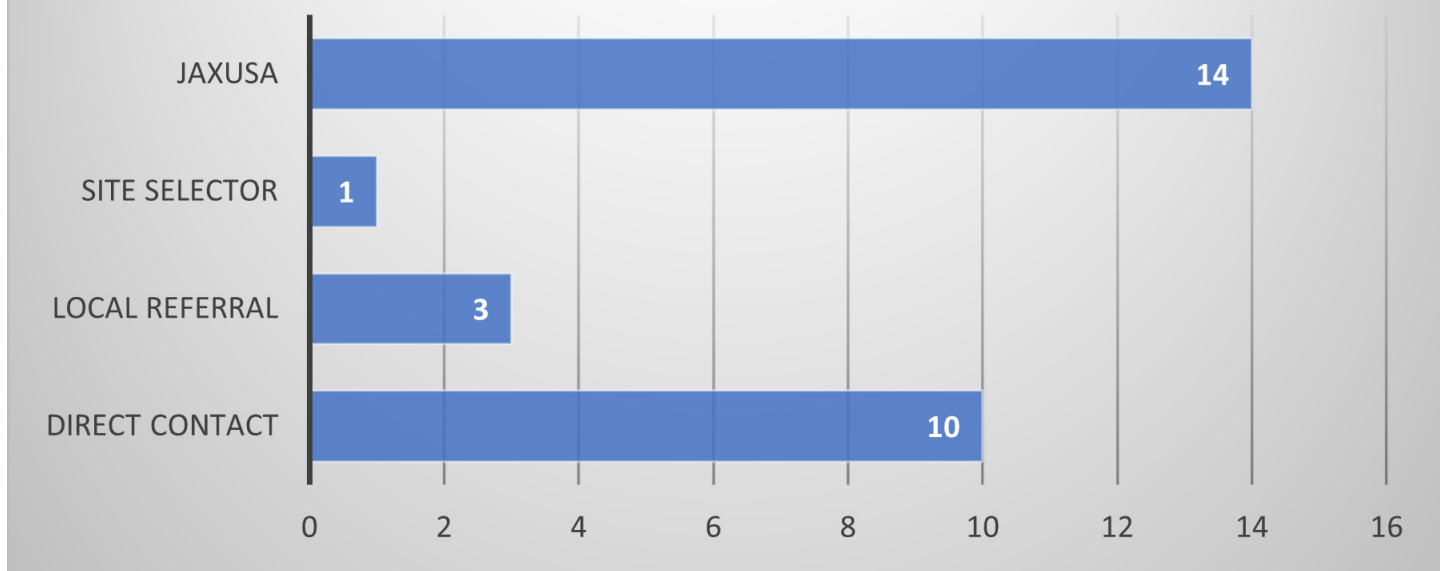


### Q3 All Prospects in the Pipeline By Industry



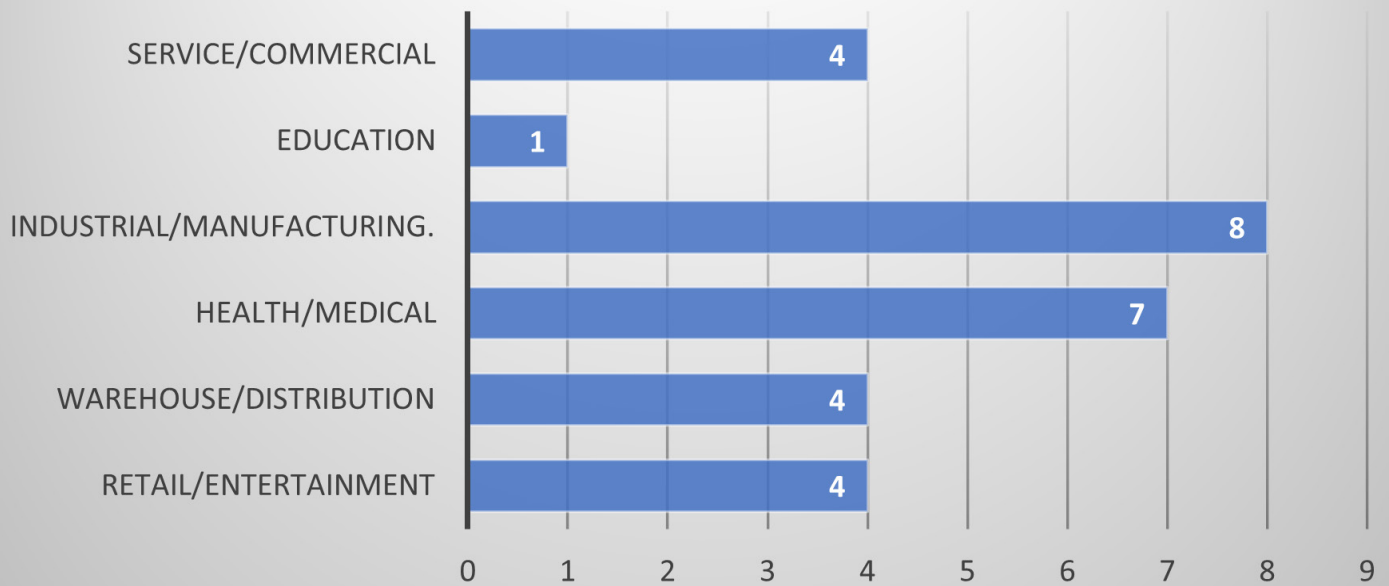
- There are a total of fourteen businesses in the pipeline for the targeted industries of Advanced Manufacturing/Aviation (7 projects), and Health and Biomedical (7 projects).
- The Education prospect is also directly related to manufacturing/aviation.

### Q3 All Prospects Active By Source



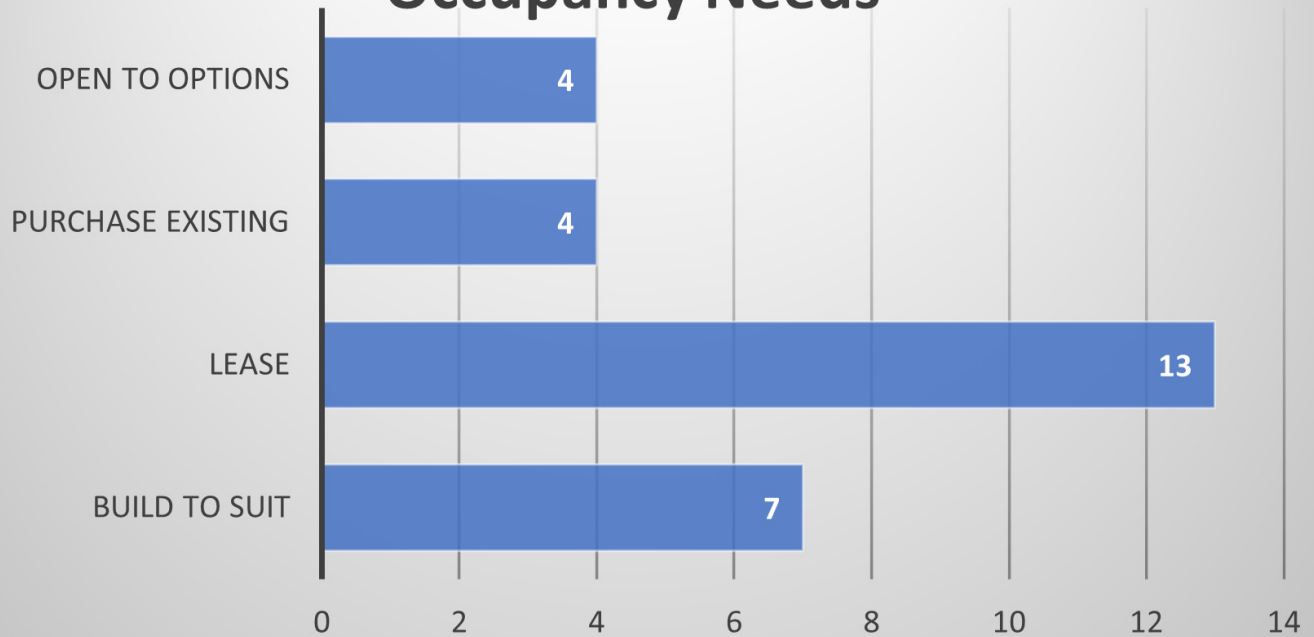
- JaxUSA continues to refer new projects. Quarter three had a significant increase over quarter two.
- Twenty-eight (28) total projects remained in the pipeline.

## Q3 All Prospects in the Pipeline By Facility Function



- Current projects in the pipeline will feature service or commercial space (4 projects), industrial or manufacturing space (8 projects), health or medical facilities (7 projects), warehouse/distribution (4 projects), retail/entertainment space (4 projects) and education/training space (1 project).
- The Foundry Project on World Golf Parkway added 500,000 square feet of warehouse/light industrial space in quarter two of 2025. The 500,000 square foot KeHE project is in the final stages of construction with a ribbon cutting scheduled in quarter 4.

## Q3 All Prospects in Pipeline By Occupancy Needs



- The majority of the current projects in the pipeline seek to lease (13 projects) or build-to-suit space (7 projects).
- Four projects indicated an interest in purchasing an existing building in St. Johns County while the other four were open to exploring all options.

