

St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce
Economic Development Council

2024–2025 QUARTER 2 REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The first quarter ended with Mr. David Altig, executive vice president and chief economic adviser at the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, serving as guest speaker at the December EDC Breakfast. Mr. Altig told us he wasn't sure what to expect with the new Federal administration, and as we get closer to the 100th day, I can safely say he was right. Federal and State politics are in full swing, and we are monitoring legislation that affects our members closely. Please take the time to read your legislative update, which comes out every two weeks while the state legislature is in session.

We continue to focus on workforce development and the talent pipeline as one of our main goals. The Chamber hosted a panel discussion on Workforce in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry. Topics included hiring for internships, recruiting students, engaging with educational institutions, and best practices for retention. During Flagler College's Business Week, the Chamber hosted an engaging event that brought together Flagler students, faculty, and regional employers, creating a platform for meaningful discussions about internships and career prospects in St. Johns County.

Our county is continuing to develop as the medical hub for Northeast Florida. AdventHealth held its groundbreaking for the new 12-bed off-site emergency department (OSED) to expand services in the rapidly growing area. AdventHealth also purchased additional property in the World Golf Commerce Center for future expansion. This new facility brings another major healthcare provider further into St. Johns County. They join UF Health St. Johns, Baptist, HCA, Acadia Behavioral Health, and TyME, which have active medical construction projects in the county.

The Chamber launched our Chamber Hour Radio Show on March 1. The show will air on the first Saturday of each month, highlight important initiatives, celebrate member accomplishments, and provide useful information for our community. We want to thank Sarah Arnold for being our inaugural guest for that show. Our April show featured Dave Chatterton with Historic Tours of America, who discussed Autism Awareness Month and their process of becoming an Autism Certified Destination, and Kim Jones with Tropical Vibes, who discussed her success after participating in the 2023 Pitch Factory Cohort.

The Chamber's Pitch Factory Entrepreneurship Program will kick off again on June 2. Registration is now open. If you know of a small business or entrepreneur who would benefit from this program, please have them contact us.

EDC 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

Throughout the first quarter Chamber Staff participated in educational training and activities with partner agencies including:

Jan. 10	SJC State Legislative Delegation Hearing	Feb. 27	Hurricane Loss Mitigation Meeting (ESF-18)
Jan. 13	Industrial Development Authority Meeting	Feb. 28	Creekside Mock Interviews
Jan. 22	FloridaCommerce Future of Work Florida Webinar	Mar. 3-7	Flagler College Business Week
Jan. 23-24	Florida Power and Light Illumination Conference	Mar. 4	Building Momentum with AI training
Jan. 30	AI Tsunami Group Chamber Overview	Mar. 4	Ponte Vedra High School Mock Interviews
Jan. 31	Visitor Information Center Winter Showcase	Mar. 10	Industrial Development Authority Meeting
Feb. 10	Industrial Development Authority Meeting	Mar. 11	Legislative Presentation for Black History Museum
Feb. 11	2024 FEMA Hurricane Listening Session (ESF-18)	Mar. 11	Beachside High School Mock Interviews
Feb. 11	St Johns County Dementia Care and Cure Initiative	Mar. 11-16	Players Championship
Feb. 13 J	AXUSA State of the Region Meeting	Mar. 14	Guest Speaking Flagler College Economics/Business Classes
Feb. 13	JAXUSA Partner Meeting		
Feb. 20	St. Augustine Career Fair at St. Johns River State College		
Feb. 20	Select Florida Program Benefits Meeting		
Feb. 21	Guest Speaking Flagler College Economics Classes		
Feb. 26	First Coast Expressway Summit		

BUSINESS EDUCATION TRAINING & COMMUNITY OUTREACH EFFORTS

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

- Jan. 2 Public Policy Committee Meeting
- Jan. 7 Chamber Ambassador Meeting
- Jan. 8 Economic Development Council Meeting
- Jan. 9 Joint Chamber at Noon with Players Championship Executive Director Lee Smith

- Jan. 23 Leadership St. Johns Social Service Day
- Jan. 29 Chamber Board Meeting
- Jan. 29 Chamber After Hours – The Social Society



- Jan. 10-11 Leadership St. Johns Retreat
- Jan. 14 Ponte Vedra Division Board Meeting
- Jan. 15 Castillo de San Marcos Certified Autism Certification Press Conference
- Jan. 16 Joint Tourism & Hospitality Council and HSAAC Meeting - Workforce solutions in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry

- Feb. 4 Chamber Foundation Board Meeting
- Feb. 4 Chamber Ambassador Meeting
- Feb. 5 Women with Vision - Dr. Jessica Marshall, AdventHealth
- Feb. 11 Ponte Vedra Division Board Meeting
- Feb. 12 Economic Development Council Meeting
- Feb. 19 Chamber After Hours – Vista Wellness
- Feb. 20 Leadership St. Johns First Responders Day
- Feb. 26 Chamber Board Meeting



Feb. 26 Chamber After Hours – St. John Knits



Mar. 26 Chamber Board Meeting

Mar. 26 Leadership St. Johns Education Day

Mar. 26 Chamber After Hours – Basecamp Fitness Fruit Cove

Feb. 27 BizzED – Eddie Creamer
Understanding taxes on
Commercial Property

Feb. 27 Board of Advisors Legislative Dinner

Mar. 1 The Chamber Hour Radio Show –
Commissioner Sarah Arnold, Guest

Mar. 4 Ponte Vedra Division Board Meeting

Mar. 4 Chamber After Hours – Flagler
College Business Week

Mar. 5 Board of Directors Dinner hosted by
First Citizens Bank – Guest speaker,
Sara Maxfield, SJC Executive
Director of Economic Development

Mar. 6 Joint Chamber After Hours - Night
at The Players



Mar. 20 Chamber Attainable Housing
Coalition Meeting

Mar. 25 Learning from Leaders

RIBBON CUTTINGS, GRAND OPENINGS & GROUNDBREAKINGS

- Jan. 8 Epic Theater ribbon cutting
- Jan. 9 Rise at Nocatee ribbon cutting
- Jan. 21 Rolland Reash Plumbing ribbon cutting
- Jan. 22 Cereset Ponte Vedra ribbon cutting



- Jan. 23 Diesel Barbershop IOP Place ribbon cutting



- Feb. 15 The ST. Augustine Amphitheatre Debuts New AMP Shop, Box Office, And the Kookaburra Coffee Outpost



- Feb. 19 Vista Wellness ribbon cutting



- Feb. 27 Your Health Primary Care ribbon cutting

- Mar. 5 The Dirt Destroyer ribbon cutting



- Mar. 6 The Fresh Market ribbon cutting

ADVENTHEALTH BREAKS GROUND IN ST. JOHNS COUNTY



After growing for years in nearby Flagler County, [AdventHealth](#) is taking its first step into St. Johns County with more plans for future growth. The health care provider officially broke ground on its standalone Emergency Room facility at State Road 207. This facility will be located east of I-95 near the intersection of S.R. 207 and Wildwood Drive. It will feature a 12-bed emergency department and is set to open in early 2026. The project is on almost 11 acres of land.

For more than 20 years, AdventHealth has been a part of the Flagler County health care industry. It has invested over \$200 million in recent years in health care infrastructure, including a new hospital, cancer treatment center and more physicians. “Having the presence we’ve had in Flagler County for many, many years now is just a natural extension to move across the county lines and to be able to offer that care here,” said David Weis, Regional President of AdventHealth East Florida.

“ADVENT HEALTH BREAKS GROUND”

Continued on Page 8



David Weis, Advent Health

Denyse Bales-Chubb, the President and CEO of AdventHealth Palm Coast/Flagler/St. John's Market said, "This new emergency department will provide expert immediate care when minutes matter the most, but just as important, it will connect patients seamlessly to follow up care, ensuring that they have the support they need beyond the ER, designed with the latest medical technology and staffed by a team of highly skilled emergency medicine clinicians, this er will serve this community with excellence, making emergency care more accessible and reducing wait times. But the impact goes far beyond that. When we build new facilities like this, we create jobs, first in construction and development, then in healthcare operations and supporting local businesses. This kind of investment strengthens the entire community. We are grateful for the support of local leaders and community members who share our vision for a healthier St Johns County. Your partnership is invaluable and has helped bring this vision to life."



AdventHealth has other plans for expansion in St. Johns County. In February, it spent more than \$13 million to acquire about 21.5 acres of land in the World Golf Village for a future project. "We're still working out the full scope of what that project will be," Weis said.

BUSINESS RETENTION AND EXPANSION

CHAMBER OPPOSES RESCINDING NON-RESIDENTIAL CONCURRENCY FEES

At a recent St. Johns County Board of Commissioners meeting, Scott Maynard spoke on behalf of the Chamber and its members to oppose the ordinance to rescind the existing commercial exemption for non-residential concurrency fees.

Concurrency fees in St. Johns County are based on the number of peak-hour trips generated by the new project. The business owner would pay these fees upfront. Large corporations build these fee estimates into their development budgets as a cost of doing business. However, for small businesses trying to open or expand, these upfront fees determine whether the business owner can even afford to open up or expand.



Commissioner Christian Whitehurst

Commissioner Christian Whitehurst said during the discussion, “I had our staff research to put some real numbers to this. For Commissioner Murphy to open Sonny’s Bar-B-Q, he would have been required to pay an additional \$513,188. The new V-Pizza, north of the airport, would have been required to pay an additional \$4,405,617 to open its doors. This would be perceived as a tax to open a business. It is hard enough to open a new business. It would be unconscionable for us to consider a new fee that would stand in the way of an individual trying to open a new business.”

Another crucial factor in the discussion highlights that St. Johns County currently has a severely unbalanced tax base. Residential developments provide over 87 percent of the tax revenue, while commercial businesses contribute less than 13 percent. A more balanced residential /commercial tax base ratio would be 70% residential and 30% commercial.

The current imbalance is unsustainable in the long run as the volatility of the residential real estate market is subject to the whiplash of severe price swings as we saw during the recession of 2007-2009, making it even more critical for the County to encourage, not discourage businesses from opening and expanding. In the past 5 years, the total assessed value of commercial real estate has increased by 74% from 3.6 billion to 6.3 billion. Encouraging small businesses to open and expand brings new tax dollars and employees to St. Johns County, providing additional benefits and revenue.

The County Commission voted 3-2 not to proceed with this ordinance change. The Chamber appreciates the commission’s support on this issue. We believe that the existing concurrency fee exemption for non-residential projects should be maintained in the public interest to continue growing our employment and tax base.

CHAMBER FOUNDATION LAUNCHES 25TH LEADERSHIP ST. JOHNS CLASS



The new year kicked off with the 25th Leadership St. Johns (LSJ) class retreat. This cohort of 29 individuals marks the largest class ever. Since 2000, more than 400 community leaders have graduated from Leadership St. Johns. The program provides structured, interactive programs and activities emphasizing local economic, education, government and volunteerism issues, among others.

Leadership St. Johns accelerates the development of leadership skills for business, government and community professionals by building relationships and enhancing their knowledge of St. Johns County. Participants at all levels of career advancement establish themselves as key players in the county's business landscape as they make connections with a diverse group of civic, business and community leaders, professionals and advocates to build a powerful network.

With representation from every business sector in St. Johns County, employers of LSJ participants value the experience and knowledge gained as participants use these new tools to advance the organizations' goals and make an ongoing positive difference in the community. LSJ is the cornerstone program of the [St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Foundation](#), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening the local business community through leadership opportunities, economic development programs and continuing education.



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS

CHAMBER HOSTS WORKFORCE PANEL FOR TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY



The Chamber recently hosted a panel discussion on *Workforce in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry*. David Rivera, Flagler College; Ashley Wimpelberg, St. Johns County School District; Jennifer Bowmaster, FCTC, and Beth Abstein, FCTC, served on the panel. Topics included hiring for internships, recruiting students, engaging with educational institutions, and best practices for retention.

"CHAMBER HOSTS WORKFORCE PANEL" Continued on Page 12



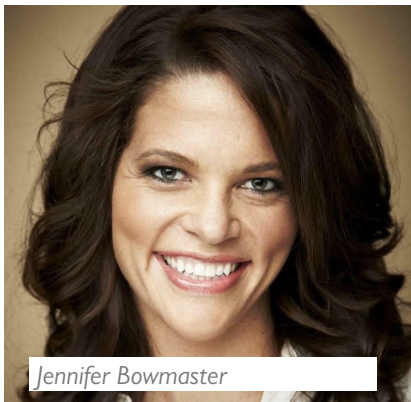
Ashley Wimpleberg

Ashley Wimpleberg, Work-based Learning Coordinator with the SJC School District, provided an overview of the district's CTE Program. She said, "The St. Johns County School District has 29 career academies at nine high schools. Around 60% of our high school students, a little over 10,000, are enrolled in a CTE program at the high school level. We are very proud of that." Through that program, the district provides numerous ways for students to experience their field of study. Wimpleberg said, "The district offers a very structured internship program. We always look for business partners to host a student in the summer. It is a minimum of six weeks, 120 hours, for an unpaid internship, or if they're producing work for you, then it would be expected to be a paid internship, which could be for the whole summer." Studies have shown that internships provide tremendous value in helping students solidify their career choices. If they can experience it early, they can make a more informed decision.



Dr. David Riveria

Working directly with the students is also essential at every level. The opportunity to develop soft skills and industry certifications while still in school makes students more marketable at graduation. David Riveria, Director of the Hospitality and Tourism Department at Flagler College, works nationwide with tourism and hospitality employers. He points out, "One of the easiest ways to develop a relationship with a school is through the Career Development Center. They can disperse the information to many different individuals and assist students with resumes and interviewing skills."



Jennifer Bowmaster

Students also want to hear directly from leaders in the industry. Jennifer Bowmaster, Dean of Student Services with First Coast Technical College (FCTC), told the employers in attendance, "Your experience is valuable to what our students need to hear. They want to understand your career path and the challenges that you have faced. It helps them envision themselves in that role." Beth Abstein, Career Specialist at FCTC, added, "Sometimes what our instructors say day-to-day falls on deaf ears, but when they hear another industry professional say the same thing, they begin to take note."



Beth Abstein

Employers interested in hiring graduates and interns or hosting job shadow students can contact the speakers directly to learn more. Each institution offers opportunities to serve as a guest speaker or on an advisory board. We all must invest in our Workforce's development to ensure it is prepared for the employment opportunities we have here.

ST. JOHNS COUNTY TEAMS SHINE AT FIRST LEGO LEAGUE REGIONAL TOURNAMENT



On January 17-18, 2025, nine outstanding teams from St. Johns County proudly represented their schools and organizations at the **First LEGO League Regional Tournament** in Alachua, FL. Competing against the top 30% of teams across Northeast Florida, these groups showcased exceptional innovation, teamwork, and determination in the fields of robotics, engineering, and project design. Programs like this help provide exposure to STEM education as well as teaching soft skills like communications, teamwork, time management and critical thinking.

The St. Johns County teams who advanced to this prestigious event included:

- High Tech Hunt from R.B Hunt Elementary
- Moof Monsters from Bolles School
- BROs from Bolles School
- Shooting Stars from St Johns County
- Charger Tech Bots from Patriot Oaks Academy
- Wards Creek Elementary Warriors
- Swiss Submarines from Switzerland Point Middle School
- Durbin Creek Elementary School Robotics
- Charger Trons from Patriot Oaks Academy
- Aquatechs from Code Ninjas Ponte Vedra

"ST. JOHNS COUNTY TEAMS SHINE" Continued on Page 14

These teams joined 60 elite groups from a field of over 200, earning their place at regionals through months of hard work, creativity, and preparation. They competed in a series of events testing their robot design, programming, and core values, as well as their ability to innovate and present solutions to real-world challenges.

Ryan Clark, Vice President of Builders of Tomorrow, praised the students for their dedication and professionalism. "The enthusiasm and effort displayed by all the teams were inspiring. This was a fantastic opportunity for these young innovators to put their skills to the test, learn from one another, and celebrate their accomplishments," said Ryan.

The competition took place at **Legacy Park Multipurpose Center** in Alachua, where the energy and excitement were palpable as students presented their projects and tackled challenges on the robot competition tables.

Celebrating Excellence

Every team brought their unique perspective and creative flair to the event, and their success in advancing to regionals reflects the thriving STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) culture in St. Johns County.

The event organizers and coaches emphasized the importance of fostering a passion for STEM disciplines. "It's not just about the robots; it's about developing problem-solving skills, creativity, teamwork, and confidence. These students are tomorrow's innovators," remarked Joel, a long-time coach and mentor.

Looking Ahead

The First LEGO League Regional Tournament served as a platform for young minds to push boundaries and explore their potential. As they continue their journeys in robotics and STEM, these teams have proven that St. Johns County is a hub of innovation and talent.

Congratulations to all the teams on their remarkable achievements!

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

PITCH FACTORY ANNOUNCES 2025 DATES



The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Pitch Factory has announced upcoming dates for the 2025 Pitch Factory. This year's cohort will begin on Tuesday, June 3 and meet each Tuesday night through July 15. The 2024 cohort had over 25 participants, and 17 competed in the final pitches. After the final pitch, participants received valuable feedback from the judges and developed knowledge and confidence to take their business to the next level. Mentorship continues throughout the year.

The Chamber is honored to partner with the Women's Business Center and the JAX Chamber to bring an exciting opportunity for entrepreneurs in St. Johns County. Inspired by the [JAX Bridges program](#), "The Pitch Factory" is a six-week workshop that will prepare entrepreneurs to bring their businesses to the next level by helping to develop and refine their pitches and strategy.

Through a Women's Business Center grant this program is offered free of charge to allow everyone the opportunity to participate. Thank you to Ascension St. Vincent's Hospital for again hosting the 2025 classes in their training space. See what the participants thought in the video on the St. Johns Chamber of Commerce YouTube Channel. For more information on the program contact Scott Maynard at scott.maynard@sjcchamber.com.

CHAMBER SUPPORTS FLAGLER COLLEGE BUSINESS WEEK



During Flagler College’s Business Week, an event known for fostering learning, networking, and career-building opportunities, the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce played a pivotal role in connecting students with local businesses. The Chamber hosted an engaging event that brought together Flagler students, faculty, and regional employers, creating a platform for meaningful discussions about internships and career prospects in St. Johns County.

The event emphasized the Chamber’s commitment to economic development and workforce growth, highlighting the importance of bridging the gap between education and professional opportunities. Aliyah Meyer, Economic Development Coordinator for the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce, spoke about how her own experience at Flagler College prepared her for a career in economics. She credited her professors for providing both a strong academic foundation and the guidance necessary to build her career path. Meyer passionately encouraged students to engage with local businesses, highlighting how their curiosity and ambition could benefit both the regional economy and their personal growth. Her words resonated with attendees: *“Keep striving, keep learning, and keep making a difference.”*

SIDNEY CLARK NAMED 2024 CENTER DIRECTOR OF THE YEAR BY CODE NINJAS

Code Ninjas is thrilled to announce that Chamber member Sidney Clark, Center Director of Code Ninjas World Golf, has been awarded the prestigious title of Center Director of the Year for 2024. This accolade, bestowed upon her as the top-performing Center Director across the 340 Code Ninjas locations in the U.S., U.K., and Canada, celebrates Sidney's exceptional leadership, innovative approach to STEM education, and her unwavering dedication to the community.

A Trailblazer in STEM Education

Sidney Clark's impact goes far beyond her role as a center director. Her leadership has been instrumental in transforming Code Ninjas World Golf into a vibrant hub for STEM education in Northeast Florida. Under Sidney's guidance, Code Ninjas World Golf has experienced impressive growth, achieving milestones that have set new standards for the region and the brand.

Congratulations Sidney!



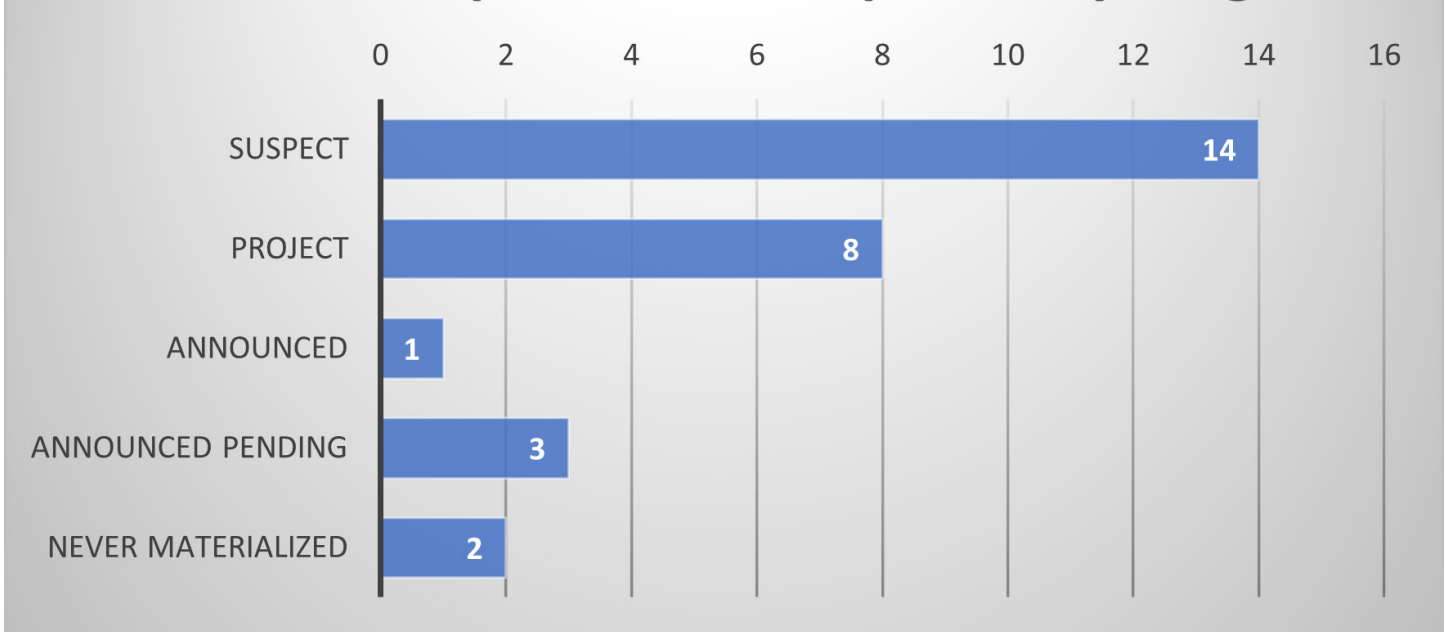
ST. JOHNS COUNTY PROJECT PIPELINE

Q2 – ALL PROJECTS IN THE PIPELINE FOR ST. JOHNS COUNTY

STAGES OF A PROJECT IN THE PIPELINE

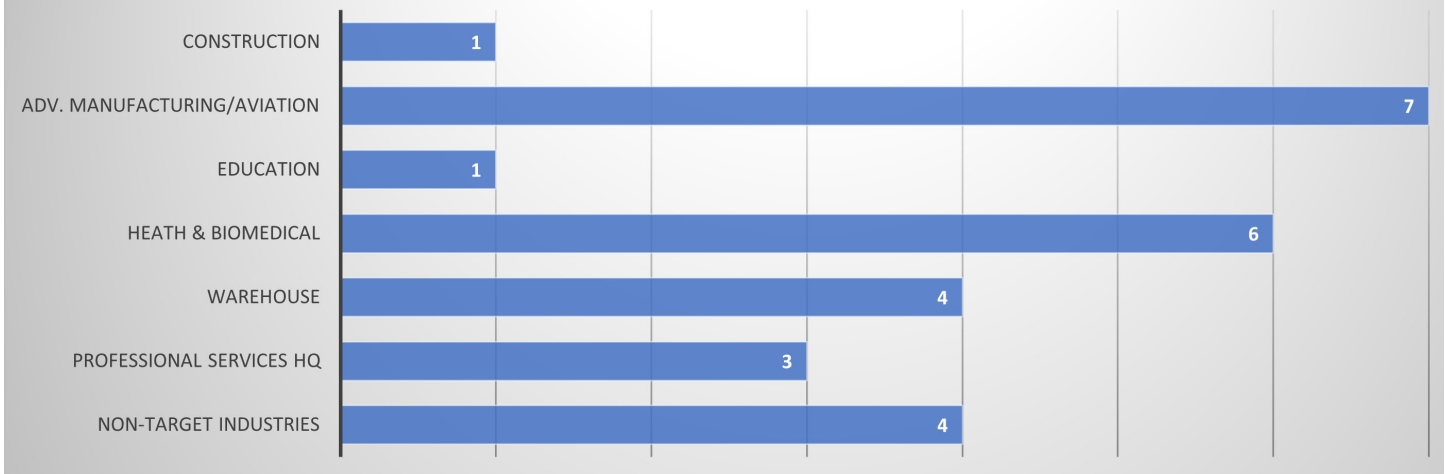
STAGE	DESCRIPTION
Suspect	EFI referrals, JAXUSA referrals, Chamber Member/Local Referrals, and Direct Inquiries with at least a 10% potential of moving forward.
Project	The project has real potential to select St. Johns County for new business, relocation, or expansion. The representative either has 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.

Q2 All Prospects in the Pipeline By Stage



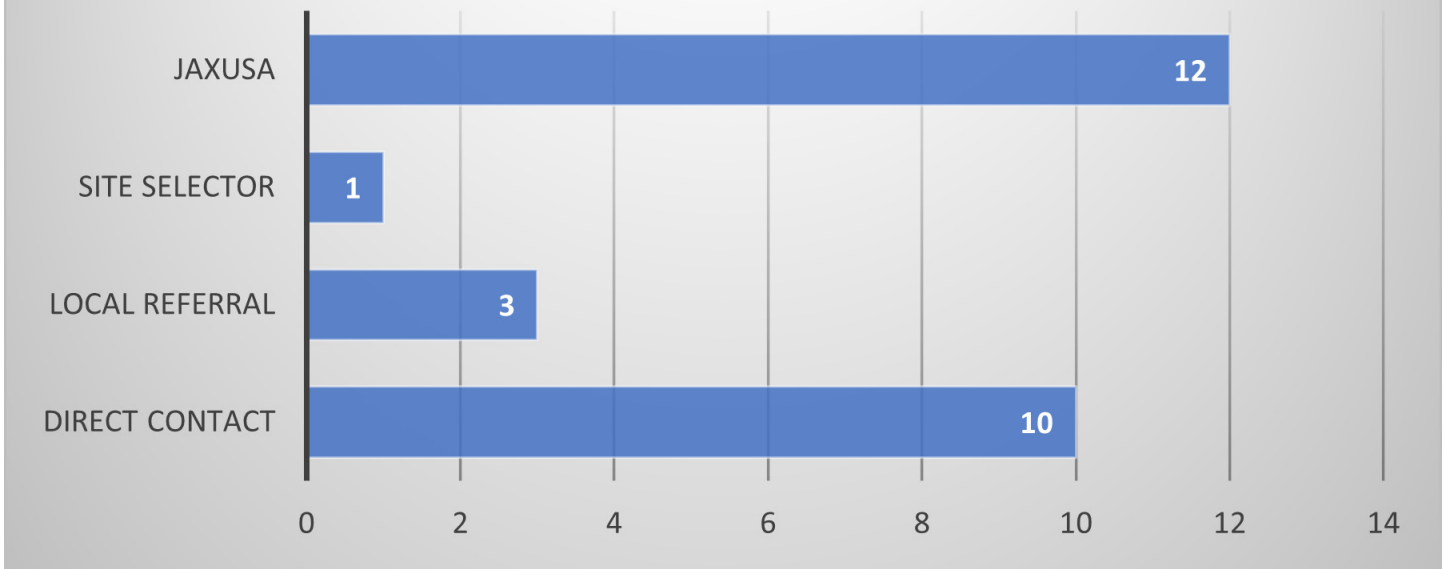
- At the end of Q2, there were a total of 26 active businesses in the pipeline. The announced pending project should be revealed in quarter three.
- These projects represented a wide variety of industrial types.

Q2 All Prospects in the Pipeline By Industry



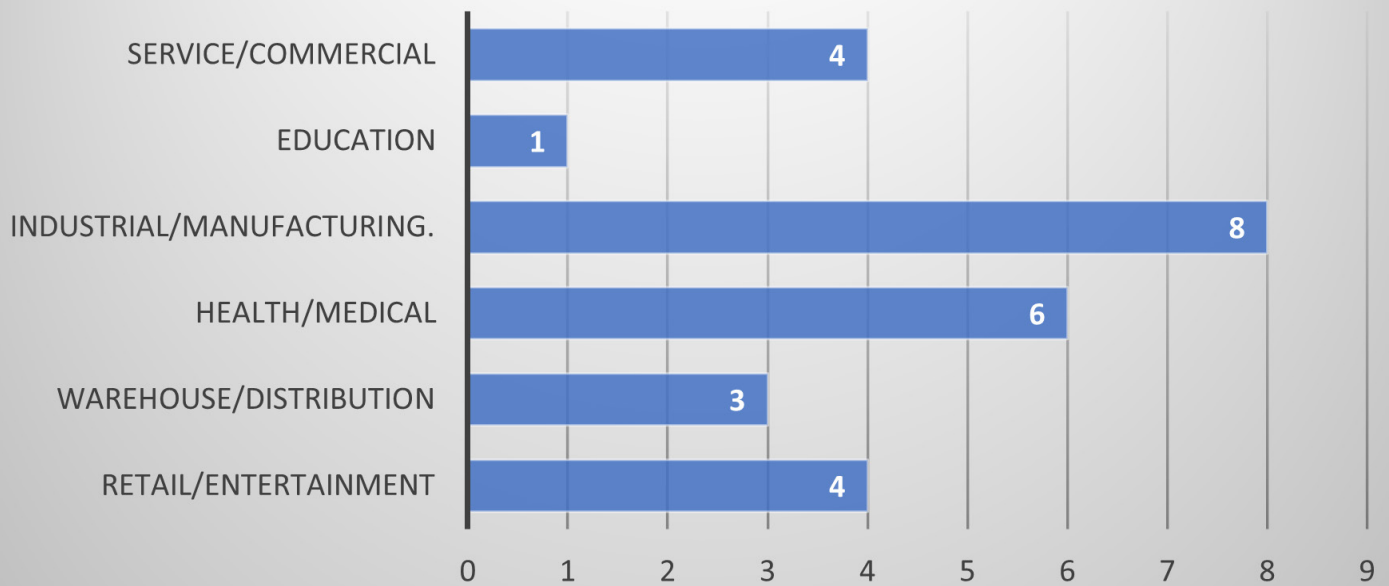
- There are a total of thirteen businesses in the pipeline for the targeted industries of Advanced Manufacturing/Aviation (7 projects), and Health and Biomedical (6 projects).
- The Education prospect is also directly related to manufacturing/aviation.

Q2 All Prospects Active By Source



- JaxUSA continues to refer new projects. Quarter two had a significant increase over quarter one as we entered the new calendar year.
- Twenty-six (26) total projects remained in the pipeline.

Q2 All Prospects in the Pipeline By Facility Function



- Current projects in the pipeline seek service or commercial space (4 projects), industrial or manufacturing space (8 projects), health or medical facilities (6 projects), warehouse/distribution (3 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.

Q2 All Prospects in Pipeline By Occupancy Needs



- The majority of the current projects in the pipeline seek to lease (11 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.



ST. JOHNS
C O U N T Y
CHAMBER
OF COMMERCE

Economic Development Council