

St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce  
Economic Development Council

# 2024–2025 QUARTER 1 REPORT



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The first quarter of 2024-2025 has started strong. After a slow September and October, tourism numbers rebounded strongly to end the year. The County welcomed two new commissioners as the local, regional, and national elections unfolded. Ann Taylor and Clay Murphy joined the board along with Christian Whitehurst's reelection. The board elected Krista Joseph to serve as Chair for this year.

The voters in St. Johns County also passed two separate tax referendums on the November ballot. The Board of Directors of the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce supported the extension of the ½ cent sales tax and the 1-mill increase on property taxes. These were crucial investments in our schools and students, as an educated workforce is one of the greatest assets to any community. The Chamber is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that does not endorse political candidates but does weigh in on specific issues that can impact the business community.

The EDC Breakfast series welcomed David Altig, executive vice president and chief economic advisor at the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, as the program's featured speaker for the first event of this fiscal year. Altig shared information about the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta's latest monetary policy and how it affects business and industry in our region. He also discussed inflation and its local impact. Altig also provided a national economic forecast and shared key performance indicators businesses should monitor in the coming months.

Mobility needs are still a significant concern in the County. During a recent open house meeting, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) shared details about the next phase of the First Coast Expressway. The project will connect the First Coast Expressway construction in Clay County to St. Johns County with the construction of a new four-lane bridge over the St. Johns River just south of where the Shands Bridge currently stands. The bridge will then move across the County to connect to I-95 between the State Road 210 and World Golf Parkway exits.

Finally, the Chamber ended the year with the CELEBRATE Annual Awards Ceremony, where various business leaders who made their mark in the community this year were recognized. The event marked the 120th year of the Chamber. Chamber CEO Isabelle Renault read a proclamation from the Congressional Record provided by Congressman John Rutherford and a timeline unveiled, marking the history of the Chamber. Historic Tours of America provided period-attired actors to take the group back to 1904 when the Chamber membership first gathered. The 1904 Celebrate event featured President Teddy Roosevelt as the keynote speaker.

Welcome to 2025!

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL: PURPOSE & ROLE

## PURPOSE

The purpose of the Economic Development Council is multifaceted: to promote the economic growth of St. Johns County by attracting new business and industry into the community, enhancing the growth and expansion of existing business and industry, fostering entrepreneurialism and innovation and supporting workforce development and business education programs and serving as the ESF 18 business and industry lead for emergency response and disaster recovery 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:

Oct. 3	CEIA Workforce Development Seminar	Nov. 16	FCTC Institutional Advisory Committee Meeting
Oct. 14	Industrial Development Authority Meeting	Nov. 21	St. Johns County LMS Meeting
Oct. 15	AdventHealth Robotic Surgery Showcase	Nov. 21	Tiger Bay Club Meeting – Flagler County
Oct. 16	Grow Story Live Event with Solar Stik	Nov. 17	JAXUSA Regional Partner Meeting
Oct. 17	JAXUSA Business Development Committee	Nov. 17	St. Johns River State College Business Advisory Board
Oct. 24	JAXUSA Regional Partner Meeting	Dec. 3	Distributive Education Competition Judging
Oct. 29	23rd Annual Tourism and Hospitality Industry Celebration	Dec. 5	Junior Leadership St. Johns Presentation
Nov. 6	JAXUSA Talent Engagement Committee Meeting	Dec. 6	JAXUSA Regional Partner Meeting
Nov. 11	Industrial Development Authority Meeting	Dec. 9	Industrial Development Authority Meeting
Nov. 12	JAXUSA Regional Partner Meeting	Dec. 11	St. Johns County School District Career Academy Showcase
Nov. 14	Beachside High School Biomedical Advisory Board	Dec. 14	STEM Falcon Flight Regional Qualifier
Nov. 15	St. Johns River State College Business Advisory Board		



# BUSINESS EDUCATION TRAINING & COMMUNITY OUTREACH EFFORTS

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

Oct. 16 PVBD Chamber Before Hours – K9's For Warriors



Oct. 24 Chamber After Hours – Flagler College

Oct. 29 Tourism and Hospitality Mini Expo

Oct. 31 Joint Chamber at Noon – John Rutherford

Nov. 6 Chamber Before Hours – Fountain of Youth



Oct. 17 Chamber Before Hours – St. Johns County Public Library

Oct. 23 PVBD Chamber After Hours – Ponte Vedra Recorder



Nov. 6 Chamber After Hours – DJ's Clam Shack

Nov. 7 Women with Vision Veterans Day Luncheon





Nov. 8 Sea Serpent Air Boat Tour  
 Nov. 14 Celebrate – 120 Years  
 Nov. 19 Joint Tourism and Hospitality /  
 HSAAC – St. Augustine Lighthouse  
 Turns 150

Dec. 4 HR Roundtable Webinar –  
 Constangy, Brooks, Smith and  
 Prophete LLP  
 Dec 6 EDC Breakfast – David Altig,  
 Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta  
 Dec. 12 PVBD Jingle and Mingle – Fantasy  
 Farms



## RIBBON CUTTINGS, GRAND OPENINGS & GROUNDBREAKINGS

Oct. 1 Island Fin Poke ribbon cutting



Oct. 3 A Classic Theatre Inc. ribbon cutting

Oct. 4 Body Fit Training ribbon cutting

Oct. 15 Fury Adventures ribbon cutting



Oct. 17 Ability Tree First Coast ribbon cutting

Oct. 28 Valhallan St. Johns ribbon cutting



Nov. 1 Art Collective St. Augustine ribbon cutting



Nov. 22 Hounds Town St. Augustine ribbon cutting

Dec. 5 Ideal Dental ribbon cutting

Dec. 5 Ivybrook Academy Valley Ridge ribbon cutting

Dec. 11 Hydrolight Lounge ribbon cutting

Dec. 12 The Sweet Spot ribbon cutting



Nov. 7 Legacy Roofing and Solar ribbon cutting

Nov. 8 Retail Reviver ribbon cutting

Nov. 13 Kilwins St. Johns-Beachwalk ribbon cutting



Dec. 17 Brightside Pediatrics ribbon cutting

Dec. 18 Panda Express ribbon cutting

Nov. 15 The Legacy Retirement Group ribbon cutting

Nov. 21 Keller Williams St. Johns ribbon cutting



# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL QUARTERLY BREAKFAST EVENT DECEMBER 6, 2024



Looking ahead was the focus of the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce's quarterly Economic Development Council Breakfast on Friday, Dec. 6, in St. Augustine. The Chamber welcomed David Altig, executive vice president and chief economic advisor at the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, as the program's featured speaker. He shared information about the latest monetary policy from the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta and how it affects business and industry in our region. He also discussed inflation and its local impact. Altig also provided a national economic forecast and shared key performance indicators businesses should monitor in the coming months.

In his predictions for the year, Altig pointed out that forecasting is a best guess, and this year was "rock solid" despite indications that the economy would not be as strong as it is.



“The economy is remarkably robust even in the face of historically rapidly tightening monetary policy,” he told attendees, noting that election years are not always this friendly to economic activity. Altig also explained that the Federal Reserve does not make policy but is a “taker” of policy from Washington, D.C.

Altig also noted that every new administration brings changes and adjustments. Policy decisions, such as tariffs, could decrease spending if prices are adversely affected, and the expansion of AI into business and the market could also have an effect. The latest data shows that most unskilled jobs have not been affected by AI, and only a fraction of high-skill workers use the technology significantly. Productivity has remained high even as the labor market has softened, and immigration is helping to keep labor market inflation low by making up for the lower birth rate among US citizens.

During the EDC Quarterly Breakfast, the Chamber recognized the Jacksonville Aviation Authority, England Thims & Miller Inc. and the Jacksonville Transportation Authority for their contributions to the Chamber and the Region. All three organizations play a vital role in economic development for the area.



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# CONSTRUCTION OF FIRST COAST EXPRESSWAY STARTS IN ST. JOHNS COUNTY

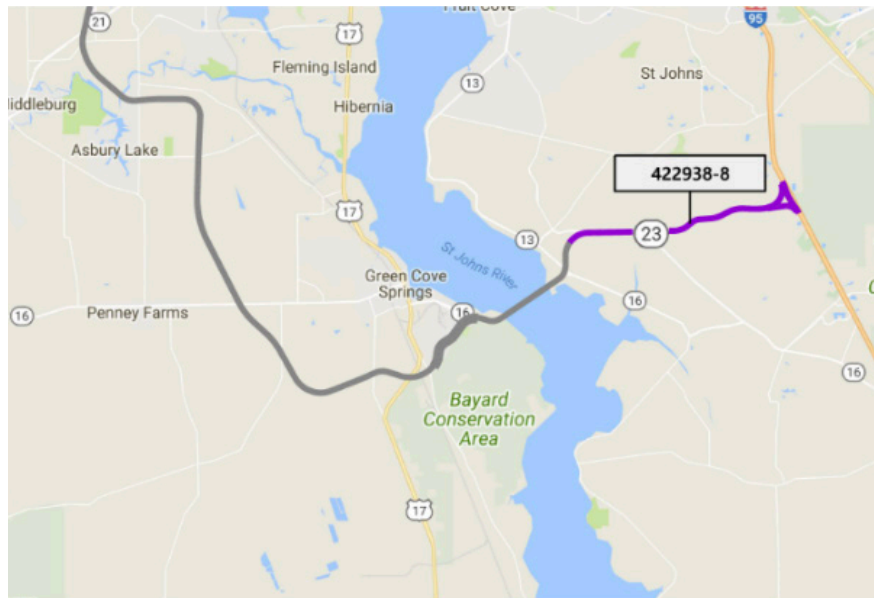
The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) shared details about the next phase of the First Coast Expressway during a recent open house meeting. This is a significant infrastructure project that will expand connectivity in Northern St. Johns County.

The project will connect the First Coast Expressway construction in Clay County to St. Johns County with the construction of a new four-lane bridge over the St. Johns River just south of where the Shands Bridge currently stands.

The design-build team of WGI, Inc., Johnson Bros. Corporation and American Bridge was selected to complete the project at a cost of approximately \$595 million. The vertical clearance height of the new bridge will be 65 feet from the water line, compared to the existing 45 feet of clearance. The additional 20 feet will match the Buckman Bridge's clearance and is an improvement for marine commerce in the region.

From there the project will be completed in phases to ultimately connect to Interstate 95 between the CR 210 exit and the World Golf Parkway exit. One phase of the First Coast Expressway consists of a new four-lane limited-access toll facility from east of the County Road 16A to east of County Road 2209 in St. Johns County. De Moya Asphalt Joint Venture. was awarded the contract to construct this project, which includes milling and resurfacing, earthwork, subsoil excavation, base work, shoulder treatment, drainage improvements, curb and gutter, traffic signals, lighting, highway signing, guardrail, box culverts, bridges, MSE walls, sidewalks/bicycle path, intelligent transportation systems (ITS), tolling, and other incidental construction.

The entire project is projected to be completed by 2030.





# ST. JOHNS COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE HONORS BUSINESS LEADERS AND INDUCTS NEW CHAIRPERSON AT ANNUAL AWARDS CEREMONY CELEBRATE

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The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce held its CELEBRATE Annual Awards Ceremony Thursday night, November 14, 2024, where various business leaders who made their mark in the community this year were recognized. The event marked the 120th year of the Chamber and was held at Hyatt Place Vilano Beach. Chamber CEO Isabelle Renault read a proclamation from the Congressional Record



provided by Congressman John Rutherford and a timeline unveiled, marking the history of the Chamber. Historic Tours of America provided period-attired actors to take the group back to 1904 when the Chamber membership first gathered. The 1904 Celebrate event featured President Teddy Roosevelt as the keynote speaker.

Four business leaders were recognized for their dedication to St. Johns County and the community in which they live. “The award recipients have distinguished themselves through contributions advancing the Chamber, its members, our business community, and the local economy. This year’s recipient list is impressive, and a testimonial of the favorable economic growth St. Johns County is experiencing. Congratulations to this year’s awardees!” said Chamber President and CEO Isabelle Renault.

Brian Walter with AIT Environmental Technology was presented with the Marty Lewis Ambassador of the Year Award. In the last three years, he’s attended and volunteered at over 100 events and ribbon cuttings. He also mentors new Ambassadors, helping them develop their roles as catalysts for business connections as they engage new Chamber members. The Chamber Ambassadors are volunteers who assist with welcoming new members and visiting renewing members each year.

The Small Business of the Year award went to Culver’s of St. Augustine. Garth and Lisa Darton’s restaurant on A1A South was recognized as one of the Top 5 Culvers in the country by receiving the Crew Challenge Award, which acknowledges areas of quality, service, cleanliness, hospitality, community outreach, and team member training and development. Craig Culver, co-founder of Culver’s, recognized the team for its exceptional performance and for going the extra mile to make guests happy.

The Fred Schroeder Economic Development Council award was presented to Baptist Health.

Baptist Health / Wolfson Children's Hospital opened a dual Emergency Room and Imaging Center earlier this year. The 23,879-square-foot facility features two emergency centers under one roof – Baptist Emergency Center for adults and Wolfson Children's Emergency Center, designed specifically for patients ages 0 to 17. In addition, with the opening of this campus, families in St. Johns County will have easier access to the specialized pediatric care of Wolfson Children's Hospital, the only full-service children's hospital in the region and the only state-designated Pediatric Trauma Center in Northeast Florida.

The Chamber Member of the Year Award was presented to Historic Tours of America, the parent company of Old Town Trolley Tours. Historic Tours of America has been a key supporter of the Chamber's Autism Certification efforts over the past year. They were the first business in St. Johns County to achieve the Certified Autism Center designation, demonstrating a commitment to creating more inclusive, accommodating, and welcoming environments for neurodivergent individuals and their families. The company's local attractions were certified, including Old Town Trolley Tours, Old Jail, Oldest Store Museum Experience, St. Augustine History Museum, and Potter's Wax Museum.



The prevalence of autism diagnoses has increased to 1 in 36 children in the US and 1 in 6 people with sensory needs. As a result, it has become increasingly vital to equip businesses and organizations with the knowledge and tools to engage and assist these individuals and their families effectively. The Certified Autism Center designation by these organizations marks a significant step forward for the larger movement. It makes St. Johns County an inclusive, welcoming destination for visitors and residents. The company's leadership and example have encouraged nine other local tourism and hospitality businesses to complete the certification process, bringing us closer to the goal of St. Johns County becoming a Certified Autism Destination.



The event concluded with the passing of the gavel ceremony from Immediate Past Chair Berta Odom with RE/MAX Realty 100 to Orv Dothage with Northrop Grumman.

## CHAMBER WELCOMES ALIYAH MEYER

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The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce is excited to welcome Ms. Aliyah Meyer as their new Economic Development Coordinator. This position was created to support the Chamber's economic development strategy as our county continues to grow. Ms. Meyer is eager to contribute to the St. Johns County community's growth, sustainability, and well-being. For Meyer, economic development is not just about building businesses; it is about creating a future where here residents and newcomers have access to stable jobs, improved quality of life, and the opportunity to participate in and succeed within the economy. Meyer said, "As a seventh-generation Floridian, I am deeply passionate about creating opportunities that foster positive transformation in the communities of the state I have known and loved throughout my entire life"



Every project she undertakes presents an opportunity to make a lasting impact and foster an environment where innovation, collaboration, and sustainable growth can thrive for generations to come. In a world of rapidly changing markets, Meyer is excited to leverage data-driven solutions and analytics to help St. Johns County adapt and flourish in response to shifting societal needs. As a young professional in this role, she is grateful for the chance to bring fresh perspectives and innovative ideas while drawing on a deeper understanding of her community's evolving needs.



# WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS

## NORTHEAST FLORIDA MONTHLY EMPLOYMENT REPORT NOVEMBER 2024

FloridaCommerce has announced that the unemployment rate for the Jacksonville region was 3.6 percent in November 2024 – up slightly from October 2024.

Of the 872,040 people counted as part of the area’s labor force in November, there were 31,271 unemployed residents in the region – up from 30,662 unemployed residents in October.

### NORTHEAST FLORIDA NOVEMBER 2024 UNEMPLOYMENT STATISTICS BY COUNTY

*Source: FloridaCommerce (not seasonally adjusted) & CareerSource Northeast FL*

	NOV-23	OCT-24	NOV-24
CareerSource Northeast Florida	3.1%	3.5%	3.6%
Baker County	3.0%	3.6%	3.8%
Clay County	3.1%	3.5%	3.6%
Duval County	3.2%	3.5%	3.6%
Nassau County	3.0%	3.3%	3.4%
Putnam County	4.0%	4.4%	4.6%
St. Johns County	2.8%	3.2%	3.4%
Jacksonville MSA	3.1%	3.5%	3.6%
Florida	3.0%	3.5%	3.6%
United States	3.5%	3.9%	4.0%

## REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT UPDATE

In November, Nassau County and St. Johns County recorded the lowest unemployment rates in the region (3.4 percent), followed by Clay County (3.6 percent), Duval County (3.6 percent), Baker County (3.8 percent) and Putnam County (4.6 percent).

The industries gaining jobs over the year were Education and Health Services (+ 6,600 jobs); Trade, Transportation, and Utilities (+ 2,600 jobs); Mining, Logging, and Construction (+ 2,500 jobs); Leisure and Hospitality (+ 2,500 jobs); Government (+ 1,800 jobs); and Other Services (+ 900 jobs). Industries losing jobs included Financial Activities (- 3,000 jobs); Professional and Business Services (- 1,100 jobs); Manufacturing (- 300) and Information Services (- 100 jobs).

The current top-five most advertised job occupations among all industries in the region included retail salespersons (1,816 positions), first-line supervisors of retail salespersons (1,718 positions), registered nurses (1,305), medical and health services managers (1,097 positions), and sales representatives of services – except advertising, insurance, financial services and travel – (1,015).

*Source: CareerSource Northeast Florida Nov. 2024*

## HIGH SCHOOL SHOWCASE

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*Scott Maynard and Aliyah Meyer participate in SJC School District High School Showcase*

Students and their parents recently attended the St. Johns County School District High School Programs of Interest Showcase. The event is held each year at the St. Johns County Convention Center, located at the Renaissance World Golf Village Resort. A detailed listing of each Program of Interest can be found on the district's Career and Technical Education website.

The Programs of Interest Showcase is offered to support a student's interests, career plans, or advanced academic

needs. A student who enrolls in a Program of Interest participates in theme-related classes over a multi-year period. Approximately 56 percent of high school students in St. Johns County are enrolled in various career and technical education pathways which include the Early Career Program and 28 Career Academies. Additionally, students may participate in other Programs of Interest options such as Junior ROTC, St. Johns County Center for the Arts, Advanced International Certificate of Education, International Baccalaureate and the Early College Program.

Students and staff from each high school were available at the Showcase to provide information and answer questions about the Programs of Interest offered at their schools. Information about program requirements and registration will also be available. Any student who meets an individual program's requirements and who can provide his/her own transportation may be approved to attend any high school, on a "space available" basis.

The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce, JAXUSA's Talent Division, First Coast Technical College and St. Johns River State College also set up booths to showcase programs and employment opportunities in the region. Aliyah Meyer, St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Economic Development Coordinator, said, "This is a great opportunity for us to showcase employers of all types in our region to students and parents. We realize that many people are new to this area and may not be aware of the variety of businesses and industry that exists. There are opportunities in St. Johns County that align with every Career Academy in the district. The local employers provide students with job shadow and internship experiences while they are still in high school."

Program of Interest applications were accepted online from eighth- and ninth-grade students residing in St. Johns County following the Showcase. Space is limited in all programs and a lottery system is utilized to place applicants. Priority is provided to students zoned for each school. Priority is also provided to active military families who have provided their status with their current school.



# **SJC CHAMBER SUPPORTS SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL BOARD TAX REFERENDUMS TO ENSURE HIGHEST QUALITY OF LIFE**

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The voters in St. Johns County voted to support two separate tax referendums on the November ballot. The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors supported the extension of the ½ cent sales tax and the 1-mill increase on property taxes. These were crucial investments in our schools and students, as an educated workforce is one of the greatest assets to any community. The chamber is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that does not endorse political candidates but does weigh in on specific issues that can impact the business community.

“Any new or additional tax increases the potential burden on businesses in St. Johns County, and raising taxes is never the first choice for revenue, but the chamber views these taxes as an investment in our economy,” said Isabelle Renault, president and CEO of the chamber. “Our schools are an economic engine for the county. Employees seek to live in areas with great schools, and employers will follow the talent.”

State regulations limit school districts’ options for raising revenue, and a millage increase is the “last lever the school district has to pull,” St. Johns County School District Superintendent Tim Forson said in a presentation at the chamber’s Sept. 20 Economic Development Council Breakfast. “Property tax is an integral, vital part of funding public education in Florida.”

As new businesses and industries enter our region and existing businesses seek to expand, the highest priority is often access to an educated workforce. St. Johns County School District, consistently ranked among the best in Florida, is important in attracting and retaining these new and expanding businesses as they follow the talent pool.

“The sales tax extension is heavily borne by tourists, and the millage increase will contribute to a stronger, more educated future workforce by attracting and retaining the best teachers for our children,” said Orv Dothage, chair of the chamber’s board of directors. “St. Johns County schools are also developing a high-quality homegrown workforce, especially for technical jobs. Investing in our schools is an investment in our current and future workforce.”

The school district offers students a variety of opportunities through career academies and technical education, and the proposed tax revenue is critical to supporting these programs, which train students in subjects like biomedical science, aviation, agriculture, advanced manufacturing, construction, and logistics.

The programs create a pipeline of well-trained, well-educated employees for businesses in the county but require a significant financial investment by the school district. The half-cent sales tax and 1-mill increase are estimated to produce nearly \$100 million in revenue for the school district.

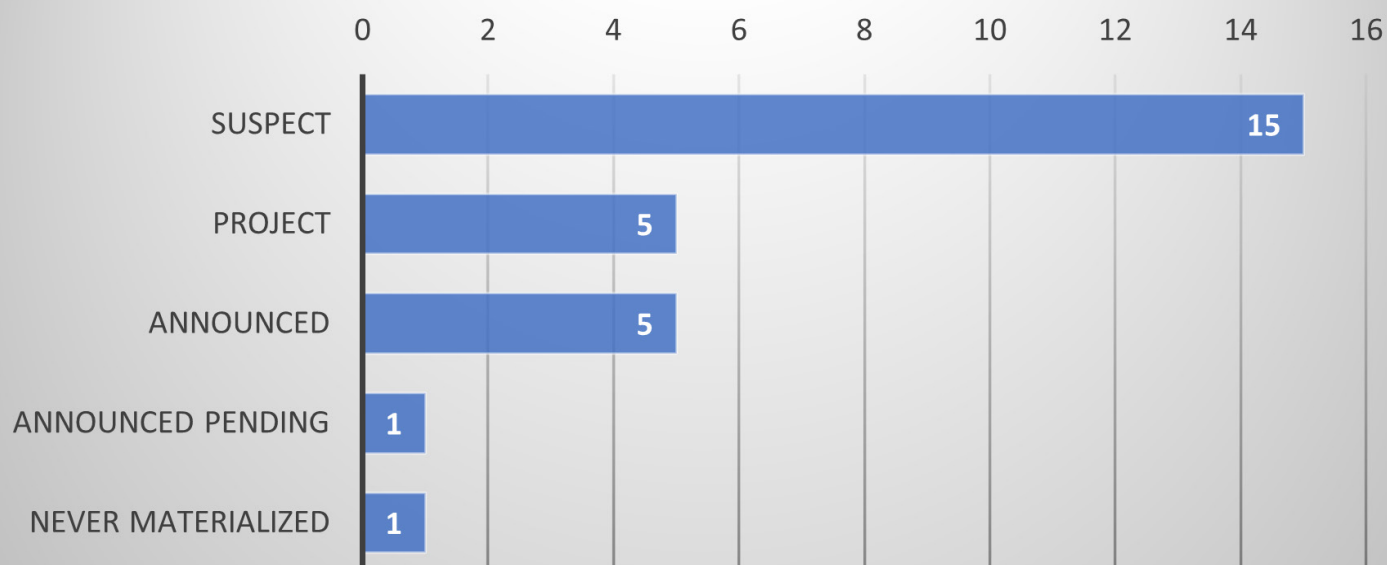
# ST. JOHNS COUNTY PROJECT PIPELINE

## Q1 – 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.

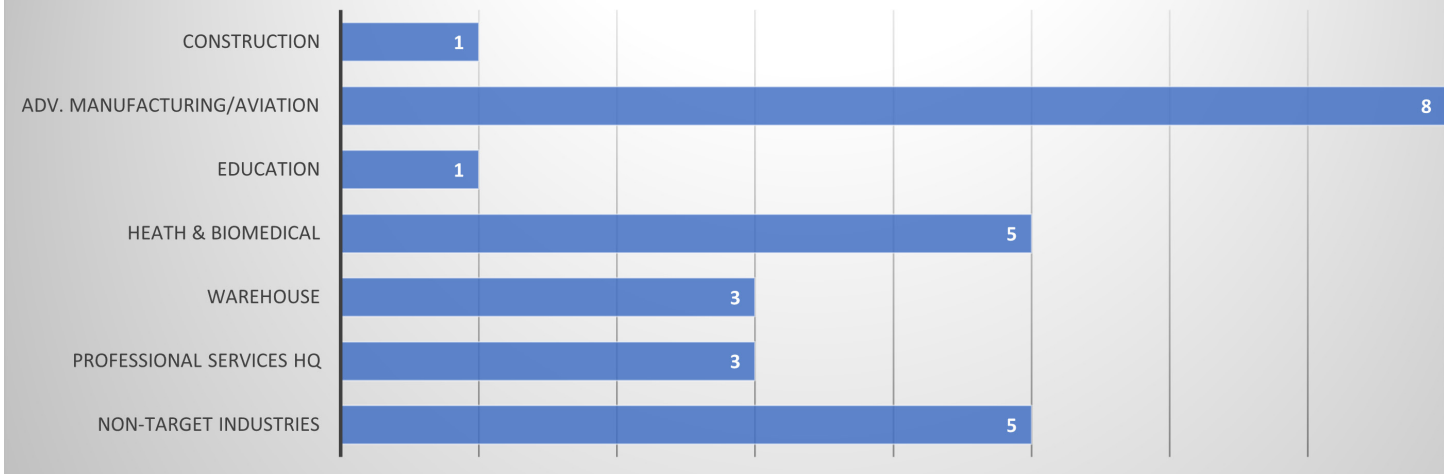
### Q1 All Prospects in the Pipeline By Stage



- At the end of Q1, there were a total of 26 active businesses in the pipeline. The announced pending project should be revealed in quarter two.
- These projects represented a wide variety of industrial types.

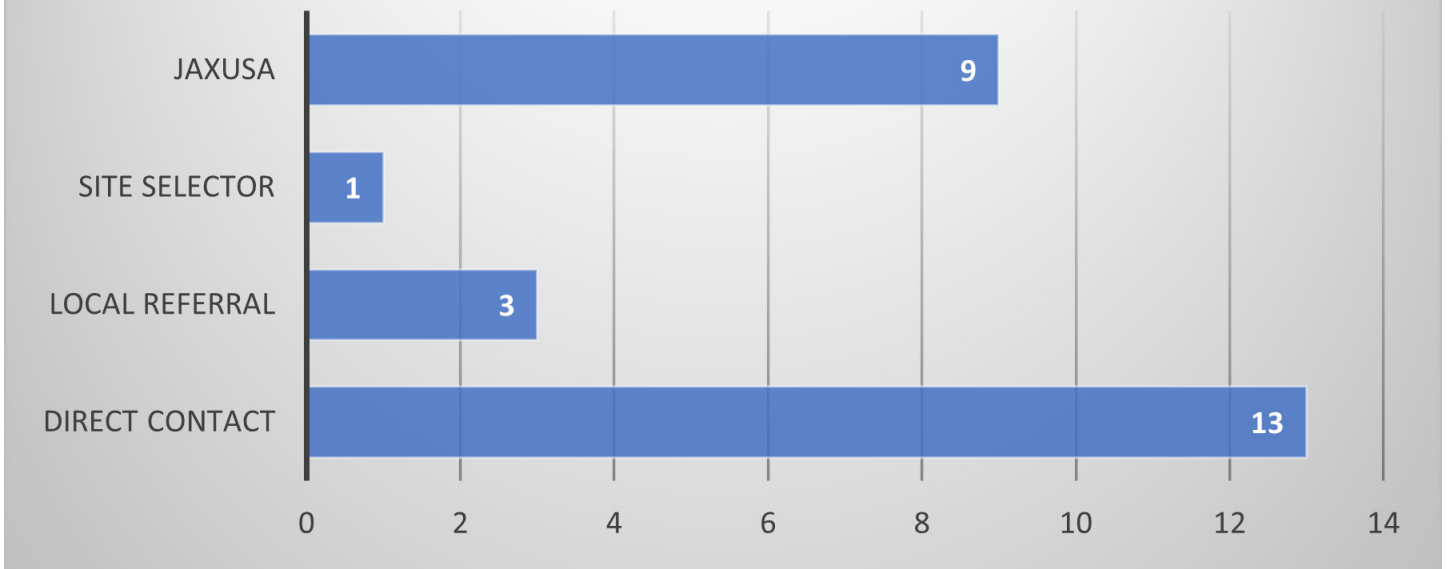


### Q1 All Prospects in the Pipeline By Industry



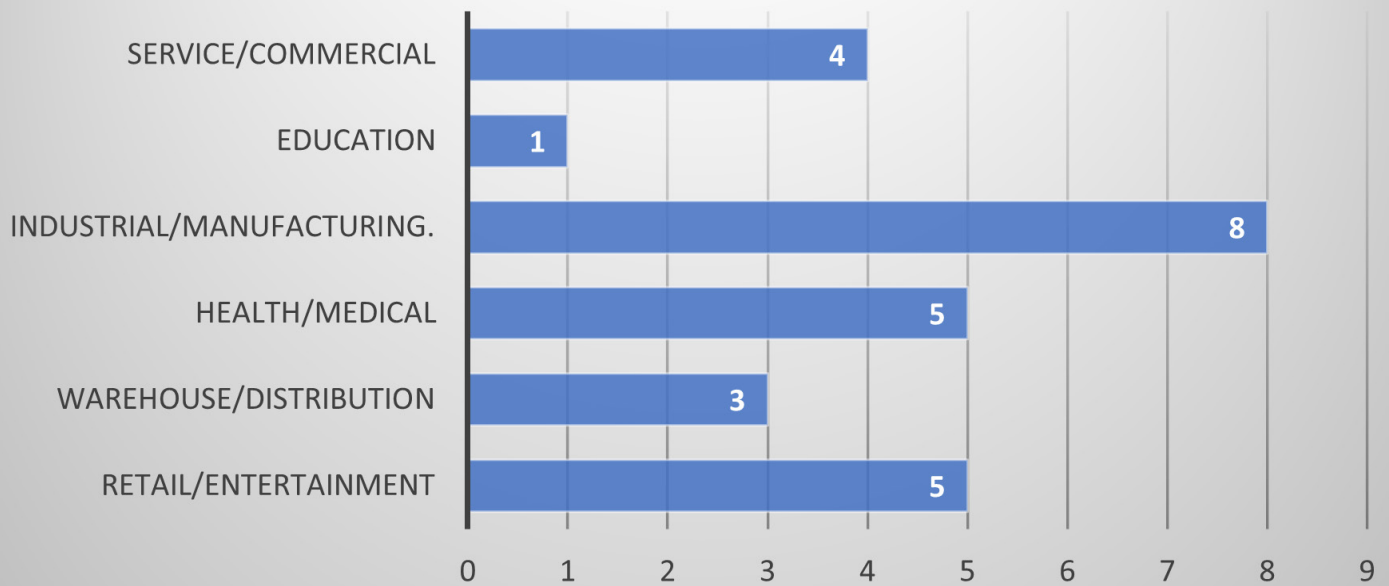
- There are a total of thirteen businesses in the pipeline for the targeted industries of Advanced Manufacturing/Aviation (8 projects), Health and Biomedical (5 projects).
- The Education prospect is also directly related to manufacturing/aviation.

### Q1 All Prospects Active By Source



- JaxUSA continues to refer new projects. Quarter one was slower due to a slowdown nationwide during the national election cycle.
- Twenty-six (26) total projects remained in the pipeline.

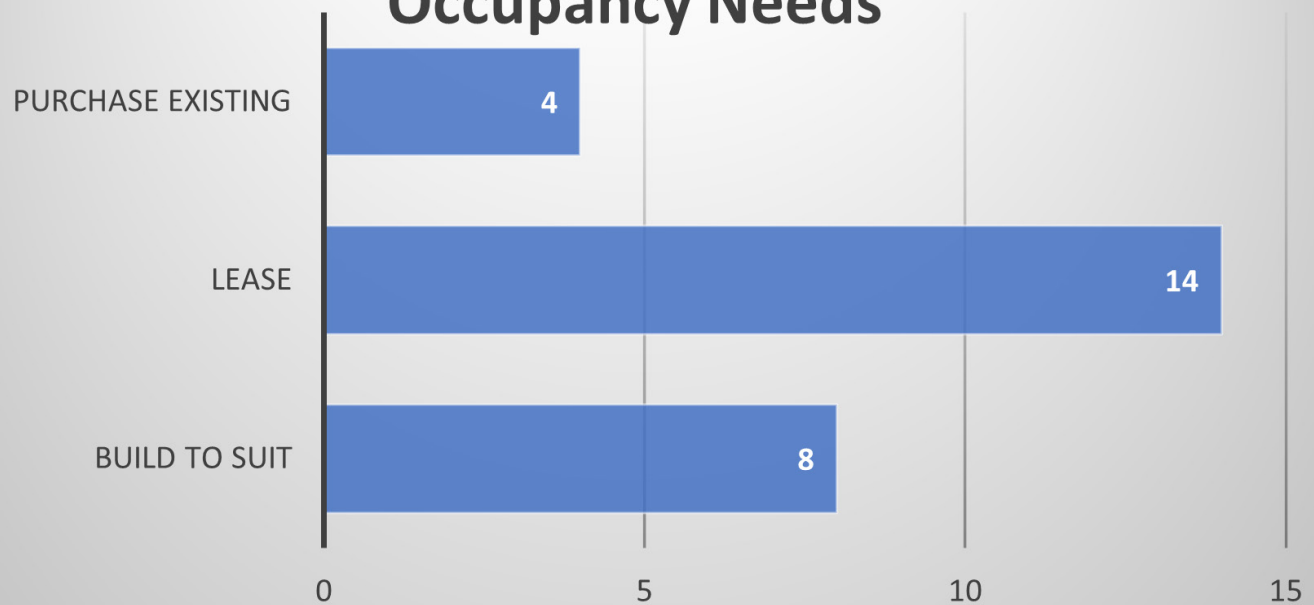
## Q1 All Prospects in the Pipeline By Facility Function



- Current projects in the pipeline seek service or commercial space (4 projects), industrial or manufacturing space (8 projects), health or medical facilities (5 projects), warehouse/distribution (3 projects), retail/entertainment space (5 projects) and education/training space (1 project).
- The Foundry Project on World Golf Parkway will add 500,000 square feet of warehouse/light industrial space by quarter two of 2025.



## Q1 All Prospects in Pipeline By Occupancy Needs



- The majority of the current projects in the pipeline seek to lease (14 projects) or build-to-suit space (8 projects).
- Four projects indicated an interest in purchasing an existing building in St. Johns County.



ST. JOHNS  
C O U N T Y  
CHAMBER  
O F C O M M E R C E

Economic Development Council