

Government & Regulations

# Will moving jail spur downtown development?




A view of the John E. Goode Pretrial Detention Facility from Bay Street.

MATT DENIS



By Brent Godwin – Special to the Business Journal  
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The jail on East Adams Street in Jacksonville is a vestige of a bygone era.

When the John E. Goode Pre-trial Detention Facility was built more than three decades ago, the county courthouse was located not far away along East Bay Street, giving the jail and the adjacent Police Memorial Building close proximity for in-person court appearances.

But these days, the courthouse is in a new building about 10 blocks to the west, and court appearances often take place via Zoom. With the now-demolished Berkman II tower directly across the street gone, the jail and police buildings now have a view of the Riverfront along the Bay Street corridor.

In coming years, the corridor will include the new Riverfront Plaza park to the west and a Ritz hotel and a likely-renovated Jacksonville Jaguars stadium to the east.

For years, business leaders have talked about the need for the jail to be moved from such a high-profile spot in order to help spur more development along Bay Street. In fact, approximately 85% of respondents in the JBJ's First Coast Forward survey said they think the jail should be moved out of downtown.

But experts say the issue isn't as simple as it may seem. While the perception may be that the jail hinders real estate development, there are multiple examples of other cities that have jails in their downtown areas without any negative impact to real estate development.

"The main lesson for Jacksonville to learn and accept is that the jail isn't stopping downtown development," said Ennis Davis, an urban planner local to Jacksonville.

He said the jail location had nothing to do with "expensive, self-inflicted wounds" -like tearing down the Landing or LaVilla and the closure of Kids Kampus with no replacement-which have hampered "logical downtown development."



Davis said Fort Lauderdale and Columbus, Ohio, both have similar situations to Jacksonville with jails in the urban core.

Davis said the area adjacent to the Broward County jail has multiple cranes working on new developments. In Columbus, Davis said the jail is moving from downtown because it was obsolete, not because it was holding back development.

In fact, like Columbus, Jacksonville's jail and police offices are outdated when it comes to both infrastructure and technology, according to a recent study of the issue presented to the Jacksonville City Council.

The report, presented after a seven-month study, recommended that JSO headquarters move to an office space in the Florida Blue building on Riverside Avenue that it could renovate and lease.

Last year, Jacksonville City Council approved a [149-month lease](#) for the Sheriff's Office's Homeland Security Division to occupy 58,959 square feet of space in the Florida Blue tower. JSO is looking to spend \$5 million to renovate the space and will be charged \$20 per-square-foot annually by Florida Blue for office space in the building and an additional \$6 per square foot for 3,567 square feet of parking space.

The city has not made a decision about whether the rest of JSO's administrative offices will move to the Florida Blue tower, but the idea has been discussed by a special council committee.

For the jail, the report recommended "constructing a modern, outcome-driven jail facility."

The cost of a new jail facility could reach \$1 billion, and would probably take about five years until it was completed, according to the study.

Representatives with the city did not immediately respond to requests for comment for this story.

Jake Gordon, CEO of Downtown Vision, said it makes sense that the jail and police facilities would move rather than be renovated. If and when those sites open up, Gordon



said it may make sense to develop something tourism-related there since the location is so close to the Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront hotel.

Gordon also mentioned the plans from the city and the Downtown Investment Authority to put more focus into public spaces and parks along the riverfront to help further activate one of the city's best features.

"I think the negative effects of having the jail downtown are kind of overstated," Gordon said. Although it's too early to know how or when a new jail would be built, Gordon pointed to multiple public-private partnerships in the past that have worked to develop things like Florida Theatre and the new JEA headquarters and can serve as inspiration for a future jail project.

"We can spend a billion on a new jail elsewhere, but it won't change downtown's fortunes if we don't get smarter and more strategic about our public investments and acceptance of market dynamics," Davis said.

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