



Jacksonville Downtown Riverfront and Emerald Trail Selected to Join High Line Network, a National Network of Urban Parks and Public Spaces

Membership selection is latest sign of progress for an increasingly vibrant waterfront

February 7, 2023 - Jacksonville, FL - The Jacksonville Riverfront and the Emerald Trail have been selected to be among the [10 new members](#) of the High Line Network, a community of nonprofit leaders representing industrial reuse projects, urban parks and public spaces. This is the first time that two intersecting projects have been added to the High Line Network at the same time.

Members of the High Line Network commit to creating a world where people have access to vibrant public spaces that center local communities, build civic connections, support environmental resilience, and foster equitable community development.

“Vibrant parks and public spaces are an integral part of our strategy for growth and development in Downtown Jacksonville and capitalizing on the momentum we’re already seeing,” said Lori Boyer, CEO of the Downtown Investment Authority. “Membership in the High Line Network allows our community’s leaders to access world-class peer-learning opportunities that we can apply to helping our parks system be as welcoming and active as it can be.”

“This membership is an exciting new resource to help our Parks become the world-class public spaces that we know they can be,” said Daryl Joseph, Director of the City of Jacksonville Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department. “We’re grateful to our nonprofit partners at Groundwork Jacksonville, the Jessie Ball duPont Fund and the Riverfront Parks Conservancy for their tireless work in enhancing and promoting our parks system. We look forward to continuing to work together for the benefit of all Jaxsons.”

The High Line Network membership is exclusively open to nonprofit organizations reusing infrastructure as public spaces, in all stages of development. Groundwork Jacksonville, the city’s nonprofit partner in building the Emerald Trail and restoring McCoys Creek and Hogans Creek, is the membership lead for the Emerald Trail. The Emerald Trail is a 30-mile trail and linear park system that will connect 14 historic neighborhoods to downtown, Hogans Creek, McCoys Creek and the St. Johns River. The trail links 16 schools, two colleges, three hospitals and 21 parks among other destinations like restaurants, retail and businesses, with 13 additional schools and 17 parks located within three blocks of the trail.

“We have reached out to many High Line members over the years, such as Miami Underline, Atlanta Beltline and Houston’s Buffalo Bayou to learn from them, so we are excited and honored to now be a member of this great network. This opportunity will provide so many new resources and access to experts who have successfully accomplished many of the things we aspire to achieve,” said Kay Ehas, CEO of Groundwork Jacksonville. “While we have much to learn, I



hope to also provide value to others as we share our experiences along this ambitious journey to build the Emerald Trail, restore our urban creeks and strengthen our urban neighborhoods.”

The Emerald Trail, will connect to the Riverfront in four places - on the Eastside at Hogans Creek, along Hogan Street at Riverfront Plaza, Brooklyn at the outfall of McCoys Creek and at the Riverside Arts Market. “Jacksonville is fortunate to have two projects accepted to the High Line Network who share a common goal of creating an active, vibrant, resilient and connected downtown. I think this will heighten our collaboration and lead to increased benefits for the community,” added Ehas.

The Jacksonville Riverfront membership will be co-led by the Jessie Ball duPont Fund and the newly-formed Riverfront Parks Conservancy. The Conservancy is dedicated to the stewardship, activation, enjoyment and ongoing improvement of Jacksonville’s riverfront parks, including the riverwalk and all riverfront parks adjacent to it.

“The duPont Fund, the Riverfront Parks Conservancy, and JaxParks are establishing partnership frameworks for an activated Riverfront and the shared resources and expertise of the High Line Network will be pivotal as we navigate this new approach to elevate the Downtown Riverfront,” said Sondra Fetner, Director of Placemaking for the Jessie Ball duPont Fund. “Jacksonville has a unique opportunity to harness the collective power of our City departments, nonprofit organizations and Downtown businesses to fully activate our incredible Riverfront.”

This selection is the latest mark of progress along the Riverfront since the unveiling of the Riverfront Activation Plan in August 2022. Since then:

- A group of interested stakeholders have come together to establish the Riverfront Parks Conservancy, an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit partnering with the City of Jacksonville through a Friends of the Park agreement. Leading the group as Chair of the Board and Interim Director is Barbara Goodman, a respected parks administrator with more than 30 years of National Park Service experience. The Conservancy is in the process of building its Board of Directors and fundraising to hire a full-time executive director. The Conservancy will launch a new website in the coming weeks, available at www.riverparkjax.org.
- The City of Jacksonville Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Services is working with Gary Monahan, a University of North Florida graduate who has dedicated his personal and professional energy toward making Jacksonville a more vibrant city, to activate City parks in Downtown Jacksonville. As Downtown and Riverfront Parks Lead, Monahan oversees the strategy and implementation of activation plans for the Downtown Riverfront and other Jacksonville parks, including Riverfront Plaza and Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing Park. Monahan is employed by the Jessie Ball duPont Fund, on loan to the City for three years. His position is entirely funded by the Jessie Ball duPont Fund.



- Pilot programming along the activated Riverfront is underway, with a “Yoga on the River” series hosted by Yoga4Change attracting more than 250 people over 15 sessions at Riverfront Plaza.

All of this progress, and more, will be discussed at an open community meeting on Wednesday, February 8 at 5:00 p.m. hosted by the Downtown Investment Authority, Build Up Downtown JaxParks, Jessie Ball duPont Fund and Riverfront Parks Now. In-person tickets are sold out but the event will be streamed live. Sign up here: [Riverfront 2025: A Look Ahead](#).

About Riverfront Parks Conservancy

The Riverfront Parks Conservancy is a newly formed 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to the stewardship, activation, enjoyment and ongoing improvement of the riverwalk and downtown riverfront parks. Working through a Friends of the Park Agreement with the City of Jacksonville, The Conservancy will collaborate with City of Jacksonville Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department, the Jessie Ball duPont Fund, and all other organizations working to make downtown riverfront a more accessible, vibrant place for all to enjoy.

About Groundwork Jacksonville

Groundwork Jacksonville, Inc., was formed in 2014 by the City of Jacksonville in partnership with Groundwork USA, along with support from the US National Park Service and US Environmental Protection Agency. Jacksonville is one of 21 Groundwork Trusts across the country focused on environmental equity, resilience and stewardship, and transforming the natural and built environment in low-resource and climate-vulnerable communities. Learn more at www.groundworkjacksonville.org or follow @GroundworkJax.

About the Jessie Ball duPont Fund

The Jessie Ball duPont Fund is a private foundation that works to expand access to opportunity and create inclusive growth for the people, organizations and communities that Jessie Ball duPont knew and loved. We envision a world in which every member of those communities feels they belong, and is engaged in shaping the future of their community. We use our grantmaking, investments, research and partnerships to increase equitable access to opportunities and resources for members of society who have historically been excluded, and placemaking to build stronger communities where all voices are heard and valued. Learn more at www.dupontfund.org.

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Media Contacts

Jessie Ball duPont Fund
Melanie Cost



mcost@dupontfund.org

(610) 453-4153

Groundwork Jacksonville

Trish Kapustka

trishk@tlkcomms.com

(904) 891-6320

Riverfront Parks Conservancy

Barbara Goodman

barbara@riverparkjax.org

(904) 434-1413