

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Chairman and Members  
Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission

**FROM:** Christian Popoli, City Planner Supervisor – Planning and Development

**RE:** *Johnson Street to LaVilla Center Drive*

**DATE:** November 20, 2019

Consistent with Chapter 745 of the Jacksonville Ordinance Code on addressing and street naming regulations, requests to rename streets require a review and recommendation from the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission. In making a report and recommendation, the Commission shall address the following criteria:

1. The origin of the street name
2. Any historical significance of the existing street name
3. Whether there are any historical structures or landmarks on the subject street
4. Whether the existing name is part of a common theme of street names throughout the community where such street is located
5. The age of the street name
6. Whether the street name is a duplicate street name

**Present Street Name:** Johnson Street

**Proposed Street Name:** LaVilla Center Drive

### **Reason for Change:**

The proposed street name change is for the purpose of both honoring LaVilla as a community, and drawing attention to the recently developed LaVilla redevelopment plan. The proposed change would occur between Adams Street to the North, and Bay Street to the South. The name change would also include a request to City Council to also sign the street not only with traditional street signs listing it as “LaVilla Center Drive” but also historic street signage, noting it as “James Weldon and J. Rosamond Johnson Drive”

### **Background:**

This portion of Johnson Street appears to have been part of the LaVilla Plat. This portion of what is now downtown was outside the City Limits of what was then Jacksonville, and was in fact an independently community. The street names are verifiably dated to at least 1897, based on the attached Sanborn Fire Map. The street naming theme seems to stem from post-civil war reconstruction area influences, and includes names such as Lee Street, Stuart Street, and North Davis Street. It is known that in 1866, a lease agreement was granted to forty-one freedmen, and soon after the

originally platted Fourth and Fifth Streets were renamed to Letitia and Lagrand. Between this period and 1897, the names were changed to their current nomenclature.

**Report and Recommendation:**

The origin of the street name and any historical significance of the existing street name

Located in the Southwest part of Downtown, the LaVilla area was once home to a great deal of history and culture. The area was incorporated as an independent community of African Americans during the post-Civil War reconstruction era. By 1887, it was annexed into the City of Jacksonville. Though the majority of the street names are confederate generals, it's unclear which Johnson was the namesake for this street. It may be named for President Andrew Johnson, or it may be named for Confederate General Edward Johnson. With little detailed information on the origin of the name, the only definitive conclusion that can be drawn is the commonality of former confederate generals for the remainder of the platted street names to the east and west.

Whether there are any historical structures or landmarks on the subject street

This portion of Johnson Street has no historic structures or landmarks that are addressed to Johnson Street. Though the now named Prime Osborne Center, previously the Jacksonville Union Station, sits at the end of Johnson Street, it is currently addressed off of Bay Street, and was historically addressed off of the same right-of-way, though the name has changed historically.

Whether the existing name is part of a common theme of street names throughout the community where such street is located

As noted above, the majority of the streets for the LaVilla Plat are named for prominent figures of the Confederacy. There is a commonality of street names in the downtown area that include historic US Presidents as well, typically running east and west, with the Confederate names running mostly north to south. It's unclear which of these two themes Johnson Street was intended to honor, but based on its north-south orientation, it's likely associated with the Confederacy.

The age of the street name

The actual date of the road naming is undetermined at this point. It is known that in 1897, the street name did exist, it's unclear if the street name was assigned at the time of the LaVilla Plat, or renamed at a later time. It's safe to assume the street dates from somewhere after 1866 and before 1897.

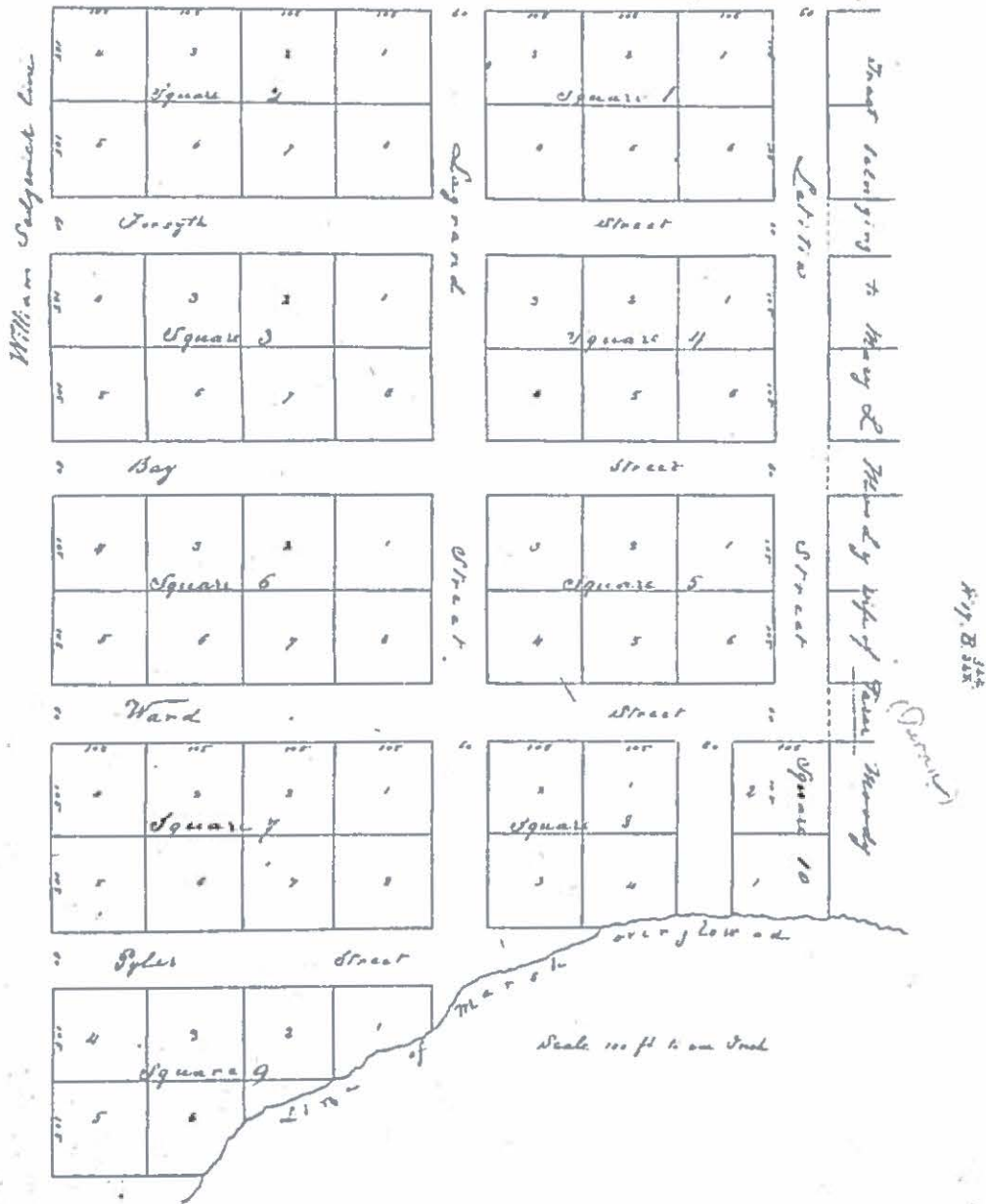
Whether the street name is a duplicate street name

The street name can be considered a duplicate, or simply continued. As noted in the map below, the street dead ends to the south into the old Jacksonville Union Terminal, and to the North, dead ends at Adams Street. However, a road continues north, with a shift to the west, which does not align with this segment of Johnson Street. It may well be duplicate, or a continuation that no longer has physical connection to this portion of Johnson Street.

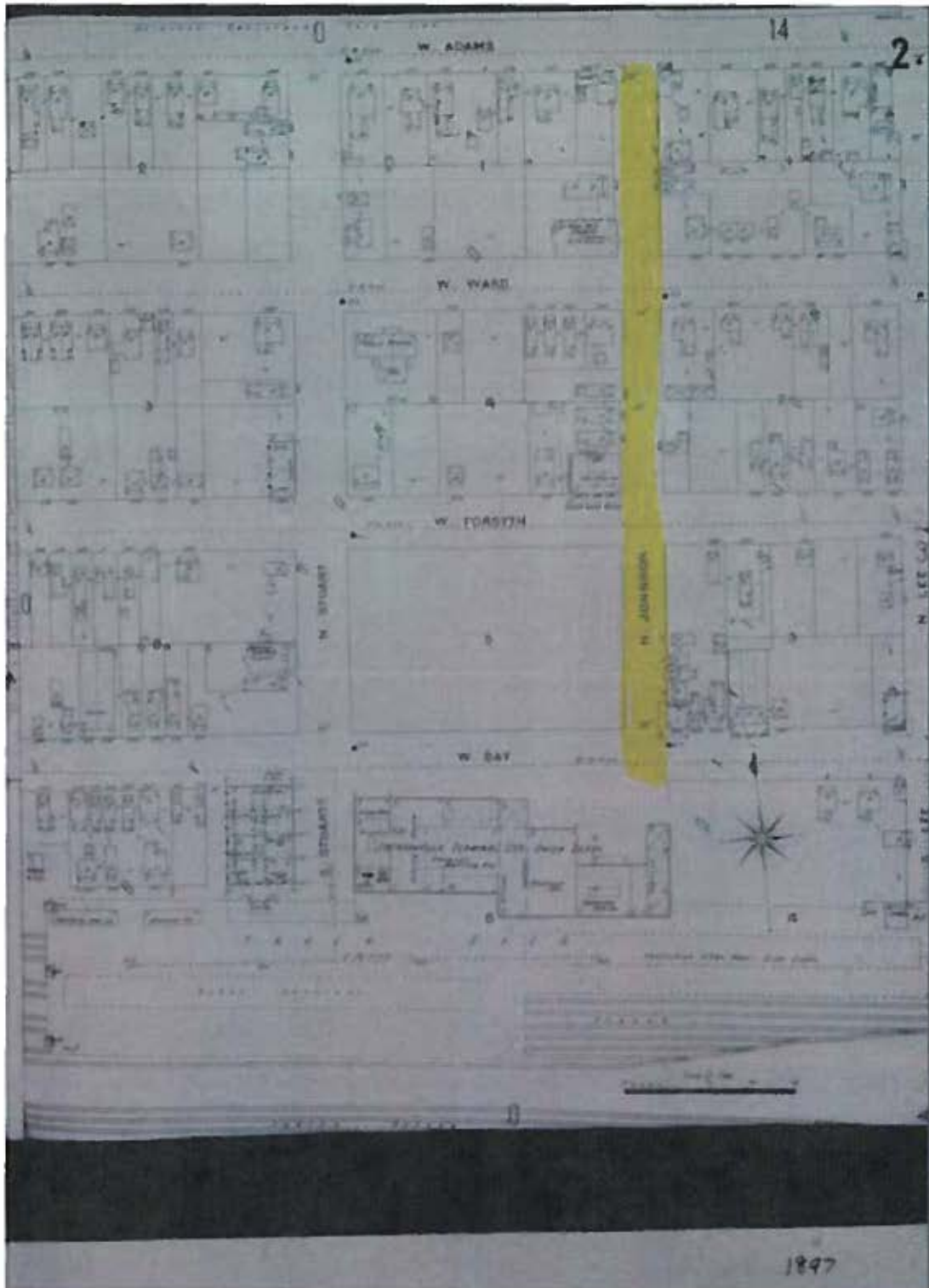
**Recommendation:**

Based on the best evidence available, the Planning and Development Department recommends that the proposed street name change from Johnson Street to LaVilla Center Drive be approved by the Commission. Additionally, staff recommends the Commission Support the proposed historic signage proposal to include the name of "James Weldon and J. Rosamond Johnson Drive".

Plat of a tract of land in the Western Suburb of the City of Jacksonville  
 known as The Jacques Place  
 Street 10 ft wide



Un-dated plat of portions of LaVilla showing Lagrand & Letita Streets,  
 Predating current road names, dating post 1866.



1897 Sanborn Map of LaVilla showing Johnson Street.