

City of Jacksonville Landmark Designation Report

Eagle Film City (Norman Film Studios)

LM-23-09
January 24, 2024



Application Prepared By:
Historic Preservation Section
214 North Hogan Street
Jacksonville, Florida 32202

Property Owner:
City of Jacksonville
117 Duval Street East
Jacksonville, Florida 32202

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I. Planning and Development Department – Findings,
Conclusions, and Recommendation

**REPORT OF THE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
APPLICATION FOR DESIGNATION
AS A CITY OF JACKSONVILLE LANDMARK**

**LM-23-09
Norman Film Studios Complex
6360 Commerce Street / 0 Arlington Road
Jacksonville, Florida 32211**

GENERAL LOCATION: Between Westdale Drive and Sprinkle Drive in the
Norman Film Studios National Register

Prepared in accordance with the JACKSONVILLE ORDINANCE CODE, SECTION 307.104, the Jacksonville Planning and Development Department hereby forwards to the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission, its "Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations" on the Landmark Designation, **LM-23-09**. The owner of the property is:

City of Jacksonville
117 Duval Street East
Jacksonville, Florida 32202

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

- (A) Consistent with the JACKSONVILLE ORDINANCE CODE, SECTION 307.104(d), the Planning and Development Department determined that the application for designation of the property at 6360 Commerce Street / 0 Arlington Road as a Landmark was complete.
- (B) As required, the Planning and Development Department had signs posted in front of the property being considered for designation, as well as sent notices by U.S. Mail to each owner of real property within three hundred and fifty (350) feet of the proposed landmark. Notice of the public hearing on the designation of the property at 6360 Commerce Street / 0 Arlington Road as a Landmark was published in the *Financial News and Daily Report*. Proof of publication is attached to this report.
- (C) Once designated, any activity affecting the exterior of the building and site of the proposed landmark at 6360 Commerce Street / 0 Arlington Road will require a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA). All proposed work will be reviewed for consistency with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*. The review of most routine work scopes including repairs, maintenance, alterations of previously altered features, small additions and size-limited new construction that would not impact significant historic elements or would not be readily street visible can be processed by the Historic

Preservation Section (HPS) of the Jacksonville Planning and Development Department, but certain activities like alterations, additions, new construction, relocation and demolition that would be visible from the public right-of way, as well as any work the HPS determines to be potentially in conflict with the *Secretary of the Interior Standards*, will require review by the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission.

The purpose of the historic designation of this site is to provide protection to the two-story structure and the enclosed pool at 6360 Commerce Street / 0 Arlington Road and not to discourage or prohibit the future development of the site. The review of work through the COA process is to preserve the historic character, architectural features and materials of this significant structure, as well as ensure any future development of the site is compatible with and sensitive to this primary historic resource.

- (D) In preparing the application, the Planning and Development Department has found the application to meet **four of the seven** criteria. The **four** criteria include the following:

A. Its value as a significant reminder of the cultural, historical, architectural, or archaeological heritage of the City, state or nation.

Starting with the Kalem Company in 1908, Jacksonville had attracted so many film companies by 1912, that the City was billed as the "World's Winter Film Capital." From 1908 to 1922, Jacksonville was home to over thirty silent motion picture studios including the Eagle Film City established in Arlington. The film companies were attracted by the area's mild, winter climate, abundant sunlight, varied scenery, and excellent transportation facilities. Shortly after the Eagle Film City opened in 1916, the movie industry began to decline in Jacksonville due to competition from California, local politics, lack of local financial support and material shortages caused by World War I. The Movie production facilities in Jacksonville were located in several areas, including Springfield, Riverside, Fairfield, Oklahoma, and Arlington. Because of its brief history in Jacksonville and predominately wood frame construction, all of the actual studio buildings and support facilities have been demolished except for the Eagle Film City (Norman Film Studios) and the wood frame house at 20-24 West Ninth Street, which was part of the old Klutho Studios in Springfield. The Eagle Film City (Norman Film Studios) is especially significant since it contains a majority of the structures that made up the original production complex.

The first black film company was formed by William Foster from Chicago 1909-1913. Foster was the first to produce all black cast film shorts. He successfully completed two films—The Pullman Porter in 1910 and The Railroad Porter in 1912. Foster's difficulties with distribution of his films were cited as the cause for the final curtain on his film making career and the end of his business. Ironically, the movie credited as being the catalyst for the resurgence of black film making in America was the notoriously disturbing 1915 film produced by D. W. Griffith "Birth of a Nation".

White actors in "black face" depicted blacks during the Reconstruction Era as crazed, murderous, lecherous, incompetent buffoons." Actually titled *The Clansman* for its first month of release, the film provides a highly subjective history of the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the rise of the Ku Klux Klan. Studied today as a masterpiece of political propaganda, *Birth of a Nation* caused riots in several cities and was banned in others but was seen by millions." ¹

To counteract this offensive and inaccurate depiction of Black life, the Lincoln Motion Picture Company, started by Noble Johnson, produced one of the first positive image feature films. Race films, as they were called, were films produced with all black casts, especially for black audiences depicting the Negro race in a positive life. As early as 1916, Race films began to emerge. The Lincoln Motion Picture Company was the first of these companies and it started on May 24, 1916. Noble Johnson was an actor as well as the company's President. The first production produced by Lincoln was *The Realization of a Negro's Ambition* which was released in mid-1916. It was a two reel film and dealt with the theme of drama, love and adventure. The second of Lincoln's films was a three-reeled movie titled *A Trooper of Troop K* (released January 1919) which was about the massacre of Black troops in the Army's 10th Cavalry with a cast of over 300 extras. Johnson had hoped to play to a wide audience with the film. The company was able to secure costumes and props from the more established Hollywood studios. Unfortunately, the film had a limited distribution and was shown at churches and schools and the few "Colored Only" theatres. By 1920, the Lincoln Company had completed five films. Two pictorial and three dramatic subjects, including a five-reel feature titled *A Man's Duty* (released September 1919). *By Right of Birth* (released October 1921) was the company's swan song. A six-reel drama. Johnson arranged to have the film open at the Trinity Auditorium (now the Embassy Auditorium) in the Embassy Hotel at 9th Street and Grand Avenue in downtown Los Angeles in June of 1921 as a Hollywood premier/gala. According to Johnson, the entire event was a success. Unfortunately, the commercial prospects for the film were still limited because of there were few black theaters and other venues for black audiences and the white audience did not materialize.

In 1917, the Lincoln Motion Picture Company contacted a young black novelist about making his book, "The Homesteader" into a movie. The novelist's request to be included in the directing of the film and certain budget requests were refused by the movie executives. Undaunted, the young novelist. Oscar Micheaux (1884-1951) converted his publishing company into the Micheaux Film and Book Company and would become the most "prolific writer, director, and producer of Race films in the history of motion pictures."² Micheaux, over the course of a 30 year career, would produce more than 40 films. In 1948, Micheaux's last film, *Betrayal*, was the first African-American produced film to open in white theaters. In 1987, Micheaux received a star on Hollywood Boulevard's Walk of Fame.

The twenties were the boom years for Race films. There were many black-owned and operated film studios in Philadelphia, New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and Kansas City. World War II had an adverse impact on Race Films. The government began to make films as recruitment propaganda tools to recruit blacks into the military. In addition, the government took control of all film stock and rationed it out to only Hollywood. The cost to filmmaking became too

¹ This day in history "Birth of a Nation Opens" <https://www.history.com/>

² "Early Black Film History" <https://acinemaapart.com/idl.html>

expensive for the smaller race film makers. Furthermore, the Great Depression and the advent of the "talkies," which brought on more expense, the black independent film companies for the most part, went bankrupt. The only black film company to survive the Talkie era was the Micheaux Film Company.

In the forties, after the war most of the films about blacks were musicals. By the fifties, Hollywood began to make films with blacks, not as servants or slaves. Hollywood produced Carmen Jones, with Dorothy Dandridge, Porgy and Bess, Alma Lucasta and St. Louis Blues. Race films ended with blacks were portrayed, not as stereotypes or derogatory caricatures, but as characters portraying their dramatic or comedic live styles, tragedies and triumphs.

B. Its location is the site of a significant local, state or national event.

A native of Middleburg, Florida, Richard E. Norman Sr. began his filmmaking career by traveling extensively throughout the Midwest and Northeast sections of the country, writing scenarios and filming as he went. With headquarters in Des Moines, Iowa, Norman ventured from city to city setting up shop, obtaining local financing, using local actors and crew, and then shoot the movie which was developed and edited at the Iowa lab. While working in Jacksonville, Norman decided to return to Florida and took advantage of reasonably priced studio space in the City. In 1922, he purchased the former Eagle Film City in Arlington.

Norman was one of the first independent movie producers to recognize the commercial potential of making black cast movies specifically for the African-American community. Contrary to most movies made during the silent screen era, Norman's films were one of the first to show African-Americans in a positive light. Between 1920 and 1928, Norman produced eight feature films featuring an all-black cast. The films included, *The Green-Eyed Monster* (1920), *The Crimson Skull* (1921), *The Bull-Dogger* (1921), *Regeneration* (1923), *A Debtor to the Law* (1924), *The Flying Ace* (1926), and *The Black Gold* (1928). After 1922, most of these movies were shot on location in Jacksonville and included many Arlington residents as extras. All the post production work was done at the Arlington studios. These African-American films made by Norman at the old Eagle Film City studios have national significance in documenting the important but little known contributions of African-Americans to the American film history. Unfortunately, only one Norman film is known to exist.

C. It is identified with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the development of the City, state or nation.

The Eagle Film City (Norman Film Studios) is directly associated with the pioneer film making of Richard E. Norman Sr. Born in 1891, Norman was a native of Middleburg in Clay County, Florida. He acquired an interest in chemistry and motion pictures while attending college in Tampa. As stated above, Norman began his film making career in the Midwest, working out of a studio in Des Moines, Iowa. In 1920, he returned to Florida, and purchased the old Eagle Film City studios in 1922. By this time, he was already concentrating on the production of films utilizing all African-American cast members. These films, which were produced for African-American audiences, were some of the earliest movies featuring African-Americans in a more positive light. In a 1978 interview, Richard E. Norman Jr. said his father though white was "deeply concerned about prejudice" and had an underlying desire to do something constructive to

better race relations while allowing African-American actors the opportunity to display their theatrical talents beyond roles that emphasized racial stereotypes.

During this same period, Norman invested heavily in his invention of a practical synchronization device that joined picture and voice. Costing upward to six thousand dollars each, Norman sold over a dozen units to theater owners. However, Western Electric came out with a photoelectric sound-on-film system that made Norman's disk sound system obsolete. Bankruptcy followed, and Norman was forced to abandon theatrical production and confined his operation to industrial films. Norman is credited with being one of the first film producers to synchronize sound and motion to create the early "talkies."

D. It is identified as the work of a master builder, designer, or architect whose individual work has influenced the development of the City, state or nation.

It is the determination of the Planning and Development Department that the subject property at 6360 Commerce Street / 0 Arlington Road does not meet this landmark criterion.

E. Its value as a building is recognized for the quality of its architecture, and it retains sufficient elements showing its architectural significance.

It is the determination of the Planning and Development Department that the subject property at 6360 Commerce Street / 0 Arlington Road does not meet this landmark criterion.

F. It has distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style valuable for the study of a period, method of construction, or use of indigenous materials.

It is the determination of the Planning and Development Department that the subject property at 6360 Commerce Street / 0 Arlington Road does not meet this landmark criterion.

G. Its suitability for preservation or restoration.

In utilizing this criterion, it has been the practice of the Planning and Development Department to evaluate proposed landmarks based on evidence of significant exterior alterations that have negatively impacted character-defining features, as well as represent alterations difficult, costly, or impossible to reverse. Further, the degree and nature of any exterior deterioration, as well as the evidence of long term and potentially ongoing neglect are also a factor in evaluating potential landmarks for their suitability for preservation or restoration.

The Eagle Film City (Norman Film Studios) is particularly significant since it is a complex of buildings utilized in early film production. The entire complex includes five separate buildings and the site of the outdoor pool. The referenced building for landmark designation is two-story with a composition hip roof, wooden clapboard siding and open rafter ends. The outdoor pool built for water scenes has been filled, and is not presently visible. According to City permits and archival records, the following restoration repairs to the referenced building: structural repairs and enhancements, re-roofing, lead abatement, repair/replacement of windows and doors, exterior

painting, and installation of electrical systems. It is the opinion of the Planning and Development Department that Norman Film Studios meets criterion G.

RECOMMENDATION

In reviewing the application, the Planning and Development Department has found the application to meet **four of the seven** criteria. Based on the findings of this report, the Jacksonville Planning and Development Department recommends that the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission **APPROVE** the designation of 6360 Commerce Street / 0 Arlington Road (**LM-23-09**) as a City of Jacksonville Landmark.

II. Designation Application

**JHPC
INITIATED**

III. Legal Description and Location Map

Legal Description

4-19 52-2S-27E

ARLINGTON HEIGHTS

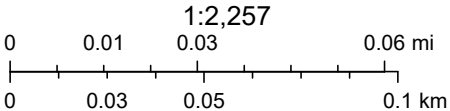
LOTS 10 TO 18 BLK 47

RE # 141476-0010 AND 141476-0000

Duval Map



January 19, 2024



Esri Community Maps Contributors, City of Jacksonville, FDEP, © OpenStreetMap, Microsoft, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, SafeGraph.

IV. Proof of Public Notice

STATE OF FLORIDA,

S.S.

COUNTY OF DUVAL,

Before the undersigned authority personally appeared Nichol Stringer, who on oath says that she is the Publisher's Representative of the JACKSONVILLE DAILY RECORD, a weekly newspaper published at Jacksonville, in Duval County, Florida; that the attached copy of advertisement, being a Notice of Public Hearing on Application to Designate a City of Jacksonville Historic Landmark

in the matter of LM-23-09 6360 Commerce Street and 0 Arlington Road

in the Court, was published in said newspaper by print in the issues of 1/4/24.

Affiant further says that the JACKSONVILLE DAILY RECORD complies with all legal requirements for publication in Chapter 50, Florida Statutes.

*This notice was published on both jaxdailyrecord.com and floridapublicnotices.com.



Nichol Stringer

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 4th day of January, 2024 by Nichol Stringer who is personally known to me.

RIIONDA L. FISHER
Notary Public, State of Florida
My Comm. Expires 08/16/2024
Commission No. 1044288



Seal

Notary Public, State of Florida

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING ON APPLICATION TO DESIGNATE NORMAN STUDIOS COMPLEX 6360 COMMERCE STREET AND 0 ARLINGTON ROAD LM-23-09 AS A CITY OF JACKSONVILLE HISTORIC LANDMARK

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVE that that on January 24, 2024 at 3:00 P.M., the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission of the City of Jacksonville will hold a public hearing for the consideration of the Norman Studios Complex, 6360 Commerce Street and 0 Arlington Road as a City of Jacksonville Historic Landmark, pursuant to Jacksonville Ordinance Code 307.005. The public hearing will be in the Conference Room #851, 8th floor, Ed Ball Building, 214 North Hogan Street, Jacksonville, Florida.

Exhibit A
Legal Description
4-19 53-25-27E
ARLINGTON HEIGHTS
LOTS 10 TO 18 BLK 47
RE # 141476-0010
AND 141476-0000

This application (LM-23-09) is being sponsored by the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission. A copy of the application may be examined in the Office of the Planning and Development Department, 3rd Floor, Ed Ball Building, 214 North Hogan Street, Jacksonville, Florida, (904) 255-7800. All interested parties are notified to be present and will be heard at the Public Hearing.

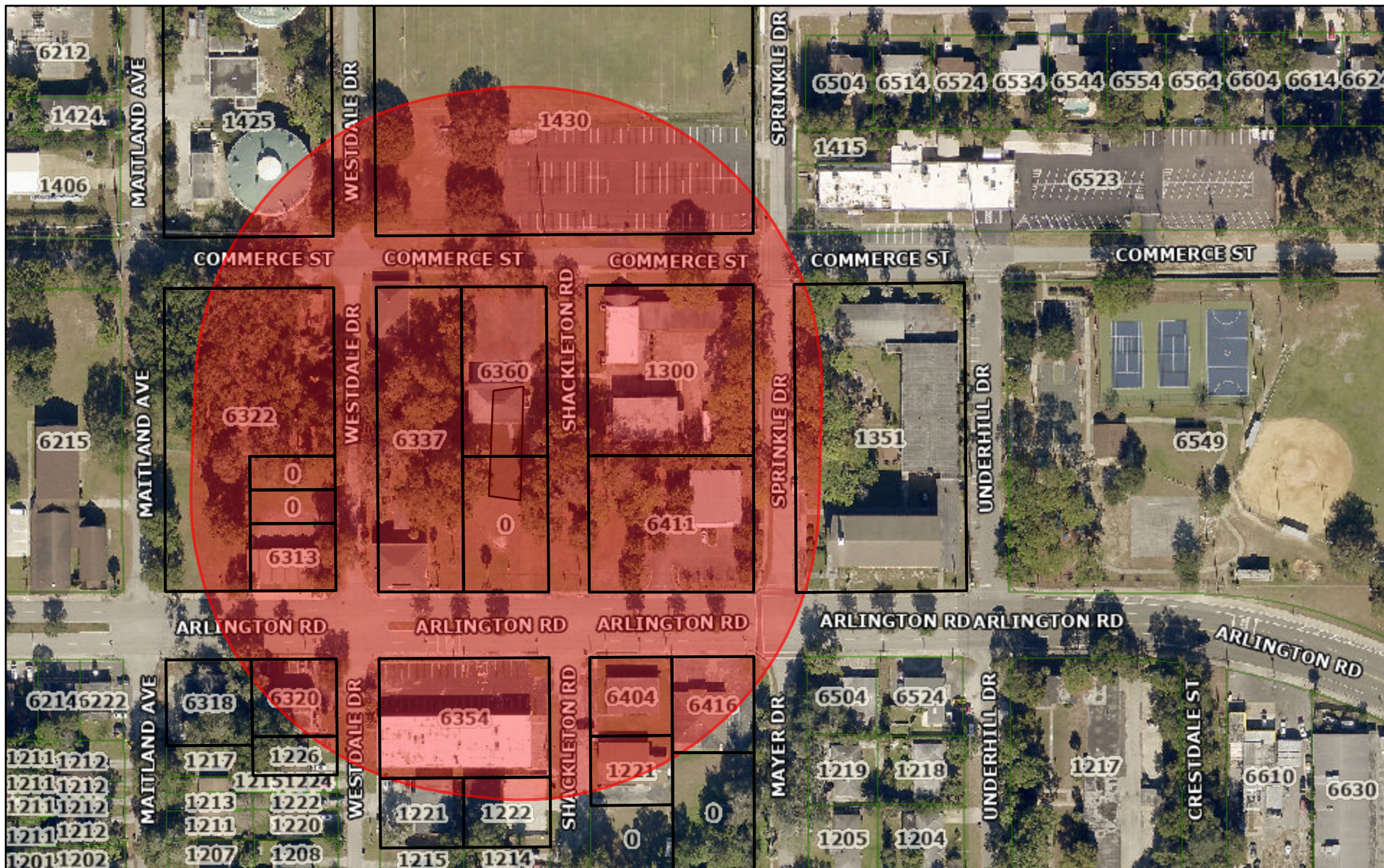
Please contact the Historic Preservation Section at historicpreservation@coj.net or by phone at (904) 255-7800.

DATED this 4th day of January, 2024.

Jack C. Demetree, III
Chairman
Jacksonville Historic
Preservation Commission
City of Jacksonville
Jan. 4 2024 (24-00007D)

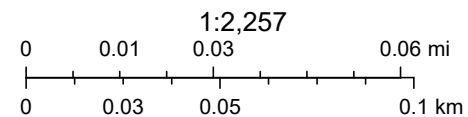
V. List of Property Owners Located within 350 Feet of
the Proposed Landmark

Land Development Review



January 19, 2024

 Parcels



RE	LNAME	MAIL_ADDR1	MAIL_ADDR2	MAIL_CITY	MAIL_STA	MAIL_ZIP
141462 0005	ARLINGTON CHURCH OF CHRIST JACKSONVILLE FLORIDA IN	6215 ARLINGTON RD		JACKSONVILLE	FL	32211
141471 0000	ARLINGTON HAVEN INC TRUSTEE	PO BOX 1000		MIDDLEBURG	FL	32050-1000
141500 0110	ARLINGTON LIONS CLUB HOLDING CORP	6523 COMMERCE ST		JACKSONVILLE	FL	32211-5441
141499 0000	ARLINGTON PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH	1300 SPRINKLE DR		JACKSONVILLE	FL	32211-5494
141470 0130	ATTAUD CAROLYNNE DIANA	1208 WESTDALE DR		JACKSONVILLE	FL	32211
141495 0000	BCEL 10D LLC	7563 PHILIPS HIGHWAY STE 208		JACKSONVILLE	FL	32256
141470 0055	BELIZAIRE COLLETTE	1217 MAITLAND AVE		JACKSONVILLE	FL	32211-5777
141486 0000	CIRCLE OF FAITH INC	6360 COMMERCE ST		JACKSONVILLE	FL	32211-5439
141475 0090	CITY OF JACKSONVILLE	C/O CITY REAL ESTATE DIV	214 N HOGAN ST 10TH FL	JACKSONVILLE	FL	32202
142233 0000	CRUCIAL INC	9802 BAYMEADOWS RD STE 12 188		JACKSONVILLE	FL	32256
141474 0047	GLM RENTAL ENTERPRISES LLC	11277 KINGSLEY MANOR WAY		JACKSONVILLE	FL	32225
141474 0040	HARMS J F ET AL	1221 WESTDALE DR		JACKSONVILLE	FL	32211-5763
141499 0100	JACKSONVILLE ELECTRIC AUTHORITY	225 N PEARL ST		JACKSONVILLE	FL	32202
141495 0020	LOPEZ ELSSY CAROLYNNE	PO BOX 10871		JACKSONVILLE	FL	32247
141464 0000	MACKOUL CAROL CYCMANICK TRUST	2280 SHEPARD ST #606		JACKSONVILLE	FL	32211
141474 0042	MBI HOLDINGS LLC	3122 HONEYWOOD DR		JACKSONVILLE	FL	32277
141488 0000	PAM LLC	720 OAKS FIELD RD		JACKSONVILLE	FL	32211
141474 0050	RTG RENTALS LLC	2223 ATLANTIC BLVD		JACKSONVILLE	FL	32207
141474 0046	RUCKER SHARONE D	1212 SHACKLETON RD		JACKSONVILLE	FL	32211-5760
141474 0041	RUSSELL WILLIAM H LIFE ESTATE	3764 WAYLAND ST		JACKSONVILLE	FL	32277
141470 0065	SPEIGHT THEODORE C	1213 MAITLAND AVE		JACKSONVILLE	FL	32211
141470 0000	SPINSPIRE LLC	887 W AMERICAN EAGLE DR		SAINT AUGUSTINE	FL	32092
141470 0060	STEVENS NOEL	1215 MAITLAND AV		JACKSONVILLE	FL	32211
141490 0000	TACKETT RICHARD C	2653 SCOTT MILL LN		JACKSONVILLE	FL	32223
141470 0170	TEL AVIV FLORIDA LLC	4596 LEXINGTON AVE		JACKSONVILLE	FL	32210
141492 0000	TRUTH BAPTIST CHURCH OF JACKSONVILLE FLORIDA INC	1211 SHACKLETON RD		JACKSONVILLE	FL	32211-5759
141474 0045	WARNER JENNIFER LYNN	1210 SHACKLETON RD		JACKSONVILLE	FL	32211-5760
142232 0000	WASHINGTON ELIZABETH	1219 MAYER DR		JACKSONVILLE	FL	32211
141474 0000	WELLSER LIMITED INC	6354 ARLINGTON RD		JACKSONVILLE	FL	32211

VI. Photographs and Images

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARINGS

**THE CITY OF JACKSONVILLE
WILL HOLD PUBLIC
HEARINGS CONCERNING THE
HISTORIC DESIGNATION**

FOR NORMAN FILM STUDIOS

TELEPHONE 255-7800 **FOR**
INFORMATION ON LM-23-09

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARINGS
THE CITY OF JACKSONVILLE
WILL HOLD PUBLIC
HEARINGS CONCERNING THE
HISTORIC DESIGNATION
FOR **NORMAN FILM STUDIOS**
TELEPHONE 255-7860 FOR
INFORMATION ON **LA-23-04**