



November 7, 2025

Palafox Upgrade: Why I Support “Reimagine Palafox”

I support the current plan called *Reimagine Palafox*. Here’s some background — and my “why.”

Ironically, it was 20 years ago that the idea for the Community Maritime Park was first proposed. Today, it has transformed our community for the better — but it almost didn’t happen. If the vote had gone the other way, the “No Trespassing” signs would likely still be up. No one would miss the park or the stadium, because people don’t miss what never was. The same is true for Bruce Beach — another battle. Even today, some people remain unhappy. One person told me he doesn’t like Bruce Beach because it has too much concrete; he feels it should be all nature trails. Tell that to the person in a wheelchair who can now enjoy the trails and get down to the water for the first time.

From my perspective, there have also been some missed opportunities. The new YMCA, for example, was originally planned to go on Parcel 8 by the stadium. It’s a good Y — like many Ys — but it could have been a *world-class* Y. The message from some elected officials at the time was that Parcel 8 was too valuable for a Y — a “best use” argument. As Mayor Riley of Charleston said at CivicCon, *the best land should be for the citizens*.

Rishy and I also offered to build a \$22 million Center for Entrepreneurship — a one-stop shop for entrepreneurs, start-ups, and UWF students interested in innovation. It followed all CMP use protocols. Then, the elected officials changed the rules. We walked away. An attorney was hired, and the council voted to revise the lease terms. They felt good about it — but numerous investors said the new terms would prevent future investment. So far, they’ve been right. Parcel 5 may see development in 2026, but no one misses the Y on Parcel 8 or the Center for Entrepreneurship — because they never happened. I hope that’s not the case for Palafox.

I read that Councilman Bare spoke with business owners, and I commend him for that. We didn’t talk, so I’d like to share my perspective as a business owner who currently pays over \$1,032,000 in property taxes for downtown properties — and has guaranteed \$400,000 in loans for some Palafox business owners (none of whom lease from me).

Property owners are business owners too. Many of us have long-term loans, and keeping our spaces rented helps prevent foreclosures and bankruptcies. We all want our tenants and businesses to be successful. Many of us have also experienced major financial losses due to stormwater damage.

It's great that FPL is committed to working on Palafox and would likely repave the street. Why not use this opportunity to make Palafox safer and more user-friendly for everyone?

Yes, Palafox has some historic buildings. A better-designed Palafox will actually *highlight* them. Details like the color of brick can always change — just as they did around the CMP walkway and Wahoo Stadium. Let's not let such details distract from what a new Palafox can do for our city.

ADA access: The Americans with Disabilities Act is vital. Today, the narrow sidewalks and outdoor seating make it nearly impossible for someone in a wheelchair to enjoy what Palafox has to offer. You'll likely see more people using wheelchairs at one Wahoos game than you'll see on Palafox in an entire year. I love outdoor seating, but if this improvement doesn't move forward because of ADA concerns, perhaps outdoor seating shouldn't be allowed at all — which would have a far bigger financial impact than the proposed plan. During construction, sidewalks and crosswalks will remain open.

Pedestrian safety: Palafox is not pedestrian-friendly. Crosswalks are confusing, and vehicles often move too fast. I love that the plan includes traffic-calming measures. Some argue we shouldn't spend money slowing cars because "no one's been hit." Let's not wait. Dr. Pride, a CivicCon speaker on safety, specifically pointed out how unsafe some of our streets were — especially Cervantes. Sadly, just weeks after her visit, people were killed there. Let's learn from that, not repeat it.

Stormwater: I can't imagine anyone would argue this point. Meeting or exceeding ADA standards and improving pedestrian safety seem as important — if not more so — than stormwater management.

As a business owner with 278,000 square feet of downtown property, I want all owners and tenants to do well. I'm confident they will. If any store owner is concerned about cash flow during construction, I encourage them to contact me.

This past weekend, I spoke with Officer Lyter. He told me how much he supports *Reimagine Palafox*. When his late wife, Brenda, was in a wheelchair as her cancer progressed, he wanted to take her down Palafox — but it was impossible to navigate.

Mattie Chesnutt, a young man in his early twenties, often attends Wahoos games with his father, Paul. You've probably seen them at the park — but you've never seen them on Palafox.

It's too late for Brenda. But it's not too late for Mattie and others.

I encourage each of you to vote yes to move forward.
Thank you.

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