

Opinion

## **Guest column: JEA board didn't vote to sell but it make it better**

**By April Green**

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It's important to note that JEA's board of directors did not vote to sell JEA.

We voted for JEA to pursue a path forward that protects our employees, customers and community at large. Now that we know there is a path forward, the next step is to decide which path is best.

On Tuesday, JEA's board of directors unanimously voted for JEA's senior leadership team to begin the process of exploring unconstrained or "non-governmental" opportunities for growth.

This vote comes after months of scenario-based strategic planning process to determine how the municipally owned utility can continue to meet the demands of and stay relevant to its customers. Critical, industry-wide challenges such as revenue loss driven by energy efficiency and distributed energy resources, new disruptive technologies and competitors have made business structure changes essential.

Beginning at the January board meeting, with assistance from McKinsey & Co, we've thoughtfully and transparently deliberated the future of JEA. We started with Scenario No. 1, the status quo response, which is what could happen to JEA's business in the face of current challenges, and without a transformative response.

In June, and in more detail at Tuesday's board meeting, JEA's senior leadership presented Scenario No. 2A, the traditional utility response, which could have simply served as a way to stabilize JEA's profitability in order to pay down debt and maintain standard electric, water and wastewater services. Scenario No. 2A would have included significant headcount reductions, negative impacts to service quality and rate increases.

Scenario No. 2B outlined the feasibility of removing legal and policy constraints that inhibit growth by pursuing statewide lobbying efforts. These include constraints imposed on government entities, but not private entities, associated with the Florida constitution, city of Jacksonville charter and other state regulations.

Scenario No. 3, the non-traditional utility response, presented a transformational proposal to remove the constraints limiting JEA's ability to grow, compete and stay relevant to our community today, tomorrow and in the future.

Our mandate as JEA's board of directors is to act in the best interests of the utility, its customers and employees. It was during Tuesday's board meeting that it became apparent, through the scenario-based strategic planning process, that the best way for JEA to grow and stay aligned with its four core values (financial value, customer value, community impact, and environmental value) was to explore the removal of its government-affiliated constraints.

In the coming weeks, JEA will begin this open and competitive process.

Please understand that no alternative will be considered if it does not include guaranteed employee and customer protections, as presented in the Scenario No. 3 presentation at Tuesday's board meeting.

We expect a transformation of JEA to deliver transformational results for all of Northeast Florida. These results include employee pension and job protections, customer rebates in excess of \$400 million, city contribution guarantees well above today's value and environmental protections.

As we move forward on this journey, it is our goal to ensure the community as a whole is better off.

These are exciting and historic times for Northeast Florida. We hope to improve the lives of every citizen in our region.

April Green is chair of JEA's board of directors.