



## **RECORD EDITORIAL: One more 'best,' this time for the county**

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If we were to spitball the dominant concern of St. Johns County, growth would lead the way. And those following in order would somehow be tied to the first — clogged roads, parking woes, sky-high real estate prices — you name it.

We are, as many locals now note, being loved to death.

And, thanks to a nationwide study by a personal finance technology firm, it's not showing signs of slowing down. St. Augustine is floating in a sea of "best of" accolades. St. Johns County gets a little less national press, but it took a big step recently.

St. Johns County is now recognized as Florida's most affordable county, as well as its wealthiest in terms of median income.

Its income gives it a boost and it's housing prices drag it down, but it averages out as the No. 1 county in terms of purchasing power — and No. 28 nationally.

For county residents, the cost of living is \$37,256, while the median income is \$69,523. That gave us a purchasing power index of 88.01.

And there's something about Northeast Florida that stands out, if you study the data.

Our neighbors are enjoying the party, as well. Nassau County ranked second in the state with a cost of living of \$36,038 and median income of \$59,196 for an index ranking of 77.47.

Clay County is third with a cost of living of \$36,415, a median income of \$59,179 for an index of 76.64. Baker County ranked fifth with a \$33,053 cost of living, a \$53,327 income and an index ranking of 76.09.

Duval County ranked 13th with a cost of living of \$33,094, median income of \$49,196 and a purchasing power index of 70.11.

Where would you imagine the most affordable county in the nation resides?

The answer is Williamson County, Tennessee — think Nashville. Its median income is \$100,140.

The website, [smartasset.com](http://smartasset.com), includes calculators with which you can compare any two counties. If you were looking to relocate, say, in New York (and who does?) you'd need a 31 percent bigger paycheck, predominately because housing costs are 55 percent more costly there and taxes are 46 percent higher.

A living wage calculator on another website ([livingwage.mit.edu](http://livingwage.mit.edu)) reports for a family of two adults, with one working and one at home, and with two children, food costs in St. Johns County are \$8,882 annually; child care 0; medical is \$8,214 and housing costs are \$11,364.

Other data collected on cost of living within the city of St. Augustine show it as compared to a national average. We are, in total, 1 percent below the average nationally. We're dead even on groceries, 19 percent higher for housing, 8 percent less for utilities, 3 percent less for transportation and 13 percent below the average for health care.

One more interesting number: The inflation rate in 2018 was 2.44 percent. St. Johns County's new budget is around 9 percent higher than the current year. Where will the difference end up — Infrastructure backlogs or new spending?