

From: Ken Nelms, Attorney
To: St Marys Planning Commission
St Marys City Council

Please accept the following comments submitted in opposition to the Old Mill Site Rezoning Application.

Approximately ten years ago this 722 Acres was rezoned and our citizens approved of that planned mixed use rezoning. The general consensus was then and is now that rezoning to planned mixed use was the highest and best use of this most important parcel of land in St Marys. It is my sincere belief there is a general consensus of disapproval toward this current rezoning application.

I have been in St Marys for over 30 years and my family has been in the territory of Georgia long before Georgia was even a state. But that does not give my voice any more weight than anyone else. If length of residency mattered the Cherokee would still rule Georgia. So please, let's not interject length of residency into this discussion as I have heard some try to do.

After a twenty two year naval career I returned to Georgia and "retired" in St Marys. The G. I. Bill and scholarships were good to me and I returned to Georgia with a Law Degree, a Master Degree(MA) in City Planning and a Master Degree(MS) in Business Management. My first year in Camden County I worked as the "Planner" for the Kings Bay Impact Coordinating Committee. After one year I opened a law office and I have been in private practice since. I quickly realized there was no place for a professional planner in the frantic growth years soon after Kings Bay Naval Base was established.

For over thirty years I have witnessed a frenzy of rezoning and annexations of land. The annexations and rezoning had nothing to do with City Planning or a Master Plan. The annexations and rezoning were massive in size and driven by greed and profit. The rezoning and annexations were contrary to everything I had learned about planning at the University. Rezoning and annexations were available for the asking by outside land speculators and local developers and local government were open for business. These ill planned annexations and rezoning have brought us to where we are today: a stagnant and poorly diversified local economy. Yet, as justification and support for another poorly planned and ill-advised rezoning application, our local development authorities decry the huge imbalance in the way our lands are zoned.

In my opinion, if the Planning Commission and the City Council approve this rezoning request, that will be a huge step backward in the same direction we have been traveling the past thirty years. If we rezone, we don't even know what we are rezoning for. As a young boy growing up on a farm, I learned early in life, "Never buy a pig in a poke," and it makes little sense to close the barn door once the horses are out.

In the interest of full disclosure, I do not currently represent anyone in this matter. Since 1989 I have lived on the banks of the North River directly opposite the Old Gilman Mill Site. My family, friends and neighbors fish, crab and boat on the North River. I know the North River very well and navigate it w/o the need of a depth gage. The North River eco system is very fragile and some species of fish and crab have all but disappeared in the last twenty years. Since the City of St Marys built the North River Boat Launch traffic on the river has multiplied exponentially. The St Marys Boat Yard and Shrimping have expanded and Cumberland Harbor has been approved to build a large marina on the North River. By building the North River Boat Launch St Marys turned the North River into a very active recreational area, whether planned or not. Whatever the City allows to happen to the Old Mill Site should be compatible with the active recreational use that has rapidly developed on the North River during the past twenty years.

St Marys has become a retirement town, whether planned or not. Other than Kings Bay Naval Submarine Base, growing our retiree community has become our major economic diversification. Let's embrace being a retirement community. Be patient and let this most important parcel of land develop as planned ten years ago. We did not dig ourselves into this economic hole overnight, and we will not dig ourselves out overnight. If we are not wise however, we can dig ourselves deeper into this economic hole.

Please, enough of bad planning (rezoning) decisions politically driven and rendered for the profit and greed of a few. Let's look toward the development of our city as a whole. Listen to your professional planners and most of all, your fellow citizens. Disapprove this "pig in a poke."

Ken Nelms, Attorney