

Greetings Friends and Associates:

Thanks to the many of you have attended the two public hearings held by the Planning Commission, and have added your comments to the City website.

As you may have observed, the proponents held back in the first hearing, then came out in full force in the second! Their arguments were familiar: jobs for grandkids (for the projected 2% increase in jobs!), increased tax revenues (after TAD infrastructure financing is paid off in 25 years!), trust in elected officials to know what is best for us (Really?), some residents were against the Navy coming in 15 years ago (as if that were relevant now for this subject!), gotta get it zoned industrial so we can try to attract end-users (Why wasn't this presented to the City Council by JDA's Chairman two years ago, without getting ASM involved?), etc. They even brought in someone from Fernandina to push for rezoning (more on that later)!

But it was pretty obvious that some in the City admin and JDA, along with ASM Capital, are pushing very hard to get this done. Also obvious that enthusiasm for rezoning increases dramatically with the distance of one's residence away from Ground Zero! Same goes for absolute certainty that the enthusiasts obviously know what is best for those to be most effected by the results of rezoning!

As you probably know, today is the last day for public comments to the City website. This is reasonable; it has to stop at some point to give the Planning Commission members time to digest the huge amount of material to considered, both pro and con. The PC will meet at 5:30 PM on Monday, March 14 in City Council chambers at City Hall. Don't know if they will permit further public comment at that time, but this meeting may be just for the PC members to discuss and vote. But it will be a public meeting so at least we can listen and know who votes which way.

And now back to Fernandina, which is the focus of the latest rumor, derived from two entirely separate sources. We ignored it as idle chatter when it first surfaced, but when it came from the second, apparently unrelated, source, we had to wonder. We hope this is just as meaningless as all the previous Ragucci ideas. What about a chip mill located on the mill site? It would take many of the 2,100 log trucks per day off Fernandina's 8th Street and put them on St Marys Road and Osborne Street. The chips would then be barged from the North River to Fernandina's paper mills.

Some results: St Marys reverts to being a "mill town" again, incredible noise for the nearby downtown neighborhoods (including St Marys Elementary School, the Library, and neighbors across North River), increased traffic and highway maintenance expense for St Marys AND Kingsland, more congestion for Exits One and Three, farewell to the wood storks, hello to a few low-paying jobs, and forget about attracting the promised high-tech, high-paying and "clean" industry to be neighbors to a chip mill! Haven't had time to run this rumor to ground (due to unavailability of JDA officials), but those in the know must know if it is based on fact, and must realize the tremendous opposition that it would engender from the voting public! We hope that responsible City and JDA officials will assure us that this is not in the plans.

Stay informed and stay involved!

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