



City of St. Marys Masterplan

Master Plan Steering Committee (MPSC) Meeting #1
November 5, 2015
6:00 PM – 8:00 PM

Meeting Summary

Attendees:

Joseph Antao
William DeLoughy
Tanya Glazebrook
Joseph Holler
Fred Mercier
Michael Rich (PC)
Elaine Powierski (CC)
Steve Howard (Co)
Robert Divine (Alternate)
Kenneth Lyons (Alternate)

Call to Order

Meeting was called to order promptly by Courtney Reich, Master Plan consultant, at 6:00PM.

I. Introductions

The meeting began with some open remarks from the Mayor. He praised the committee for their commitment to this process and placed emphasis on the positive nature of the project and the challenging journey ahead.

Ecological Planning Group (Courtney Reich) gave a brief presentation on the project and general scope of work. The project team consists of EPG, RS&H and Connie Cooper.

II. Personal Statements

The Steering Committee took turns introducing themselves and giving a brief personal statement about why they wanted to participate in this process and any issues they felt need to be addressed in the plan. Some of the topics and comments include the following:

- Difficulty focusing future development without a clear vision.
- The opportunity for the city to reach its full potential. The City should maintain the small-town charm, but also offer enough economic opportunity for children to come back and live in St. Marys after graduating college.
- The charm of downtown St. Marys. The maritime presence, the small town feel.
- Proximity of St. Marys to other coastal cities in Georgia and northern Florida.
- Need to be forward thinking.
- Proximity of St. Marys to the Jacksonville Airport and that this is a great resource to the community.
- Enjoyment of the St Marys community and the opportunities available for volunteering and being involved.
- Preservation of the existing culture.
- There has been a lot of change that has taken place in the community, but this also presents an opportunity moving forward.
- Small town feel of St Marys. The City needs to overcome recent economic struggles and become more resilient moving forward.
- The stand out feature of St Marys is the welcoming nature of the people and the opportunities available to be involved in the community.
- Community engagement is the precursor to change. There is a lot of opportunity in St. Marys as a whole, but any change will require broad community buy-in.
- Wants St. Marys to keep the small town charm while achieving the economic development that the community wants.
- The planning process needs to be inclusive in the overall approach. Hearing from each segment of the community will be critical.
- Keep general budget in mind when proposing activities and making recommendations in the plan.
- Recognize that a large segment of the population is lower income and efforts needs to be made to engage this sector of the population in the process.

III. Ground Rules

EPG reviewed and summarized the ground rules. EPG recommended that we move the next meeting to the senior center, as it provides a better venue for an interactive working environment.

The following revisions were recommended and will be made to the ground rules:

- The Attendance section will be revised to include language to the effect that responsiveness to emails, assignments, and participation between meetings also be required from Steering Committee members.
- Reference to “Stakeholders” in the Alternatives section will be revised

- Comments from the public will generally be reserved for the end of the meeting. In some instances, it may be necessary to allow public comment immediately following the topic. This will be at the discretion of the Chair.

Some additional comments regarding the ground rules:

- There should be some consideration in involving committee members for writing, brainstorming, and preparing materials for meetings.
- There is some concern about using social media because of the manner in which a message may come across.

The group took nominations for a Chair for the Steering Committee. A motion nominating Mike Rich was made and approved. The Chair will also act as the general spokesperson for the group. Joseph Antao and Tanya Glazebrook were nominated as vice-chair, a vote was held and Joseph Antao was elected and approved as vice chair.

IV. Meeting Formats

EPG presented a proposed meeting schedule and potential topics for moving through the planning process. There was some discussion of whether the group felt there is a need for a separate stakeholder group or if applicable groups should be invited to meetings based on the topic. Inviting interested parties based on the topic seemed to be the most effective way to move forward. The group agreed on the importance of full geographic representation and that we would need to be strategic in involving some of the under-served areas of the community.

Some general comments while discussing potential meeting topics:

- Benchmarking.
- Survey of what other communities have done and how were they successful, shortcomings, problems, etc.
- Sending out the City's current master plan (comp plan) and also providing the Steering Committee example plans that EPG has completed for another community,

The group discussed coming up with a draft outline of the masterplan to help steer the process and give the group a better understanding of where we are going. The general consensus was to start with the vision and eliminate items as we go through.

The following list includes comments made by the committee for items to be addressed in the plan:

- Resiliency and ability to be resilient in the long term. Recovery from loss of employer. Economic resiliency as well as environmental. How will the city respond both from a safety perspective and financially?
- Ordinances have strict standards, which don't always apply to this type of community. Make code apply more to need than fitting into the formality of the ordinance. Having more flexibility built into code.

- Diversity is the strength of the community. Celebrate the diversity.
- Transportation. Ability of people to get around in general. Very limited public transportation. More than just trails and bike paths.
- Vision and goals. Start with the goals and determine how we are going to get there. Practicality in developing a vision. The need for buy in along the way from the right people.
- Need to strengthen the economy, bring in a major employer that can weather economic cycles.
- Focus on outcomes and not outputs.
- Diversification of the tax base. The City can't pay the bills with residential only. Need to adapt to change.

V. Plan Review

EPG presented the web survey to the committee. The concept behind the survey is to have committee members review existing planning documents completed by the City and determine the appropriateness of activities proposed within.

EPG committed to mailing out links to the various planning documents on Friday, so the committee could review prior to the survey being made available. Since the survey is somewhat long, EPG will also determine if there is a way to allow the committee to complete the survey in multiple sittings, if necessary.

VI. Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 8:10PM.

Next Meeting:
Thursday, December 3, 2015
6-8:00PM
St. Marys Senior Center
120 Davis St.