

July 18, 2016

City of St Marys

Meeting of: Mayor and City Council Members

Audience to the Public

Addressing: Terry Adkins

200 Wheeler Street

St Marys, Georgia

I moved to Camden County in 1985. Started a business raised a family and now claim SE Georgia as home. I own Express Printing with offices in Kingsland and Brunswick. I have been a resident of St Marys for the past 17 years the last two plus years residing at 200 Wheeler Street which is in the city's designated "Historic District".

I'm here to speak out on the agenda issue of the "Ordinance Amendments" for the Historic Preservation Commission which is known as HPC. Specifically, I'm here to call for the complete dis-banning of the HPC as we know it.

First let me state I have nothing personally against the members of the HPC. In fact one of its members is my front door neighbor and I like him and consider him a friend. I have serious issues with the direction and authority that the HPC has morphed into.

I believe most HPCs organizations formed by city governments start out with the best of intentions. Most are initiated with an idea of preserving some significant structure or landmark. Many things start with good intentions then stray from common sense operations. I think that is the situation we find ourselves today.

As I prepared to make this presentation I wondered if anyone else had these issues and concerns. I reached out to neighbors, local business owners and

longtime city leaders. Not surprisingly, I found there are plenty of St Marys' residents that share similar feelings. Most that I talked with felt that St Marys had just gone down too far to recover from the misguided actions of the HPC.

Additionally, after a little research I discovered cities and towns across the country have taken actions to dis-ban, abolish or reign in their established "Historic Preservation Commissions". Just a few are:

Loveland, Colorado

Amory, Mississippi

La Quinta, California

Osage, Iowa

Ashland, Oregon

Costa Mesa, California

Norcross, Georgia

Longwood, New York

Murrieta, California

Douglas, Michigan

After reviewing these decisions to abandon the HPC model I discovered most of their stated reasons mirror my concerns and issues here in St Marys.

Some of my issues and concerns are:

- A) The HPC has gone past its original focus of advocacy for the preservation of historic structures or landmarks.
- B) The HPC was allowed to saddle a section of our city with the classification as a "Historic District" without the full ramifications being clearly understood. In doing so they have hindered this section of our city from responsible growth and prosperity.

- C) The HPC has wrongly pointed this city towards a THEME. They should more accurately be known as the HTC the Historic THEME Commission. We have allowed this commission to adopt the direction and mind-set that everything in the “St Marys Historic District” is “old” and therefore “historic”. Just because something is old does not make it historic or significant.
- D) The HPC has been allowed to use a progressive sliding scale of “if it’s 50 years old” it must be historic OR if one of its members knew someone who was old that lived in the house it must be significant. Again, sometimes old is just old.
- E) The HPC has somehow been allowed to be the first line of defense in preventing anything to change for the better in St Marys. With all this Councils’ concern about loss of businesses and lack of development in “downtown St Marys” do we need a COMMISSION that only thinks in one dimension as the gate keeper to progress?
- F) The HPC has gotten involved in the review process of every aspect of renovations and modifications to existing residential and commercial construction whether they are historic or not. They are also involved in review of all new construction.
- G) When it comes to something “new” being built in in the “Historic District” the HPC has been allowed to mandate all new construction should look old.
- H) Something that I witnessed firsthand at a recent HPC meeting brought this into clear focus for me: a property owner in the Historic District in order to obtain a construction permit to replace the rotten front steps of their NON-HISTORIC home had to stand before a called meeting of the HPC “hat in hand” to explain how authentically “old” the renovation will look. That was the tipping point for me. This has got to stop!

To summarize my comments:

I again want to state that I am in favor of preservation of historically significant structures and landmarks. I'm in full support of celebrating and promoting the history and cultural significance of the City of St Marys. I am NOT in favor of a council appointed Commission determining those issues without regard for the betterment of all aspects of my city.

It is time to abolish the HPC as we know it and allow our elected officials and paid city staff to handle development planning, zoning, permitting and code enforcement operations. The HPC should be replaced with an advisory board working under the Community Development Director. That board (Historic District Board) should have a very narrow scope of responsibilities.

Some of those responsibilities should be:

- A) Develop a proposed roster of Historically Significant Landmarks and Structures in the Historic District. That roster should have citizen and property owner input as well as public comment prior to the St Marys City Council's adoption of the Historic District Registry.
- B) At the request of the Community Development Director the new formed Historic District Board should be expected to comment on and review plans for demolition, modification or renovations of any of the Historic District Registry buildings, landmarks or structures. Their focus should be limited to advising the Director on best practices of historic preservation.

Mayor and Council thank you for this opportunity to address you and my city.