

# 2015 Board, Authority, Commission, and Committee Evaluation Report

## **Introduction**

A review of the Boards, Authorities, Commissions and Committees was conducted in the first quarter of 2015. This document contains an explanation of the reasons for the review, the process utilized, and opportunities that may exist that could improve the effectiveness and efficiencies of most or all of the entities. Findings related to a specific entity will not be addressed in this document.

## **Study Purpose**

Boards, Authorities, Commissions and Committees are all part of the overall governance of the city of St. Marys. In preparation for Master Planning, it is important that there is a clear understanding of how these entities operate, the purpose, roles and responsibilities of each. Ideally, each would understand how its role fits into the overall short and long term goals of the city.

It is important to our collective success that all components of city governance in existence are operating in a manner that is in the best interests of the city and its residents.

The community, the citizens, elected officials, city employees and volunteers all have expectations for how these entities will operate and what they are to achieve. Volunteers want their time spent and the services they render to result in a meaningful contribution. Sometimes this is an opportunity to develop new city leadership and increase the base of community involvement. Often it presents employees an opportunity to work more closely with community advocates who are not represented on these bodies to better enable them to ensure service to all citizens.

For these reasons, it is in the best interest of all involved to evaluate each of the entities to determine current roles, responsibilities, composition, goals, operating procedures and the potential for improvement both within the entities and between entities. By clarifying roles, identifying possible duplication and seeking improved coordination between the various components, the governance of the city can be improved.

## **Evaluation Process**

Written documentation for each entity was collected. This includes copies of ordinances, by-laws, procedures and other readily available written material. A standard form was developed to facilitate collection of information in an organized and consistent manner. The sections of the form included Organization Structure, Membership and Meetings, Funding and Operation Processes. Interviews were then conducted initially with the Chairs and, at times, employees who are involved with the entity. The information gathered was discussed, requests were made for any additional information which could be useful, and verbal confirmation of processes was obtained for those items not found in the documents.

## **Entities Included in the Study**

The following entities were included in the study.

1. Airport Authority
2. Board of Ethics

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3. Convention & Visitors Bureau Authority
4. Development Authority
5. Downtown Development Authority
6. Historic Preservation Commission
7. Hospital Authority
8. Intracoastal Gateway Steering Committee
9. Library Board
10. Oak Grove Cemetery Authority
11. Orange Hall Foundation
12. Planning Commission
13. Senior Advisory Committee
14. Tree Board

### Definitions

**Board:** A committee of persons organized under authority of law in order to exercise certain authorities, have oversight or control of certain matters, or discharge certain functions of a magisterial, representative, or fiduciary character.

**Authority:** Local government authorities are separate entities created for a specific public purpose. Local governments create authorities as a means of providing a wide range of services to their citizens and have used them increasingly to deliver services. The 1992 Census of Governments notes that authorities are by far the most rapidly growing type of government. Realizing the ever-increasing role authorities play in service delivery at the local government level, the General Assembly passed the Local Government Authorities Registration Act ([O.G.G.A. 36-80-16](#)) during the 1995 legislative session. This act requires local government authorities to register annually with the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) beginning January 1, 1996. The act also specifies that local government authorities may not incur any debt or credit obligations after January 1, 1996, unless they are registered. Prior to this legislation, there was no official record of how many authorities were operating within the state.

**Commission:** A body of persons acting under lawful authority to perform certain public services. For example, the public service commission.

**Committee:** A group of people chosen or appointed by a local City Council or Mayor to perform a specified service or task.

**Foundation:** A foundation (also a charitable foundation) is a legal categorization of nonprofit organizations that will typically either donate funds and support to other organizations, or provide the source of funding for its own charitable purposes.

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## Goals and Objectives for Discussion

In order to determine what changes to the current processes could result in improved efficiency and effectiveness, it is best to have a clear understanding of the goals and objectives of all entities. The following is offered for discussion.

- 1) Provide improvement in the delivery of city services to the citizens.
- 2) Provide an opportunity for citizens to be involved in local governance and encourage participation from a diverse and broad based segment of the community.
- 3) Ensure that citizens who are willing to serve are given the training, support and Council direction necessary to produce meaningful results which are beneficial to the city and its citizens.
- 4) Provide all citizens with a description of the various entities that includes a very specific role in the governance of the city, identification of the opportunities for citizens to become involved, the expectations and responsibilities of each available position, the training and/or expertise needed for each position, the length of service and the frequency of meetings and other time commitments.
- 5) Provide opportunities for all citizens to become more knowledgeable about the operations of city government even if they are not currently in a position to volunteer.
- 6) Increase the level of understanding and cooperation between all citizens, employees and elected officials of the city.

## Overall Issues for Discussion

There are various opportunities for discussion that could result in improvements of the operation and effectiveness of all the entities reviewed. They are broken down in the same categories as the information was collected and are as follows:

### ***Organization Structure***

This section collected information relative to what mandates were in place for each entity, whether they were driven by State Law, Ordinance, By-Laws or Procedures. It also looked at which processes were mandated such as meeting frequency, selection and number of members, how appointed, terms and term limits as well as specific powers and authorities.

Findings: There was significant variation between entities in this area. The authorities and boards were often better defined and had more mandates because of State and Local Codes. Board size ranges from five (5) to eleven (11) members. Some have a City Council member as part of the entity and others do not. Some have term limits. Some do not. Some have city staff assigned to support their efforts. Some do not. Most have the powers and authorities clearly defined.

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### Opportunities for Discussion:

1. The advantages and disadvantages of term limits need to be discussed. There currently are four entities with term limits and three are not in compliance.
2. Are all the boards, authorities, commissions and committees necessary and functioning as intended? Are there any functions that currently do not have a board or authority that would benefit from having one?
3. What is the role of a City Council person who is a member of an entity and should that role have voting privileges or be a liaison?
4. Could the current processes for advertising openings on the various entities, the communication of responsibilities and expectations for the members and selection of members be improved?

### ***Membership & Meetings***

This section collected information relative to officers and how they are elected, terms of office for officers, written job descriptions for officers and members, written goals and objectives, public notification of meetings, types of meeting allowed, involvement of city staff, involvement of council, and member training.

Findings: Most of the entities have annual election of officers. Some only have a chair while others also have vice-chairs, secretaries and treasurers. No entity has established term limits for these positions although mandated term limits for members would also limit the length of time as an officer. Other than all volunteers being required to attend an Open Meeting Open Records training session, there is little consistency in training. Some have required training while others have no training. Some entities have goals and objectives, others do not. As previously mentioned, some have a City Council member participating; others do not.

Most of the entities utilize the City Clerk for notification of meeting and maintenance of minutes. The handling and maintenance of other documents is not clearly defined.

### Opportunities for Discussion:

1. What should the required training of new and current members include? Since all members are subject to laws relating to Open Records, Open Meetings, Conflicts of Interest and Code of Ethics, should core training be expanded? Should all entities have a documented training plan for new members?
2. Should there be a procedure for maintenance and retention of documents other than the minutes especially if they are considered public and available through the Open Records law?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of term limits for officers?
4. In view of the turnover of elected officials and volunteers, what should be in place to ensure continuity through the years?

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### ***Funding***

This section collected information relative to how the entity is funded, whether a budget is in place, a description of the assets held by the entity, what expenditures are allowed, if financial reports and annual audits are completed.

Findings: Approximately half of the entities have funding and/or assets. Most are included in the city budget process so there are regular financial reports and annual audits. There were a few questions relative to how monies should be handled and what expenditures are allowed but nothing significant. Most are specific to one entity and just require clarification.

Opportunities for Discussion:

Would it be beneficial to ensure that a clear definition of permitted expenditures and the approval process are in writing? Some require City Council approval; others do not.

### ***Operation Processes/Actions***

This section collected information relative to the development of annual goals, operational and reporting relationships with the City Manager and City Council, interaction with other entities, reporting requirements and communication processes.

Findings: Very few of the entities establish clear, measurable and attainable annual goals to guide them throughout the year. Most give an annual report to City Council but these reports are not consistently structured and time is not allocated for sharing of ideas or providing direction for the next reporting period. Other than knowing an annual report is given and the City Council appoints members, many of the entities do not understand the role of City Council as it relates to their entity. Some decisions made by entities are subject to an appeal before the City Council.

In addition, there is often significant interface of responsibilities between entities, shared areas of responsibility without clear roles, no formal communication process and perhaps some duplication of efforts due to a lack of a shared vision to guide their actions.

Opportunities for Discussion:

Should the establishment of clear, meaningful and measurable annual goals be a requirement for all or some of the entities? What other methods could be used to gauge the effectiveness of an entity?

When several entities informally interact and functions overlap, what can be done to improve coordination of efforts, clarification of roles and prevention of duplication?

Should monitoring/evaluation of boards, authorities, commissions and committees be conducted on a regular basis? If so how and when?

What is the role of City Council in providing direction to the entities?

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Could the process for hearing appeals of decisions made by certain entities be improved?

Should the annual reporting process to City Council change to facilitate more discussion, sharing of ideas and setting of goals?

Next Steps:

The preliminary findings will be shared with the City Manager, Mayor and City Council. Public meetings will be scheduled to discuss the results, review the opportunities, obtain input from citizens and determine the best way to proceed.