

Economic issues need closer look

An economic impact study from Georgia Southern University on Spaceport Camden appears to bode well for the creation of jobs and gross regional product in coastal Georgia. However, it only scratches the surface of the economic issues that surround the proposed commercial spaceport.

There is no denying that the area badly needs a catalyst project to help diversify a local economy that is heavily dependent on government jobs and the residential tax base.

If Camden could capitalize on just a small sliver of the \$300 billion commercial space industry, it could revitalize not only our county's economy, but have a ripple effect across the region and state, county leaders have said.

When the county announced its intention to pursue this project, commissioners noted the environmental impact study would cost approximately \$750,000, but said the potential return far outweighed that investment.

Five years later, Camden County has spent that amount many times over on a range of spaceport-related expenses that far exceed the required EIS. This doesn't include the actual construction cost of the project, which the county has said they hope will be a public-private partnership.

The projections released by the Bureau of Business Research and Economic Development and presented as a "summary" implies the existence of a larger body of published work, but that appears not to be the case.

The public relations firm that was hired by the county to answer spaceport media inquiries compared the two-page study to one that was completed by the same bureau for Kings Bay Naval Submarine Base. The obvious difference is that Kings Bay is currently in operation, has been for more than 35 years and is producing actual data upon which conclusions can be based. Projecting impact on a yet-to-be constructed spaceport is likely to be much more challenging to nail down, especially given that some of this new technology is in its infancy.

The GSU study does serve as a good starting point for a phase of the spaceport discussion that is worthy of exploring — the financial side of the project. This does not just mean discussing what has already been spent, but what costs we can expect in the future and how we plan to pay for it and sustain it for years to come.

We need to know who our potential partners will be and how much we can realistically expect them to contribute toward the operation.

We also need to examine not just the best-case scenario for economic gain, but the financial risks and obstacles that also may come with the project. Billionaires are investing in commercial space, but unlike us, they can afford to lose a few million on the chance things will pay off.

Camden County citizens are shareholders in Spaceport Camden and ultimately, these are the kind of details anyone should expect to have when making a wise decision on how to invest their hard-earned money.



"Ouch! Don't pull that one, Doc...it takes my mind off the news."

Gaining momentum in August

The popular term "dog days of summer" dates back to ancient Greece and referred to the sultry part of summer when Sirius, the Dog Star, rises at the same time as the sun, a period in late July and August often marked by lethargy and inactivity. Over time, the term translated to a time when dogs and people preferred to lounge and languish during the hot, humid days of August. Even with the invention of air conditioning, it is still a popular phrase today.

When I reflect on August in the city of St. Marys, it is clear there is no time for languishing. Instead we are experiencing action and momentum building on a number of fronts.

The Joint Development Authority (JDA) unveiled its plans at a city council work session for a proposed marine center on 50 acres of the former mill site. A contract offer from the JDA has been accepted on the property and the JDA is already busy completing the necessary 12-month due diligence requirements to ensure the property can meet the needs of interested developers and tenants. The maritime-themed development of the property will reinforce St. Marys' link to our extensive water surroundings and heritage.



John Morrissey

Guest columnist

This month the City of St. Marys announced a conceptual plan to create much-needed additional boat dockage adjacent to the gateway property. The 40-plus boat slips will attract boaters traveling the Intracoastal Waterway. The gateway committee engaged a new firm, well-known within Georgia, with plans to identify and obtain the appropriate hotel/conference/restaurant facility that can take advantage of our great waterfront location and the proposed new docks.

With the city's long history of marine-related industry and activities, all three of these projects complement each other. Our vision for the city and the waterfront is now moving forward toward reality.

Add to that, we just

opened the first phase of a pedestrian walkway/bikeway at the gateway location. As funds become available, it will eventually be extended the entire length of the gateway marsh wall. Plans for continuation to Weed Street and on to the rookery are being explored. Another great addition was the installation of a tide clock at the Wheeler Street entrance to our waterfront park. Boaters and visitors alike will appreciate the attractive addition to the park and its valuable information. Little by little, the city landscape is changing for the better.

With all this momentum in full swing in August, this is also the month in which the city council will begin its review of the citizen-driven master plan that was undertaken 18 months ago. The volunteer steering committee created a One St. Marys Vision and recommended action plans to achieve that vision in a detailed master plan for the city. Following interviews with hundreds of citizens, workshop participation by hundreds more and hours of data evaluation, the master plan steering committee has completed its key report. (I should note that the segment of the plan addressing zoning changes will be considered separately this

fall.) The steering committee and lead staff, Dr. Jeff Adams, are scheduled to engage with the city council in the first of at least three work sessions at 4 p.m. Monday, Aug. 28, in council chambers. A master plan document is always complex because it includes statistical data, findings, challenges and opportunities and finally a recommended and detailed work plan.

I encourage all St. Marys residents to attend these work sessions to learn more about what fellow citizens believe a St. Marys of the future should look like. You can access the One St. Marys Master Plan and the work plan at the city website, www.stmarysga.gov; use the left hand column link to "City Master Plan" to view the documents. It is detailed, which is why we will be addressing it in segments.

Yes, we are still in the dog days of summer, but the council chamber is air conditioned so you can listen to the first round of reviews in a cool setting. The date again is 4 p.m. Aug. 28. If you cannot make it, we hope to make the sessions available on video.

John Morrissey is the mayor of St. Marys. He can be contacted at john.morrissey@stmarysga.gov.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Spaceport adds to what Camden has to offer

Dear Editor,

More than 12 years ago, I relocated my family to St. Marys from Green Bay, Wis., to work for a high-tech company, which builds nuclear and fossil power plant simulators used to train plant operators.

The excellent school system and location were major contributors for my deciding

to come here, but after my two daughters completed their college degrees, they took jobs two and five hours away. This was partially due to the limited job opportunities which exist in Camden County.

That is one of the reasons that I am in support of Spaceport Camden. Having an industry such as this in our area will bring good, high-tech, high-paying jobs and allow more of our young people to have careers in the town where they grew up. It will also be good for the tax

base and make the region more appealing to other industries and support companies.

We already have so much to offer: we are right off Interstate 95 and close to the ports of Brunswick and

Jacksonville, Fla. We need to do all we can to maintain our community for future generations and Spaceport Camden is the perfect way to do that.

Scott Zeplin
 St. Marys

Tribune & Georgian

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WE WANT YOUR OPINION

Do you want to know more about the economic impact of a spaceport?

LAST WEEK'S RESULTS

Do you plan to watch the solar eclipse?

64% Yes
 32% No
 4% I'm not sure

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- Letters submitted for publication must include the writer's full name, street address and telephone number for verification purposes.

- Unsigned letters or those that do not include contact information will not be published.

- Letters should be no more than 500 words.

- Writers are limited to one letter every 20 days.

- Thank-you letters will be published to acknowledge volunteers, and can name specific businesses

- or individuals working in a professional capacity. Long lists will not be published.

- Letters written on behalf of a community organization must be signed by at least one person.

- While attempts are made to print all letters that meet the above criteria, all are subject to the discretion of the editor and publisher.

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