

### Good news for homeowners.

The City received confirmation last week that we have achieved a new level of compliance in FEMA's (Federal Emergency Management Agency) CRS Community Rating System designed to help reduce the cost of community flood insurance. That means good news for most St. Marys homeowners as their FEMA issued flood insurance costs should drop another 5% to a new total of 20%. When we joined, the effective but not well known program three years ago, we emerged with a (7) rating and that meant a 15% reduction in rates for most homeowners. Each year we are required to report our activity/improvements in 14 separate categories and are evaluated and graded by FEMA with points in each category. Those points lead to the rating system with a (10) being high risk prone to flooding and a (1) as the lowest risk.

While most large coastal cities participate in this program, many smaller ones do not because of limited budgets or inexperienced staff who are necessary to implement complex directives. St. Marys is fortunate that both our prior and current Community Development Directors have had the experience and dedication in tracking this program. Our next goal is to reduce our rating to a (5). The steps are far too numerous to detail here but anyone interested in learning more should contact Ms. Carter Thompson, Community Development, who will be happy to share and explain the rating system and your individual home's designation..

### Good news on St. Marys Street.

Unless the predicted heavy rains the last two days delay our efforts, the sidewalk section of St. Marys Street is expected to open for foot traffic this week, much to the relief of both merchants and patrons. The street section is on schedule but obviously will take more time. We are still hopeful this particular downtown improvement project will be complete by Fall 2019.

### Citizen Input Encouraged.

One of St. Marys most cherished assets is our role as Gateway to magnificent Cumberland Island National Seashore. It is likely there is not a single resident who does not have an opinion about how the Island is managed and now we each have an opportunity for input into how the National Park Service manages Cumberland Island for the future. A year long planning process by the Park Service began last week and will conclude in May 2020. As a part of that process, individuals are asked to submit responses to the "Draft Strategies for Future Visitor Use" document now available on the Park website: <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/cuis>. Comments may be made until May 10, 2019 on the site or can be delivered to the Cumberland Visitor Center or the Park Headquarters on Wheeler Street.

For those who want more detail or are not computer comfortable, Gary Ingram, Park Superintendent is hosting an information and input session Friday, April 12 at the St. Marys Elementary School. The Program starts at 4:30 with overview presentations with the Draft Strategies scheduled for 5, 6 and 7 p.m. each followed by half hour input sessions.

The Strategies are too long to list here but include camping opportunities, beach access, ferry service, trails and facilities. Of special interest to me and most downtown merchants, the issue of properly identifying the appropriate number of visitors to the island in order to both protect the resources and increase the number of experiences for visitors is included in the review. I have long thought that it would benefit both St. Marys and the Park Service if the number of visitors allowed daily year-round was increased while still respecting the integrity of the island and its natural environment. If you share that view, I encourage you to use the next four weeks to make your voices known to the Park Service.

The professionalism and depth of review the Park Service is undertaking in this plan for the future is commendable. Let's all do our part by participating in the opportunity for input. Whether you are a frequent or occasional visitor to Cumberland Island, it is important to share your personal perspective. The Cumberland Island National Seashore is one of America's great treasures and we are proud to be the Gateway for visitors from around the world and our own community. The success and protection of Cumberland Island is vital to all of us.