

The Mill Site Development Process November 2015

After the city's announcement that we had submitted the request for rezoning the former mill site property by The Port of St. Marys, LLC, to the Coastal Regional Commission of Georgia for its review, I have had several questions about the process of this long anticipated economic project. It seems an appropriate time just to recap where we are and what the next steps will be.

About a year ago, the bankruptcy Trustee for the property announced it had accepted a tentative offer from a firm to purchase all of the mill site property. The firm subsequently hired a development company that spent many months engaged in a due diligence process to determine whether the property was viable for its planned development. It has now concluded that step and determined that to move forward it requires a zoning change from Planned Development Mixed Use to Planned Development Industrial under Section 110-68 of the city of St. Marys zoning ordinance.

Because of the anticipated size of the project, value, and the amount of land impacted, a Development of Regional Impact (DRI) has been created by the Port of St. Marys LLC. The city is required to have the Coastal Regional Commission of Georgia review the request and approve the DRI before the city takes any further action. The Commission has 30 days to review the project, notify affected parties which include neighboring jurisdictions, impacted agencies and other state entities then issue its report. That report will provide recommendation to city officials to help with the review of the zoning application.

At that point the developer and the Camden County Joint Development Authority will host public round tables during which the developer will provide details on the project and citizens will be able to express comments. Those first sessions will occur December 5 from 10 a.m. to noon and December 15 from 6 to 8 p.m. at the St. Marys Elementary School with the possibility of another session in January. The City Council will not make any decision regarding the zoning request until the St. Marys Planning Commission has fully vetted the request and until public comment has been heard and considered.

I remain optimistic that we are finally coming to the point where a critical economic development project that will create jobs and stimulate our local economy is within reach. It has been a long process and is not yet complete, but we are closing in.

For those of you interested in reading the details of the zoning application by The Port of St. Marys LLC and their initial plans for development, it can be found on the city's website home page at www.ci.st-marys.ga.us

We have all been eager to see this valuable property developed in a way that will boost our economy and still protect our wildlife habitats and our environmentally sensitive marshes. That will continue to be our focus and our priority.