



Needs and Opportunities

6 Needs and Opportunities

This chapter provides the list of needs and opportunities that the City of St. Marys intends to address through this planning process. Each of the needs or opportunities listed herein is addressed through a corresponding implementation measure in the Community Work Program in the following chapter. This list was developed by the Master Plan Steering Committee through a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis, evaluation of demographic and economic information summarized in the Data Assessment Addendum, and review of the public input received through numerous public workshops and a community survey, summarized in the Public Participation Program Addendum. In addition, the MPSC also reviewed the supplemental planning recommendations provided by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, and included relevant ideas and information.

Economic Development

Needs
The waterfront area of St. Marys needs revitalization and investment.
Living-wage employment opportunities are needed.
The airport has been closed and the property will revert to the City of St. Marys and be available for redevelopment.
The closure of the South Gate of the Navy Subbase has negatively impacted commercial traffic for St. Marys' businesses.
There is a perception that additional hotel rooms and other types of tourist housing are needed.
The City is not benefiting as much as it could from the tourist traffic generated by visitors to Cumberland Island.
Residents have expressed a need for more restaurant/retail opportunities.
The City is not perceived by some to be a "business-friendly" city.
Overall appearance of the Midtown area, including closed buildings and vacancy, is having a negative impact on economic development.
The Midtown area and corridor to downtown needs revitalization.
There is a need for more diversification of the economic base (top employers are governmental, hospital, and education)
The City's permit fee structure is not perceived to be accommodating to new restaurants and other service related businesses.
Gateway & signage improvements are needed to direct people to and around St. Marys.

Opportunities

Continue to work with the Navy to explore opportunities to open the South Gate.

Foster improved relations with the JDA and work with the JDA to recruit clean industries and/or marina-based businesses.

Develop the Gateway Intracoastal property.

Attract intracoastal boating traffic by constructing docks with overnight slips and support services like marine supplies.

Capitalize on the population that visits Cumberland Island daily.

Create a business-friendly permitting and licensing process.

Develop a city-wide beautification program.

The Mill Site and airport properties offer opportunities for jobs and economic development.

Initiate a mutually beneficial connection with Fernandina Beach.

Leverage ecological and historical assets to foster economic growth.

Crooked River and other waterways provide ample locations for commercial aquaculture and fisheries.

Wedding, boating and marine activities can bring more tourists to the City.

The figures on the following page illustrate the City's vision for Midtown commercial corridor beautification and revitalization. By adopting and/or enforcing standards for landscaping, parking, and property maintenance in the Midtown area, the City can foster the type of aesthetic improvements illustrated. Realization of this vision is likely to require some up-front public investment by the City of St. Marys, similar to the sidewalk improvement project that is planned for the downtown area.

Figure 8: Rendering of Aesthetic Improvements to Osborne Street.



Land Use

Needs
<p>The City needs to revise or replace its outdated zoning code.</p> <p>Residents want to maintain the “small-town ambiance” while allowing for future development and economic growth.</p> <p>The aesthetics of the City’s commercial corridors need improvement.</p> <p>Vacant commercial buildings and undeveloped land along the City’s major commercial corridors are available for development.</p> <p>There is a lack of connectivity of residential areas to neighborhood and regional commercial centers.</p> <p>Family-oriented activities and attractions are lacking.</p> <p>There is a lack of service related businesses in different areas of the City.</p> <p>There is a demonstrated need for opportunities for temporary housing (furnished rooms, cottages, RVs, etc.).</p> <p>Residential density in the downtown area is needed to support desired commercial development.</p>
Opportunities
<p>Use the adoption of a new Master Plan as the impetus to adopt a modern zoning code that includes form-based standards for commercial corridors in Midtown, Downtown, and appropriate areas.</p> <p>The airport closing provides a complementary commercial/industrial space for development.</p> <p>Create incentives to encourage additional neighborhood commercial services, such as grocery stores and pharmacies, in areas in need of these services.</p> <p>Protection of local cultural, historic and natural resources are necessary to create tourist destination opportunities.</p> <p>A new zoning ordinance can attract appropriate businesses.</p> <p>Explore ways to better address vacant and underutilized structures.</p> <p>Use a new zoning code as an opportunity to create and increase residential living space in downtown St. Marys.</p>

Housing

Needs
<p>More affordable/workforce housing is needed, both for rental and owner-occupied units.</p> <p>Housing is needed for special populations, including the elderly and special needs.</p> <p>A wider variety of housing options besides detached, single-family is needed.</p> <p>Safe neighborhoods should be enjoyed by all residents of St. Marys' residents.</p> <p>There is a lack of housing opportunities for first-time home buyers, young couples, and military families.</p>
Opportunities
<p>Consider assisted living and tax credit housing for aging populations.</p> <p>Consider marketing St. Marys as an ideal housing opportunity for the growing workforce in North Florida.</p> <p>Consider zoning changes to develop mixed use and higher density living opportunities in downtown along with middle class and affordable housing development.</p>

Natural Historic and Cultural Resources

Needs
<p>Unique and sensitive environmental, historic and cultural resources within the City could potentially be adversely impacted by development.</p> <p>Any loss of these resources could potentially have an adverse impact on the tourism industry and local economy.</p>

Opportunities

Partner with the U.S. Park Service to expand tourism for Cumberland Island.

Ensuring the preservation of the marsh environment and waterways is necessary to provide a major attraction for residents and visitors.

Thoughtful and practical preservation and adaptive reuse of significant historic structures should be considered as appropriate.

Seek to include design standards for the Downtown in the new zoning code that are consistent with the historic character of this area.

Protection of the Rookery and other critical wildlife habitats is desirable to preserve the City's natural resources.

The City could better capitalize on the history of the City that currently remains undocumented / uncelebrated.

Consider a program to install historic markers to highlight the historic nature of St. Marys.

Seek to balance the City's need to encourage business and residential development with the preservation of natural, historic and cultural resources.



City Facilities, Services and Funding

Needs
<p>There are numerous city-owned facilities in need of maintenance or improvements.</p> <p>The permitting and development review process as well as many ordinances are perceived to be difficult and discourage new business and development.</p> <p>The City has a high debt to income ratio and is limited in its ability to attract capital for needed improvements.</p> <p>Code enforcement is perceived to be inconsistent.</p> <p>There is a need for supervised activities and centers for youth.</p> <p>The property tax base is not diversified and is heavily dependent on residential property owners.</p> <p>Wayfinding signage is inadequate and confusing.</p> <p>Some areas of St. Marys do not receive water and sewer services.</p> <p>There is a desire for additional City services for residents of all ages.</p>
Opportunities
<p>Expand programming for all ages at City parks and facilities.</p> <p>Review the City's ordinances and permitting process to ensure that it is business friendly.</p> <p>Annex islands of unincorporated Camden County that currently receive City services at little to no cost.</p> <p>Find alternate sources for public revenues.</p>

Resiliency

Needs
<p>Tidal influence on the stormwater drainage system causes flooding during rain events at or near high tide.</p> <p>There is street flooding in downtown, which will increase as development increases and new impervious surfaces are created.</p>

Sea level rise will exacerbate the flooding issue as high tides heights increase.

Low lying wetland areas directly east of Bartlett Street will be impacted by increasing sea levels and flooding due to high tides.

The City is vulnerable to coastal hazards, including hurricanes and associated impacts from wind and storm surge.

New FEMA Digital Flood Insurance Rate Maps will be effective in November 2017, and the Base Flood Elevation has decreased in many areas of the City.

Flood insurance rates are increasing for certain property owners.

Better partnerships and coordination with the county and other agencies that address resiliency and disaster response is needed.

Opportunities

Consider integrating flood resiliency and catastrophic emergency planning with the City's efforts to beautify the downtown and waterfront areas, to encourage residential and economic development, and to update the City's Code.

Routine maintenance of the drainage system is essential.

Determination how a Stormwater Master Plan could be funded.

The development standards identified in the Coastal Stormwater Supplement can be used as guidance for future development and redevelopment.

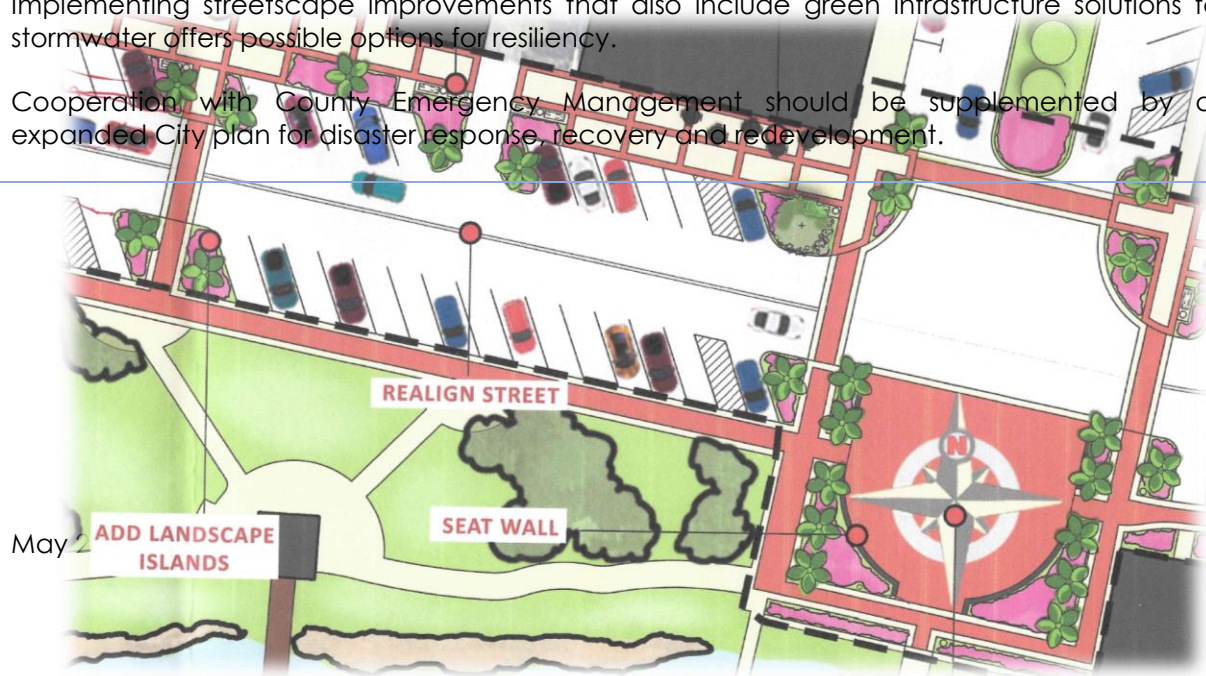
Determine whether it is possible or feasible to provide ongoing financial and staff support for the City's Floodplain Management program.

Maintaining and/or improving the City's CRS rating will benefit some property owners.

The viability of alternative energy sources / resources (solar, wind, etc.) should be evaluated.

Implementing streetscape improvements that also include green infrastructure solutions for stormwater offers possible options for resiliency.

Cooperation with County Emergency Management should be supplemented by an expanded City plan for disaster response, recovery and redevelopment.



Military Relationship

Needs
<p>The City's ongoing relationship with the changing military leadership is important to achieving mutual objectives for creating a healthy community.</p>
<p>It is difficult to involve the members of the military in the St. Marys community when they are only in St. Marys for a few years.</p>
<p>The SUBASE provides on-site services for members of the military that are often superior to similar services in St. Marys, thus competing with local businesses.</p>
<p>The SUBASE operations can be affected by adjacent land uses in St. Marys.</p>
<p>Look for ways to make the rail line a multi-user resource as noted in the JLUS.</p>
<p>Provide more family-friendly activities for military members in the community, including teenagers, families, and couples.</p>

Opportunities

Consider how the recommendations in the JLUS can be integrated into the Master Plan.

Find ways to partner with the military facilities to better integrate military family lives with community beyond the school system.

Continue dialogue with military leaders to open the South Gate for lunch hours.

Community Health

Needs

Food deserts exist in several areas of the City.

Mental health services are inadequate to meet the needs of the community.

It is difficult to attract physicians to St. Marys due to the small patient pool.

Many residents of St. Marys travel to Jacksonville or Brunswick for medical services.

St. Marys has an aging population that will need aging in place services.

There is a lack of support centers to assist caregivers.

Opportunities

Support campus style medical developments addressing the stated needs, in collaboration with the hospital.

Acknowledge the need for and support opportunities for providing healthy food and resources to underserved areas.

Support businesses seeking to bring in facilities to serve seniors.



St. Marys Community Market Courtesy of VisitStMarys.com.

Technology

Needs
<p>It is difficult for a small city to keep up with the rapid pace of changing technology.</p> <p>More residents are seeking greater online services from the City.</p> <p>There is a need to create a more effective GIS system.</p>
Opportunities
<p>Improvements in computer hardware and software allow the City to better utilize advances in technology to serve the public.</p> <p>Better use of technology can alleviate problems caused by lack of staff.</p>

Education

Needs
<p>Job training related to local employment options (current and future) is lacking.</p> <p>Life-skills training for the City's youth is not available for many of the young residents in the City.</p>
Opportunities
<p>Encourage local employers to work with the Board of Education and Coastal College of Georgia, Camden Center, to tailor classes & programs to their needs.</p> <p>Encourage nonprofit organizations, churches, foundations, etc., and the Board of Education to develop life skills and future job training for high school students.</p>



Transportation

Needs
<p>Unsafe and confusing golf cart accessible designations on local roads cause safety issues.</p>
<p>Bicycle paths along the rail corridors are desirable.</p>
<p>Improved pedestrian and bicycle connectivity to coastal marshlands is desirable.</p>
<p>Resurfacing projects should, where feasible, include provisions to bicycles and golf carts, e.g. striping for bicycle lanes.</p>
<p>Complete bicycle network with adequate lighting is needed.</p>
<p>Multi-modal access from residential areas to community facilities is not adequate.</p>
<p>Safer crossings for access to schools are needed.</p>
<p>Coastal Regional Commission demand response bus service and taxi cab services are not sufficient.</p>
<p>Public transportation is needed from downtown St. Marys along Osborne Road to Kingsland to access services, shopping and employment centers.</p>
<p>Ferry service to Fernandina should be considered.</p>
<p>Event traffic and parking is an issue for the community and visitors.</p>
<p>Congestion around the schools at peak times is an issue.</p>
<p>Traffic speed and cut through traffic is an issue on some neighborhood roadways.</p>
<p>The City has several intersections with operational issues that need to be addressed as outlined in the Multi-Modal Transportation Study.</p>
<p>Safety at intersections, particularly near schools, is a primary focus.</p>
<p>Gateway signage into St. Marys along SR 40/Osborne Road needs to be enhanced.</p>
<p>There is limited dock space at the Waterfront and it is not boater friendly. Improvements are needed.</p>

Opportunities

Identify appropriate golf cart routes and modify existing ordinances regarding golf cart operations.

Consider public and private ways to install charging stations for golf carts and electric vehicles.

Implement priority recommendations from the Camden County Bicycle and Pedestrian Study.

Create trails that link downtown with surrounding neighborhoods.

Consider using abandoned rail corridors and utility easements for recreational trails.

Consider ways to maximize the attractiveness of waterway trails for tourist and residents.

Consider remote parking and shuttle services to address event parking issues.

Encourage multi-modal interconnectivity for all new developments.

Identify opportunities to provide transit service to underserved populations.

Coordinate with rail companies to promote accessibility and safe crossing opportunities while ensuring efficient mobility for all modes.

Continue to coordinate with GDOT on roadway improvements, including improvements to Exit 1, and to address operational and safety issues.

Local safety projects along the Federal Highway system should be identified, coordinated with city and county officials, and submitted to the GDOT and FHA for consideration in the lump sum safety funding program.

Where City funds are available, use them as leverage to conduct feasibility studies, perform preliminary engineering/design and conduct right of way acquisition to incentivize State and federal funding participation in local safety projects.

There are school crossing safety issues that should be addressed as outlined in the Multi-Modal Transportation Study.

Assess feasibility and potential locations for additional boat dock facilities and associated improvements.

Protect evacuation routes in general, and specifically those that connect to SUBASE Kings Bay and peripheral residential areas.

Figure 9: Rendering of Beautification and Signage Improvements at St. Marys Road and Highway 40



Intersection.



Concept Drawing for St. Marys Gateway Enhancement Project, courtesy of Thomas & Hutton

Master Plan Implementation

Needs
A mechanism is needed for ensuring that the Master Plan is implemented.
Opportunities
Develop an oversight process for plan implementation