



City of St. Marys
Master Plan
Community Engagement Plan

FEBRUARY 2016

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INTRODUCTION

The word community, for the purposes of this plan, can be defined as a population of people living in a common location. There can be a wide variation when it comes to the basic social, professional, economic, and political values of the residents that make up a community. In preparing a Master Plan, it is important to work with citizens to identify the issues and challenges unique to their community. The planning process begins with an evaluation of the current strengths and needs of the community followed by a vision for the future. This Community Engagement Plan is designed to give citizens the opportunity to take part in the planning process, to produce a document that best reflects the overall vision for the community, and to gain support for the Master Plan from the public. An innovative and community engagement program will ensure that the public feels vested in results of the planning process.

The Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) requires that the City of St. Marys prepare an update to their Comprehensive Plan, as outlined in the Rules for Comprehensive Planning, Chapter 110-4-3 by October 2018. The Minimum Planning Standards and Procedures for the Comprehensive Plan requires the following community involvement techniques:

“(a) Identification of Stakeholders. Compile a list of stakeholders who need to have a voice in the development of the plan. Refer to the list of suggested stakeholders provided in the Supplemental Planning Recommendations for suggestions. Members of the governing authority must be included among the selected stakeholders and be actively involved in plan preparation, such as serving on the steering committee that guides development of the plan. This will help ensure that the plan will be implemented, because leadership that is involved in plan development is likely to become committed to seeing it through.

(b) Identification of Participation Techniques. Review each of the recommended community participation techniques identified in the Supplemental Planning Recommendations to select those to be used locally for involving the selected stakeholders in the process of developing the plan. At minimum, your community must form a steering committee to oversee and participate in development of the plan that includes some of the stakeholders identified in section (a) above, members of the governing authority, local economic development practitioners, and local government staff.

(c) Conduct Participation Program. Invite each of the stakeholders identified in section (a) above to participate in the activities and events identified in section (b). Use these participation events to solicit specific input on the content of the plan. Hold regular meetings of the steering committee to provide input and feedback to the plan preparers as the plan is developed.”

PUBLIC PARTICIPTION STRATEGY

The purpose of the Community Engagement Plan is to provide citizens the opportunity to participate in the development of the Master Plan. An effective community engagement program should be designed to educate the public as well as provide an opportunity for citizens to be part of the planning process. The participation strategies outlined in this plan have been selected to assure that citizens understand the planning process and that multiple avenues for involvement exist.

The benefits of effective community involvement include:

- Citizens increasingly desire to be involved in decisions that affect their community.
- People with different areas of expertise contribute ideas, resulting in a well thought out plan with better solutions.
- By allowing residents, special interest groups, and business leaders to be involved, planners and decision makers have the chance to think “outside the box.”
- Working together provides the opportunity to understand other people’s concerns and issues.
- Citizen concerns are heard and responded to early in the process, which leads to more effective program implementation and future acceptance.

The most successful community engagement strategy is one that gets a wide variety of citizens involved in the decision making process that will shape the future of their community. The City intends to accomplish this goal by providing various levels of public involvement. Implementing the activities outlined in this plan will improve the overall quality of the Master Plan by defining the values of the entire community, producing a Master Plan vision that truly represents the community, and working together to identify common goals. Additionally, involving the public during the planning stage will help to garner support for the Master Plan and its eventual implementation.

The following strategies have been selected by the City as part of the public involvement process and are discussed in this report:

- The Master Plan Steering Committee (MPSC)
- Web-Based Community Survey
- Stakeholder Interviews
- Public Presentations
- Mardi Gras Festival Booth
- Public Workshops/Charrettes
- Children’s Art Contest
- Media Campaign
- Smart Phone GIS App

IDENTIFICATION OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION TECHNIQUES

MASTER PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE (MPSC)

A great part of the success of the Masterplan will be dependent on stakeholder involvement conducted primarily through the advisory committee, MPSC. This committee is comprised of interested citizens who applied to participate and were appointed by the City Council to serve on the MPSC.

The involvement of key individuals from the community in MPSC will ensure that the Master Plan addresses the issues and concerns of the citizens of St. Marys, gains community-wide support, and is ultimately implemented. The MPSC is tasked with providing direction to the City and its consultant team throughout the planning process and is responsible for making the community engagement process as inclusive and representative as possible.

It is important that a free flow of information be maintained between the City, citizens, and MPSC. This is important because the people that comprise the MPSC live and work within the community, and they will be the best resource to convey the Plan's message.

MPSC MEMBERSHIP

It is important that the MPSC consist of a diverse assortment of local representatives with different perspectives on the issue that also possess a high degree of trust and credibility with their fellow citizens. The City of St. Marys City Council appointed nine citizen representatives and two alternates to the MPSC and has also included a representative from the Kings Bay Navy Base. In addition to this, the City Manager, Community Development Director, and contracted consultants also attend MPSC meetings.

In the selection of these committee members, the City made an effort to recognize and be cognizant of the general public's perception and to ensure that the City's Master Plan reflects the goals and objectives of the various communities within the City.

MPSC MEETING STRATEGY

The MPSC is scheduled to meet eighteen (18) times throughout the planning process to review progress and provide feedback to the City and the City's Consultant. Meeting agendas are set by the MPSC Chairperson in consultation with the MPSC Vice-Chairpersons, St. Marys Community Development Director, and the City's Consultant. Read ahead material are provided to the MPSC members prior to each meeting and are posted on the City's website on a dedicated MPSC web-page. MPSC meetings are held in an informal but professional manner, where decision are made by consensus, to create an environment that will facilitate participation and still show due respect to the participants who are donating their time. Meetings will be held from 6:00 PM on the first Thursday of the month and will be limited to a maximum of two hours per meeting. If the schedule must be changed, then proper public notice will be given.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

The MPSC has worked with the City to identify, plan and schedule the following Community Engagement activities. It is the desire of the MPSC to provide numerous avenues of participation, so that any member of the community who wishes to participate in the process will find an activity in which they are comfortable participating.

WEB-BASED COMMUNITY SURVEY

This technique involves a survey that can be completed online or in hard copy to get feedback on pertinent issues affecting the community. Questions were designed by the MPSC and are multiple choice or yes/no format to allow for easy compilation and analysis of results. In addition, the MPSC worked to keep the survey succinct to prevent survey fatigue. The link to take the survey on-line will be advertised widely to encourage participation and hard-copies of the survey will be provided upon request. The launch for the Web Survey will be the Mardi-Gras Festival on February 6th. The City has email addresses for all water customers and will use this list-serve to directly invite residents to fill out the survey.

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

This technique includes an interview with a set list of questions that can be conducted in person, through email, or over the phone. The interview may be a one-on one, or a group of people may be interviewed at once, similar to a focus group. The MPSC members created the set list of questions, identified the appropriate list of individuals and groups to be interviewed, and will conduct the interviews throughout the community engagement process. MPSC members will be responsible for taking notes during their interview and summarizing their results. The initial list of interviewees will include approximately 35 individuals and up to 15 groups.

PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS

This technique involves making presentations to specific groups (i.e. City Council, Rotary Club, Church groups, etc.), and allowing for the members of that group to provide some general feedback. In addition, these presentations provide a convenient platform to promote the web-based community survey and other planned activities. The MPSC will establish the final list of groups and MPSC members will be asked to present to those groups which with they are affiliated as well as any other groups that they identify. The City's consultant has created a short power point presentation for the use of the MPSC during these presentations. Presentations need not be long, and may only consist of a MPSC member introducing themselves and the Master Plan, and then requesting that the audience complete the web-survey. These presentations need only be publicly advertised in accordance with that particular group's requirements.

FESTIVAL BOOTHS

The City and their planning consultant will man a booth at the City's Annual Mardi Gras Festival on February 6, 2016 to promote the Master Plan. The booth will include the following:

- a) Tablets will be available for the public to fill out the web-based community survey and post cards with the web-link to the survey will be distributed.
- b) A promotional handout that advertises the future public involvement activities will be available. It will include a link to the web survey and will also include the dates, times and locations of the Future Land Use Workshops
- c) Large display maps will be available and the public will be asked to identify (by placement of a push pin) where they live, work, and play.
- d) Art supplies and a table will be made available for kids to design a poster for the art contest
- e) A sign-in sheet for interested citizens to submit their email addresses to create a Master Plan list-serve to keep the community updated and advertise public involvement activities.

The City will also man a booth at the July 4th Festival to present the results of the Community Engagement program to the public.

PUBLIC WORKSHOPS/CHARRETTES

The technique refers to public meetings held by the City and advertised to the public for their attendance in accordance with City policy and State law. These types of meetings include activities that are participatory, such as visioning or charrette design. Workshops and Charrettes are often subject-specific and have a defined goal or purpose for each meeting. Advertising may be directed to certain audiences as well as to the general public, depending on the subject matter of the meeting. The MPSC, City staff and consultant team have planned to hold the following workshops:

- a) Future Land Use Visioning Charrette: This event will be held three times in three different locations around St. Marys. It will be advertised to the general public and the MPSC will make an effort to encourage people to come. Participants will be broken into groups, with a professional at each group, to review at maps of St. Mary's land use (floodplains, JLUS issues, parcels under development pressure, wetlands, etc.) and to begin to craft a future vision/map for future land use. These charrettes will be scheduled in early March, and they will be advertised at the Mardi-Gras festival.
- b) Transportation Workshop: This workshop will be a one-time public meeting to discuss transportation issues associated with the multi-mobility transportation study that is being conducted as part of the Master Plan process. This workshop is flexible in terms of schedule, but it is preliminarily set for April 2016.

- c) Resiliency Workshop: This one-time public workshop will focus on issues related to sustainability and resiliency of the City of St. Marys in the face of sea-level rise, climate change, and coastal hazards. Dr. Jason Evans, who is conducting a Sea-Level Rise study for the City, has been invited to present on his work, and there will be opportunities for public input. The MPSC felt that this meeting should be scheduled to coincide with the start of hurricane season as public interest in these issues will be at its peak. This workshop is currently scheduled for May 2016.
- d) General Visioning: This will be a stakeholder meeting that is also open to the general public. The MPSC will identify approximately 50 stakeholders to be invited to participate in a general visioning session. The stakeholder group should be selected to represent the various special interest groups in the City. This workshop is scheduled for June 2016, which will allow time for community survey results to be gathered and then presented to the stakeholder group to help inform their visioning process.

CHILDREN'S ART CONTEST

This technique was chosen by the MPSC as a fun way to solicit feedback from an audience that is not normally included in the planning process, i.e. children. Art work can demonstrate what the children of St. Marys love about their community and how they hope it grows over the next 10 years. Submitted artwork can also be used as unique visuals for the final Master Plan. The MPSC created a flyer advertising this contest and it will be provided to the Board of Education Superintendent, to be distributed to the City's elementary and middle schools. Flyers will also be distributed to local businesses. The MPSC will reach out to local merchants to identify potential prizes for the winners. The contest will be launched in January and will conclude on April 1st. Winners will be selected by grade. Artwork may be submitted to St. Marys City Hall or Kings Bay Mail & More.

SMART PHONE GIS APPLICATION

The City's consultant will create an applications for hand-held devices for people to take pictures of "What they love about St. Marys". The app will allow people to take a picture, identify where on a map they are, and to write a short note about what they love. The app will be ready to be downloaded by February 6, 2016. An instructional guide will be created for the app so that people know how it can be downloaded. The instructional guide will be distributed at Mardi-Gras, posted on the City's dedicated Master Plan web-page, and advertised during presentations and workshops.

PUBLIC INFORMATION & OUTREACH

In addition to the strategies identified above, the City will produce informational material to update citizens about the progress of the Master Plan process. The City will also ensure that all community engagement opportunities are well publicized, so that all residents and property owners in St. Marys have an opportunity to provide input. The City will utilize the following Public Information techniques:

WEBPAGE & SOCIAL MEDIA

Websites are a great method of getting information out to a large group of people, at a low cost. A dedicated webpage has been added to the City's website for the Masterplan that will allow for quick immediate information for the general public. The webpage will include information on the program, dates for public meetings, and a link to e-mail any questions or concerns. The website also provides an opportunity to catalog appropriate public documents and make them available to the public through use of downloadable PDF files.

The web URL specific to the Master Plan is www.onestmarys.com, and dedicated email was created at one@stmarys.ga.gov for people who want to provide input or ask questions. It will be linked to City staff so that there will always be someone available to respond to public emails. A Facebook page will be created during the Master Plan process, and will be manned by the City's Planning Intern, since a successful Facebook page requires attention on a daily basis.

MEDIA CAMPAIGN

It is essential to develop a positive relationship with the media, so that they can help generate participation and support for the process. The MPSC Chairperson has contacted the local newspapers, the Brunswick News, the Tribune, and Georgian, and they have expressed a willingness to work with the MPSC to promote and encourage public participation in the Master Plan process. The MPSC will work with the local newspapers on a periodic column to be written by the MPSC, and published at the papers' discretion. The MPSC also has a relationship with the local NPR contributor, who hosts an hour-long show, five days a week, where community representatives are interviewed about issues facing the region. The MPSC will attempt to work with NPR to dedicate one or more shows to Master Plan.

Press releases will be issued periodically to all local media outlets advertising various activities and events associated with the Master Plan. The first press release will be created to advertise the Mardi-Gras booth, kick off to the web-survey, art contest and Land Use Workshops.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ASSESSMENT AND SUMMARY

At the conclusion of the community engagement phase, the MPSC will work with the City staff and consultants to review and summarize all of the public input gathered through the activities outlined above. This information will ultimately be used by the City to define the Community Vision, goals, strategies and work plan that will comprise the St. Marys Masterplan.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SCHEDULE

<i>Project Tasks</i>	2015		2016												2017		
	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
MPSC Meetings																	
Community Engagement																	
Web-Based Community Survey																	
Stakeholder Interviews																	
Public Presentations																	
Festival Booths																	
Public Workshop/Charrettes																	
Future Land Use Charrettes																	
Multi-Modal Transportation Workshop																	
Resiliency Workshop																	
General Visioning Workshop																	
Children's Art Contest																	
Smart Phone GIS Application																	
Public Information & Outreach																	
Assessment & Summary of Community Engagement																	