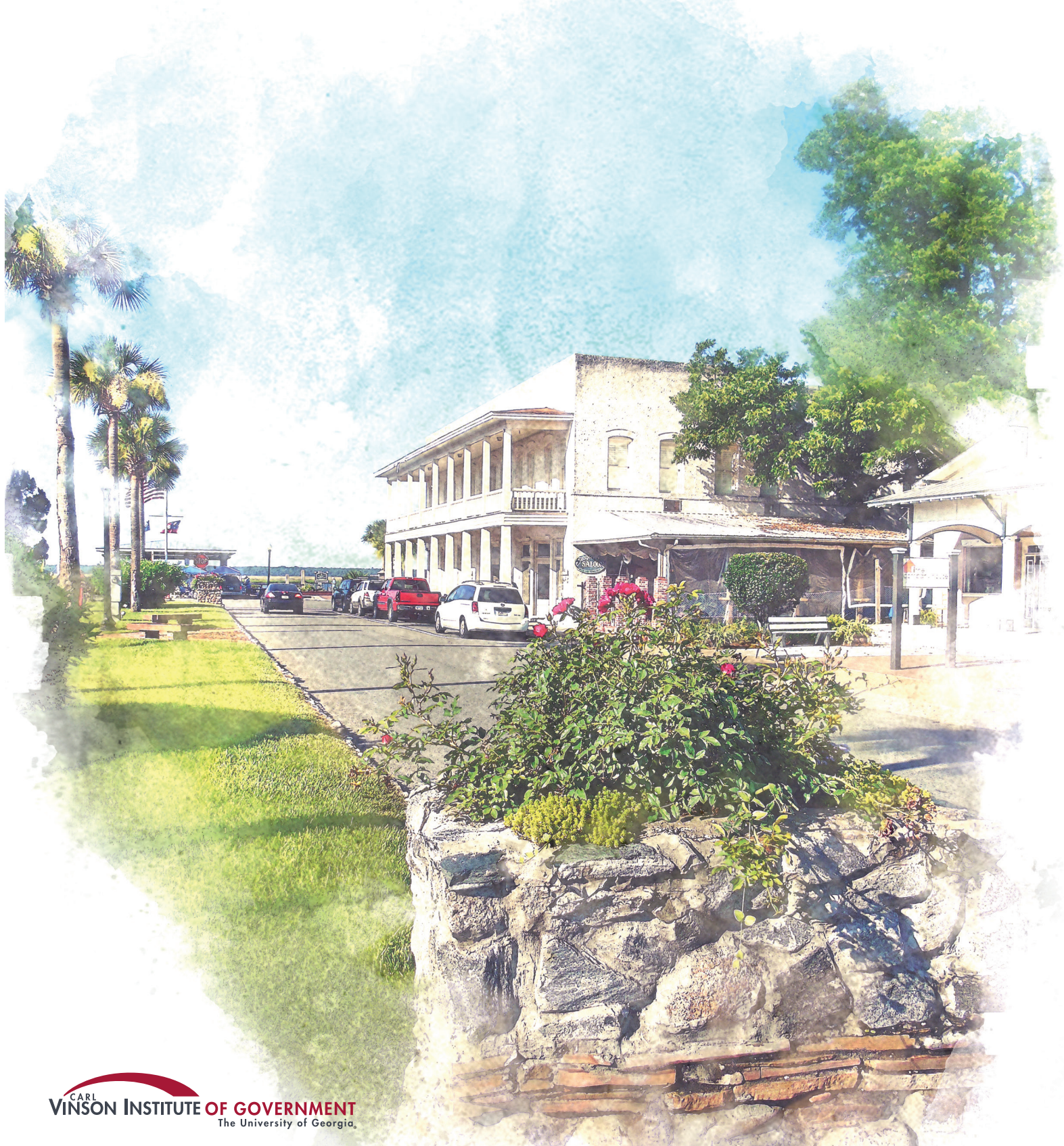


# DOWNTOWN st. marys

STRATEGIC VISION & PLAN





#### **STEERING COMMITTEE**

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#### **CITY STAFF**

John J. Holman, St. Marys City Manager  
Becky Myers, St. Marys Main Street Coordinator

#### **OTHERS**

"Downtown" Charlie Smith

*Special thanks to all of those who attended focus group meetings, took part in interviews, and participated in the community survey.*

#### **GEORGIA DOWNTOWN STRATEGIC VISIONING AND PLANNING PARTNERS**

##### **Georgia Municipal Association/ Georgia Cities Foundation:**

Perry Hiott, Director of Community Development  
Chris Higdon, Manager, Community Development

##### **University of Georgia Small Business Development Center:**

Bill Boone, Entrepreneur Outreach Specialist  
Jordan Tippet, Consultant

##### **Carl Vinson Institute of Government:**

Danny Bivins, Public Service Associate, Principal Investigator  
Langford D. Holbrook, Public Service Associate  
Scott Pippin, Public Service Assistant  
Kaitlin McShea Messich, Senior Designer  
T. Clark Stancil, Landscape and Urban Designer  
Chris Stebbins, Graduate Assistant  
Cecile Riker, Graduate Assistant  
Karen DeVivo, Editor  
Michelle Bailey, Survey Research and Evaluation Unit

# credits



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## THE GEORGIA DOWNTOWN PARTNERSHIP

# partners

The Georgia Downtown Renaissance Partnership, which includes the Georgia Municipal Association, the Georgia Cities Foundation, and the UGA Carl Vinson Institute of Government, facilitates the creation of strategic visions, plans, and work programs for communities in Georgia. By working with government leaders, chambers of commerce, downtown merchants, property owners, lending institutions, and citizens, the Georgia Downtown Renaissance Partnership helps ensure that all cities in Georgia have access to what they need in order to realize their vision and maximize their potential.

### **GEORGIA MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION**

Created in 1933, the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA) is the only state organization that represents municipal governments in Georgia. Based in Atlanta, GMA is a voluntary, nonprofit organization that provides legislative advocacy and educational, employee benefit, and technical consulting services to its members. GMA's purpose is to anticipate and influence the forces shaping Georgia's communities and to provide leadership, tools, and services that assist local governments in becoming more innovative, effective, and responsive.

### **GEORGIA CITIES FOUNDATION**

The Georgia Cities Foundation, founded in 1999, is a nonprofit subsidiary of the Georgia Municipal Association. The foundation's mission is to assist cities in their efforts to revitalize and enhance downtown areas by serving as a partner and facilitator in funding capital projects through the revolving loan fund. Its services include the Revolving Loan Fund Program, the Heart and Soul Bus Tour, the Peer-to-Peer Mentoring Tour, the Downtown Development Authority Basic Training, and the Renaissance Award.

### **CARL VINSON INSTITUTE OF GOVERNMENT**

For more than 85 years, the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia has worked with public officials throughout Georgia and around the world to improve governance and people's lives. From Georgia's early days as a largely agrarian state with a modest population to its modern-day status as a national and international force in business, industry, and politics with a population of over 10 million, the Institute of Government has helped government leaders navigate change and forge strong directions for a better Georgia.

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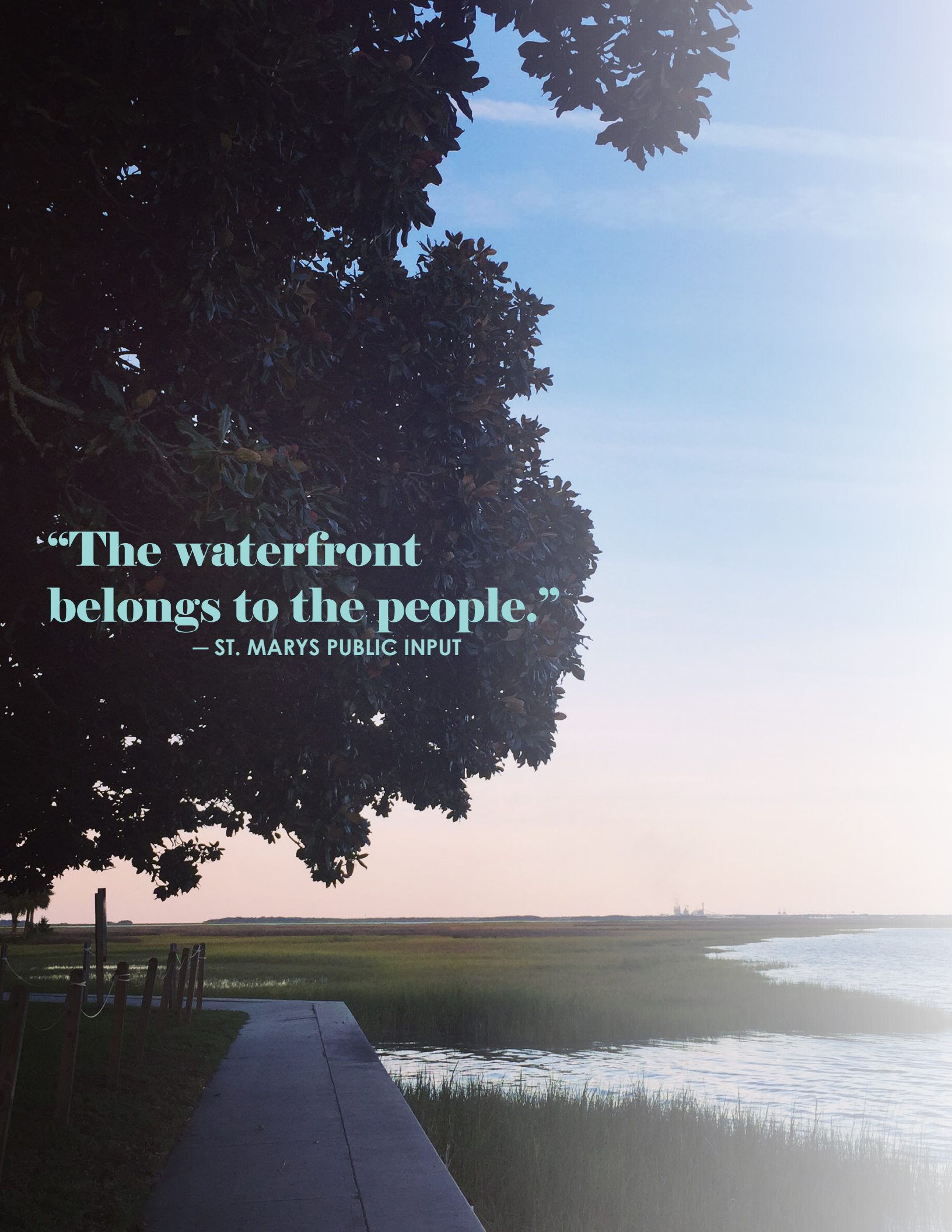




# user's guide

This plan is intended to be used as a living document to guide the future of St. Marys. Focused on positive outcomes for downtown, the programs and action items included in the St. Marys Renaissance Strategic Vision and Plan (RSVP) are intended to be used continually as an everyday resource by local officials and citizens. Completed action and work program items are designed as approachable goals and should be checked off as they are completed. As new opportunities arise, additional work program items should be added to the plan with a focus on implementation. At a minimum, local officials should undertake an annual update of the St. Marys RSVP plan by answering the following questions: what was completed; were enacted programs successful; what needs to be added; and how, when, and who is responsible for implementation. Long-term success is achieved by continuing to update and implement the plan.





**“The waterfront  
belongs to the people.”**

— ST. MARYS PUBLIC INPUT



# introduction

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**D**raped with Spanish moss and guarded by the outstretched arms of ancient live oaks, the streets of downtown St. Marys have known the feet of traders, patriots, pirates, and regular Americans seeking the tranquility and natural splendor of the Georgia coast. As a hub for maritime trade, an international crossroads, a bustling mill town, a gateway to Cumberland Island, a strategic naval hub, and a welcoming family-friendly small town, St. Marys has undergone many transformations since the city's founding in 1787. While knowing many pasts, the city preserves the varied traditions and treasured assets of these bygone eras. St. Marys' streets are lined with vestiges of the city's long history. Abundant canopies and Spanish moss shade Oak Grove Cemetery, the final resting place of Acadian refugees, early settlers, Confederate soldiers, mill workers, and veterans of every American war from the Revolution to the Gulf War. History emanates from structures like the 1801 Clark House, famous for sheltering a fleeing Aaron Burr; the 1808 First Presbyterian Church, whose pews still fill each Sunday; and the c. 1830 Orange Hall mansion, the antebellum grand dame of St. Marys.

Built and rebuilt many times, the waterfront along the majestic St. Marys River has remained the hub of activity in St. Marys and the city's reason for existence. Ravaged by Yankee gunboats during the Civil War, St. Marys' waterfront dates from the Victorian era to more recent times. Prior to the 1821 acquisition of East Florida, St. Marys served as an international border town and maritime hub. Tall masts and sails filled the landscape as St. Marys attracted a motley crew of merchants, soldiers, refugees, and smugglers. While the masts of tall ships have largely left St. Marys, the city remains an authentic working waterfront serving fishers, shrimpers, and ferry-goers. Once the site of the Federalist Era stockade Fort St. Tammany and a belfry-towered city market destroyed during the Civil War, the Howard Gillman Memorial Waterfront Park is a treasured recent addition to St. Marys' riverfront. A community hub that serves as the site of the Rock Shrimp Festival and numerous other community events, the waterfront park is treasured by the community for the expansive views of the river and marsh, pier and river access, lush plantings, recreation opportunities, and much more.

**Southernmost City: From the city's founding in 1787 until the acquisition of Spanish East Florida in 1821, St. Marys served as an international border city and the southernmost settlement in the United States.**



# The people are great ambassadors.”

— ST. MARYS PUBLIC INPUT

Throughout the community, the people of St. Marys cherish the city's high quality of life and family-friendly small town atmosphere. St. Marys, to one public input participant, represents “a slice of Americana” with “the best of the South, the best of a small town.” Consistently, citizens from all around mentioned the city's friendly atmosphere and the kindness of their neighbors as one of the city's great strengths. Likened to television's Mayberry by multiple public input participants, St. Marys welcomes visitors with the warm embrace of Southern hospitality and a spirit of coastal openness. St. Marys is a city where children still feel safe walking to the downtown elementary school and parents in the city have peace of mind knowing their children's schools are among the best in the state. Thousands gather for the numerous special events and festivals that draw citizens of all stripes downtown, filling the city's historic streets with life and activity. The community brings life to the 1916 Riverview Hotel nightly as locals and tourist share the friendly camaraderie of Seagull's Cafe and Saloon. Downtown St. Marys is a place where everybody knows your name. The vast majority of survey responses, one-on-one interviews, and focus group responses clearly indicate that the community maintains an overwhelmingly positive view of downtown. St. Marys' challenge is simply harnessing the city's existing strengths and the passion of the community. Building on the city's existing assets helps to create a vision for the thriving, welcoming, and beautiful St. Marys of the future.







OUT OF 1,653 SURVEY RESPONSES,  
**90% of participants  
expressed a positive  
opinion of downtown.**



As part of the Renaissance Strategic Vision and Planning process, the City of St. Marys contracted with the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia to engage the public across St. Marys to help develop a plan that will guide the future of the downtown area. Early on in the process, the city defined the project parameters as the historic core of St. Marys, bound to the south by the St. Marys River, to the east and west by marshland, and to the north by the St. Marys Railroad. Although mentioned many times in public input sessions, sites like the former Durango-Georgia Paper Co. mill and St. Marys Intracoastal Gateway Property were not included in the scope of work. There are certain guiding principles outlined by community members that should be incorporated into the future redevelopment of these important properties. Attracting good paying, living wage jobs that will help retain young millennials and the naval community should be an essential component of any successful redevelopment plan. Other community priorities include supporting the city's focus on ecotourism and environmental sustainability, respecting the scale and historical architectural elements of the surrounding area, and finding long-term tenants that will support downtown St. Marys and contribute to the economic viability of the city.



# basic demographics

Repeatedly during public input sessions, community members from across St. Marys expressed the desire for attractions to draw and retain more young talent in the city. Many within the community might be surprised to learn that with an average age of 29.7, St. Marys' overall population is significantly younger than Georgia's as a whole (37.7 years). Reflecting the large population of naval personnel stationed at Kings Bay Naval Base, St. Marys' population is younger, more educated, and wealthier than Georgia's state averages. Building on these existing demographic characteristics is essential to attracting more young families and millennials downtown while further strengthening the bond between St. Marys and the Kings Bay naval community. Any successful strategy appealing to young people should be focused on integrating St. Marys' existing millennials, 27.3% of the city's overall population, into the larger fabric of downtown.

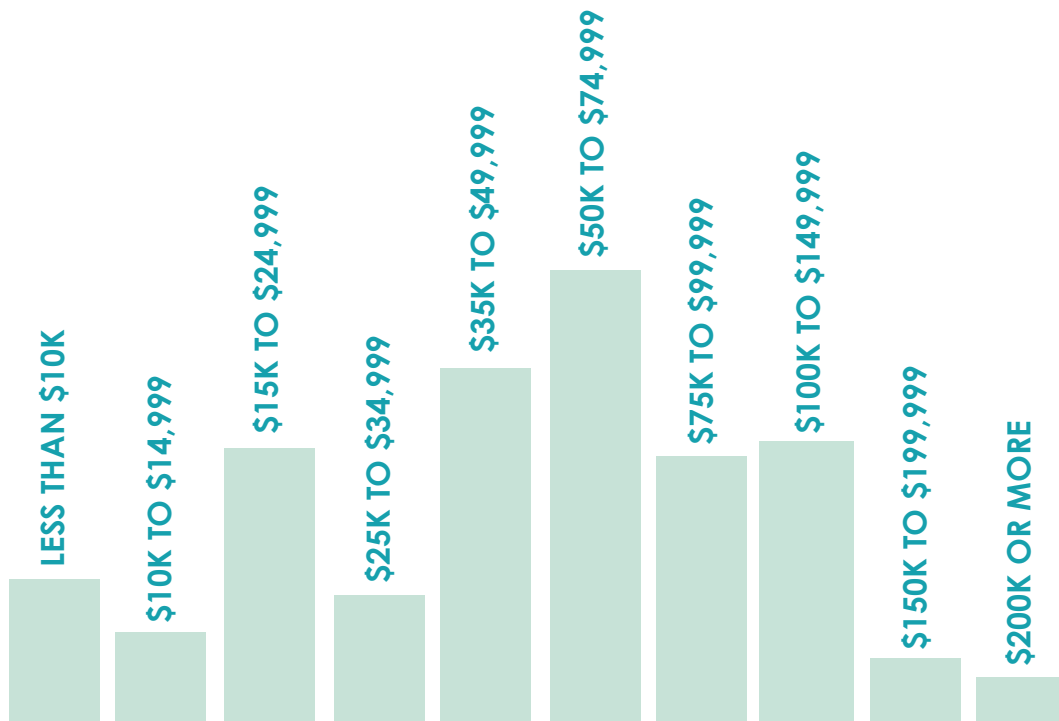
Regularly during conversations with community members, the citizens of St. Marys expressed that the city's small town atmosphere, excellent school system, safety, and convenience to big city amenities all help to make St. Marys particularly well suited to children and families. Looking at the city's demographic profile, St. Marys' high rate of family households belies the city's reputation as a great place to raise a family. While 73.6% of St. Marys households are families of more than one person, two-person households represent the most common type of family households in the city. St. Marys high rate of two-person households perhaps reflects the city's popularity among both young navy couples and empty nester retirees. Creating more housing and entertainment options targeting these groups could help to fill a void in St. Marys' current housing market and programming mix while further activating the downtown area.

Historic population figures for the city clearly reflect the impact of Kings Bay on the city, with the population expanding exponentially after the base's founding in the early 1980s. While growth has slowed following the Great Recession, St. Marys remains a growing city with 4,188 new residents since 2000: a growth rate of 30.43%. With a young, well educated, and often technologically advanced workforce, St. Marys is well suited to leverage the city's demographic profile to attract targeted industries.

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ST. MARYS REMAINS A GROWING CITY WITH 4,188 NEW  
RESIDENTS SINCE 2000: A GROWTH RATE OF 30.43%.



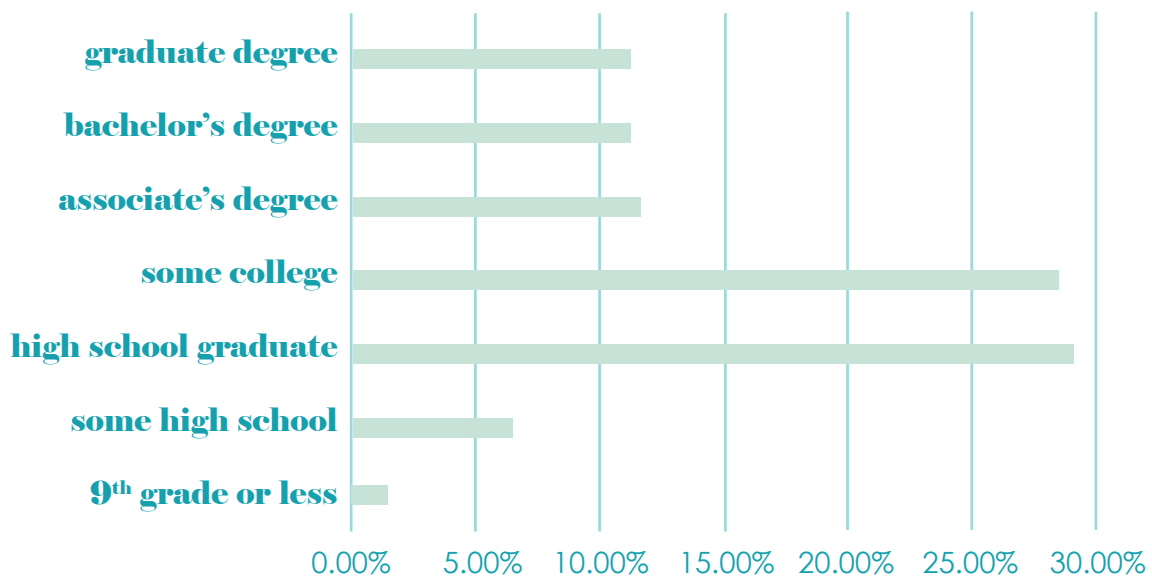


## household income of st. marys

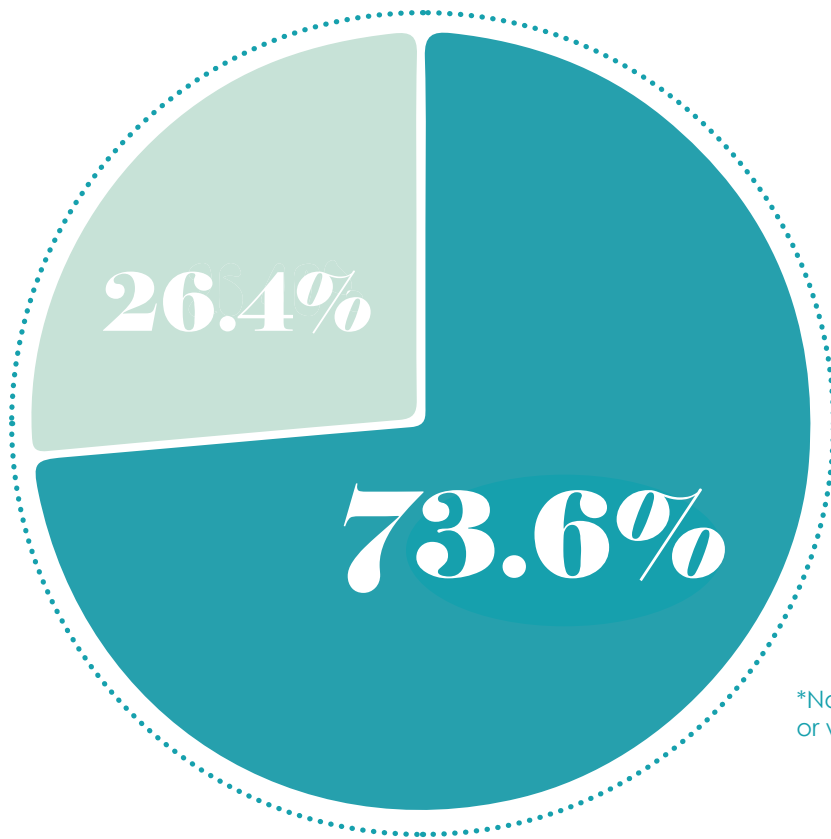
2013 MEDIAN INCOME: \$51,820; GEORGIA MEDIAN INCOME: \$47,829

## educational attainment of st. marys' residents

2013 MEDIAN RATE: 92% HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE OR HIGHER







## household types of st. marys

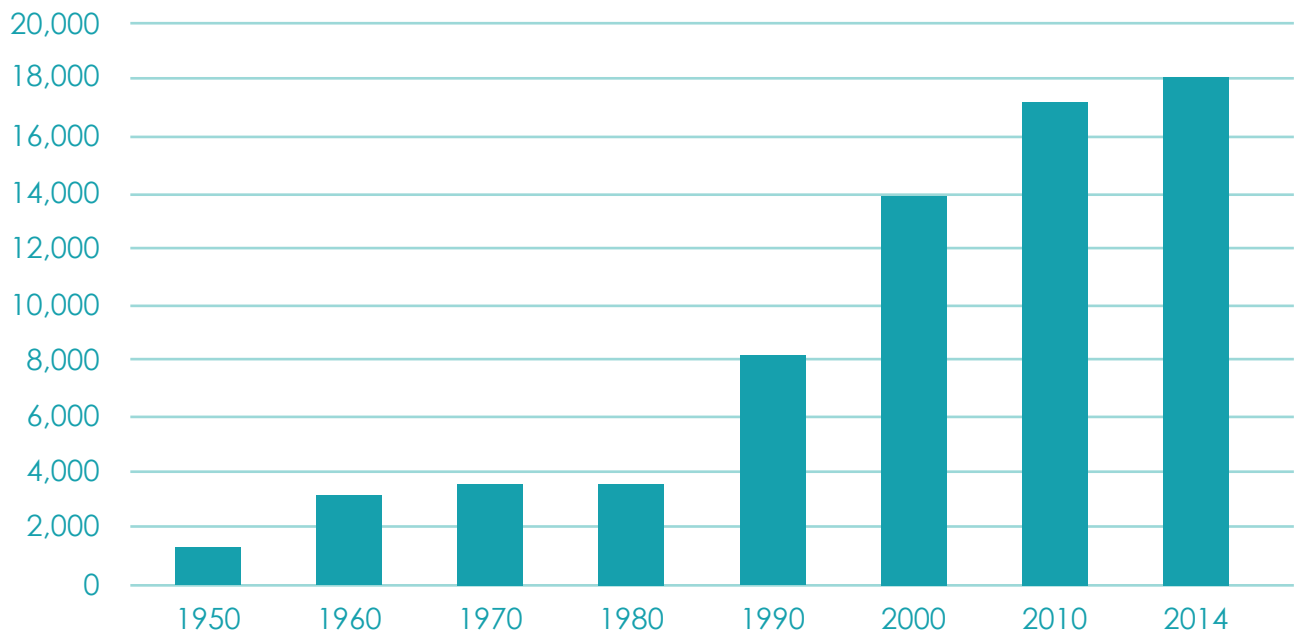
2010 TOTAL HOUSEHOLDS: 6,428



\*Nonfamily households consist of people who live alone or who share their residence with unrelated individuals.

## population of st. marys

1950 TO 2014







Closed



# THE ST. MARYS strategic visioning & planning process

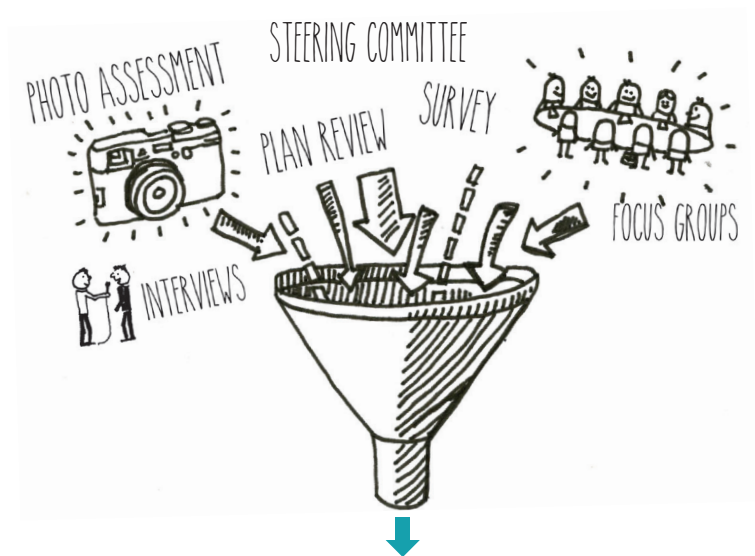
**S**trategic visioning is a collaborative planning and decision-making process that relies on broad stakeholder involvement and focuses on asset-based development to create a shared community vision, plan, and implementation work plan.

Strategic visioning helps citizens better understand unique community assets and more clearly identify collective priorities. Together, these become the basis for effective community-led planning. Throughout the development of the plan, the community identifies pressing issues, articulates big-picture goals, and develops short-term and long-term strategies to address neighborhood concerns.

THE STRATEGIC VISIONING AND PLANNING PROCESS INVOLVES THREE STEPS:

## 1 where are we now?

- ▶ Plan Review
- ▶ Demographic Scan
- ▶ Visual Preference Assessment
- ▶ Steering Committee Meetings
- ▶ One-on-One Interviews
- ▶ Focus Groups
- ▶ Community Survey



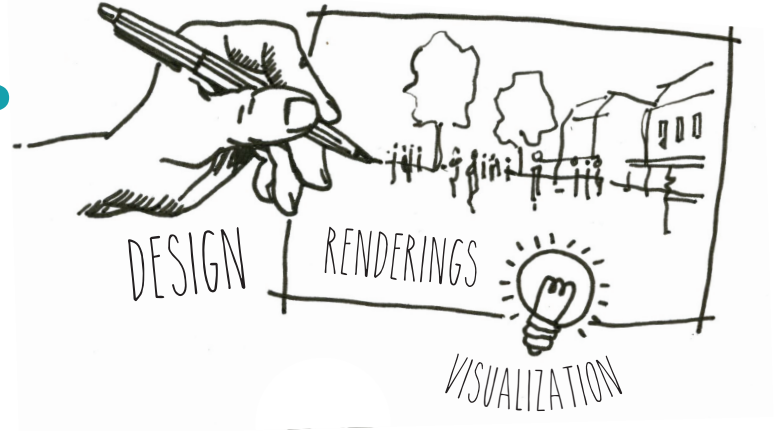
**IT IS ESSENTIAL** to understand the current conditions of downtown St. Marys. The first step involves demographic research, a review of prior plans and studies, and public engagement. Focus groups, one-on-one interviews, community-wide surveys, and visual preference assessments are tools that can be used to reveal the community's story as well as current issues and opportunities.



## where are we going?

2

- ▶ Design
- ▶ Renderings
- ▶ Visualization



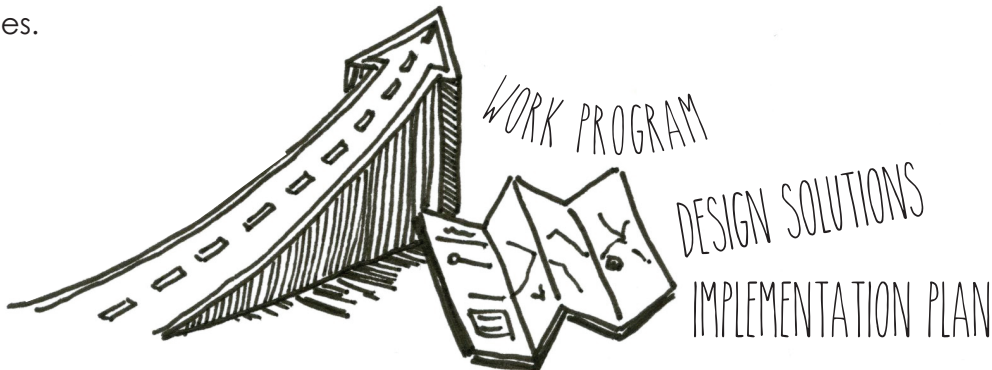
IN THE SECOND STEP OF THE PROCESS, THE COMMUNITY LOOKS TO THE FUTURE to shape a new vision. Built on the community desires and strengths discovered in community input sessions, St. Marys' vision is then interpreted in step two through illustrations and design recommendations. The final products of step two allow all community members to experience the physical translation of the collective vision.

3

## how do we get there?

- ▶ Work Program
- ▶ Design Solutions
- ▶ Short-term (1–12 months)
- ▶ Long-term (12 months–10 years)

THE FINAL STEP in the strategic visioning process creates an implementation plan to move St. Marys toward the community's vision for the future. Community input and effort form the foundation for the implementation plan, which is critical for successful outcomes.



# timeline

- ▶ **JUNE:** Initial Steering Committee Meeting, Interviews, Focus Groups
- ▶ **JULY:** Steering Committee Meeting
- ▶ **AUGUST:** Steering Committee Meeting, Interviews, Focus Groups, Community Survey, Preliminary Designs, Visual Preference Assessment
- ▶ **SEPTEMBER:** Steering Committee Meeting, Top Issue Prioritization, Plan Review, Public Input Results & Analysis, Community Survey Results & Analysis, Design, Rendering, Visualization
- ▶ **OCTOBER:** Steering Committee Meeting, Top Issue Prioritization, Draft Work Plan, Design, Rendering, Visualization
- ▶ **NOVEMBER:** Steering Committee Meeting, Final Work Plan, Action Items, Design, Rendering, Visualization
- ▶ **DECEMBER:** Steering Committee Action Items
- ▶ **FEBRUARY:** Final Presentation







The background of the entire page is a watercolor-style illustration. It depicts a classical building with large, fluted columns and a pediment. To the left, there are lush green trees. The sky is a mix of light blue and white, suggesting a bright, sunny day. The overall style is artistic and painterly.

# A Vision for Downtown:

*"The City of St. Marys is a friendly, reawakening community with great historical heritage, coastal amenities and promising economic opportunities. Our goals are to maintain our welcoming, small-town community atmosphere as a Georgia gateway and destination; and to remain committed to investing in our natural and cultural resources while proactively planning for continued myriad growth opportunities."*

- Camden County, City of Kingsland, City of St. Marys, and City of Woodbine  
Joint Comprehensive Plan, 2007



THE ST. MARYS STRATEGIC VISION & PLAN

# plan review

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## PLANS INCLUDED IN THE REVIEW:

### **ST. MARYS GATEWAY ENHANCEMENT PROJECT**

PREPARED BY THOMAS & HUTTON ENGINEERING CO., AUGUST 2014

### **ST. MARYS, GEORGIA FLOOD RESILIENCY PLAN DRAFT**

PREPARED BY GEORGIA SEA GRANT, THE CARL VINSON INSTITUTE OF GOVERNMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA, NORTH CAROLINA SEA GRANT, AND ST. MARYS, AUGUST 2014

### **CAMDEN KINGS BAY JOINT LAND USE STUDY**

PREPARED BY AMEC ENVIRONMENT & INFRASTRUCTURE, INC., MAY 2013

### **ST. MARYS, GA DESIGN GUIDELINES**

PREPARED BY ST. MARYS DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY, AUGUST 2010

### **CITY OF ST. MARYS STORM WATER MASTER PLAN**

PREPARED BY THOMAS & HUTTON ENGINEERING CO., JUNE 2008

### **CAMDEN COUNTY, CITY OF KINGSLAND, CITY OF ST. MARYS, & CITY OF WOODBINE JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

PREPARED BY COASTAL GEORGIA REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER, 2007

**T**he Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia conducted a study of six previous plans and studies of downtown St. Marys to help develop a comprehensive picture of the city's existing resources and inform a vision for the future. Previous plans ranged from specific guidelines and targeted studies to more sweeping community masterplans. Key elements of previous studies include developing gateways and other economic development measures, preserving St. Marys' historic character by protecting downtown resources from sea level rise, and enhancing the city as a destination. Taken together, these documents help to chart the course for St. Marys' future.

Previous plans recommend building on St. Marys' existing reputation as an ecotourism destination and capitalizing on the 40,000–60,000 annual visitors to Cumberland Island. The 2007 Camden County Comprehensive Plan recommends further developing St. Marys as a destination by constructing biking and walking trails, creating a museum to preserve St. Marys' naval history, expanding the waterfront park, and further activating St. Marys' beloved riverfront. Building on the draw of St. Marys as a tourist destination, the Thomas & Hutton gateway plan proposes a series of gateways to improve the aesthetic appeal of the St. Marys Road corridor, encourage visitation to the city, and direct visitors to downtown St. Marys. Additional economic development recommendations include updating ordinances to allow for mixed-use development downtown, rewriting the sign ordinance to create a more business-friendly climate, and implementing a pedestrian-friendly streetscape design to further develop downtown as a destination.





## STEERING COMMITTEE

In addition to St. Marys' unforgettable natural environment, the community relishes the city's historic heritage as one of Georgia's oldest cities. Community members value the preserved resources that help connect modern visitors and locals to the past. While measures like the St. Marys, GA Design Guidelines help to ensure that new development fits within the context of downtown, loss of the city's historic buildings would drastically change the overall character of the city and would significantly harm tourism. As outlined in the St. Marys, Georgia Flood Resiliency Plan, downtown's historic core is particularly vulnerable to flooding. To preserve downtown's irreplaceable character and create an economically viable downtown for decades to come, any streetscaping improvements should address the growing threat of nuisance flooding and sea level rise. Other strategies to reduce the risk of flooding include stipulating height regulations and educating property owners on how to best protect their buildings. Previous plans have also suggested considering code revisions pertaining to historic structures so that property owners can flood-proof historic properties.



## THE ST. MARYS STRATEGIC VISION & PLAN

# public input

**A**s part of the public input phase of the St. Marys RSVP process, the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia conducted 17 diverse focus groups, more than 20 one-on-one interviews, and a community-wide survey with over 1,600 individual responses. These measures help develop a comprehensive picture of St. Marys by the people who live and work there. Focus group, interview, and survey participants first discussed positive features and aspects about downtown St. Marys. During the second portion of public input sessions, participants identified issues that need improvement downtown and topics that need to be addressed in the future.

### FOCUS GROUPS WERE CONDUCTED WITH THE FOLLOWING GROUPS AND CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS:

- ▶ St. Marys City Council Members
- ▶ City of St. Marys Management Team
- ▶ Historic Preservation Commission
- ▶ Convention and Visitors Bureau Authority
- ▶ Downtown Development Authority
- ▶ Camden County Joint Development Authority
- ▶ Dave Southern and Camden Roundtable
- ▶ Steering Committee Applicants
- ▶ Longtime Residents
- ▶ FORUM Group
- ▶ Downtown Churches
- ▶ Express Scripts
- ▶ Submarine Museum Board
- ▶ Camden Partnership Board
- ▶ Downtown and Waterfront Businesses
- ▶ Surrounding Community Residents
- ▶ Builders/Developers/Realtors



**“It’s a feeling you  
get—the charm  
that it holds.”**

— ST. MARYS PUBLIC INPUT RESPONSE



## what's working well?

Focus group, interview, and community survey participants acknowledged an array of assets that make St. Marys a unique, fulfilling, and practical place to call home.

**THE WATERFRONT:** Of the many positive aspects identified by public engagement participants, the St. Marys waterfront is overwhelmingly viewed as the community's most precious resource. Home to the beloved Howard Gilman Memorial Waterfront Park, the vital Cumberland Island ferry, pristine river and marsh-front views, and a diverse array of local businesses, St. Marys' working waterfront is the heart and soul of the community. While the community values the tranquility and peaceful surroundings of the river, people throughout St. Marys enjoy having an active and authentic working waterfront with plenty of recreational opportunities. Citizens support the many programmed events along the waterfront—from the Fourth of July Parade and Concerts in the Park to the Rock Shrimp Festival—that help make the St. Marys waterfront a cherished community gathering space. Participants value the waterfront as a public resource and access to water in general as a key asset for the community. The community sees this accessibility and the connection to Cumberland Island as the base of St. Marys' attraction as an ecotourism destination and the main reason visitors travel downtown. The calming breezes, serene views, and beautiful sunsets along the river were all highlighted as elements that help make the St. Marys waterfront so special.

**SMALL-TOWN ATMOSPHERE:** In addition to the lure of the waterfront, the community treasures St. Marys' family-oriented small-town atmosphere. Many voices in the community cited strong feelings of safety, familiarity, and a sense of welcoming as elements of St. Marys' hometown charm. In addition to the excellent schools and the downtown St. Marys Elementary, the community supports the festivals and special events that contribute to St. Marys' small-town allure and help bring the community downtown. Overwhelmingly, voices from throughout the community see their neighbors, friends, and friendly fellow citizens as one of the city's main assets.

**HISTORIC CHARACTER:** Along with St. Marys' beautiful waterfront and small-town atmosphere, the community admires the palpable sense of history alive in St. Marys. Participants in public input sessions identified historic resources such as Orange Hall, Oak Grove Cemetery, the Washington Pump, and St. Marys' historic inns and bed and breakfasts as priceless assets. While the community values St. Marys' historic architecture, the colossal live oaks lining the city's streets were continually mentioned as the community's favorite historical resource.

**ACCESSIBILITY:** The active citizens that call St. Marys home cherish the mobility and connectivity that links the city's waterfront, historic resources, recreation opportunities, and shaded neighborhoods. Locals value pedestrian, bicycle, golf cart, and other alternative mobility options available in the city. Additionally, many citizens and business owners prize and rely on the city's convenience and proximity to major metropolitan resources and near-universal accessibility—immediate access to water, rail, air, and interstate transportation.



# st. marys top assets:

► THE WATERFRONT

► HISTORY

► FAMILY-ORIENTED SMALL-TOWN ATMOSPHERE

► ACCESSIBILITY

(BIKE & PEDESTRIAN FRIENDLINESS; "GOLF CART-IBILITY")

► FESTIVALS & SPECIAL EVENTS

► EXCELLENT SCHOOLS

## what needs improvement?

Capitalizing on what is working well, community members see a future in which the waterfront is restored as the center of the community and the local economy. While preserving the sense of place and historic character that make the city special, St. Marys citizens envision a more active downtown experience with a healthy variety of dining, retail, and entertainment options. Community members envision attractive live oak-shaded boulevards that accommodate bikers, pedestrians, outdoor dining, and all the amenities of coastal living. They see a future St. Marys as a thriving hub of ecotourism, where downtown is deeply connected with the surrounding environment and the community lives in harmony with the city's fragile natural surroundings.

### **CAPITALIZING ON THE WATERFRONT & CUMBERLAND ISLAND:**

Reflecting the consensus that the waterfront is St. Marys' greatest asset, the community sees capitalizing on the waterfront as one of the greatest issues and opportunities facing St. Marys. Voices throughout St. Marys believe that the waterfront can be more effectively programmed to build on existing tourist traffic while attracting more locals downtown. Participants strongly feel that visitors to Cumberland Island must be engaged and encouraged to explore the remainder of downtown. Capitalizing on the Cumberland Island ferry and outdoor recreation opportunities that draw visitors and locals downtown, many desire to program the waterfront with more environmentally friendly attractions and retail options. Consensus exists for programming that could help expand St. Marys' existing reputation as an ecotourism and outdoor recreation destination. Wide consensus exists for aesthetic improvements along the waterfront. Beautifying St. Marys Street, moving waste receptacles, and addressing building maintenance along the waterfront were all common responses from the public. The community overwhelmingly sees promoting existing assets like the Peacemaker, the Submarine Museum, fishing, and other outdoor recreation opportunities as important elements to increase St. Marys' allure as a vibrant maritime destination.





**CREATING A DESTINATION:** Residents and visitors need more to do downtown. Besides visiting the park and attending events every so often, many citizens feel like they have limited options and need more reasons to go downtown. As the main gateway to Cumberland Island and an alternative stopping point for people on the way to Fernandina Beach and Amelia Island, St. Marys needs attractions to capitalize on the large numbers of people passing through. More attractions and businesses are needed for locals and tourists to see downtown as a destination worth visiting. Important elements of creating a destination include drawing in more of the local community, growing and retaining downtown businesses, and increasing the variety of retail and dining options downtown.

► **BRING LOCALS DOWNTOWN:** While the community values St. Marys' role as a tourist destination, many comments focused on enhancing downtown as a local attraction. Because popular programmed events like Music in the Park and the Scarecrow Stroll already bring locals together downtown, the community supports building on and devoting more resources to these attractions. Many within the community indicated that they would visit downtown more if they lived, worked, or conducted day-to-day business there. Attracting and retaining the functions that drive people downtown is essential to creating a vibrant local destination in the heart of historic St. Marys.

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► **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:** While festivals and events help to bring the community downtown, many citizens see luring good jobs downtown, keeping existing businesses economically viable, attracting young professionals, and developing options for downtown living as critical to the long-term health of downtown. To support the local businesses already on the ground, the community desires a more proactive public role in economic development. Incentivizing small businesses, removing roadblocks and hurdles to business development, easing signage ordinances, and attracting investment downtown were all common sentiments. Many see economic incentives, tax abatement, and a strengthened façade grant program as possible solutions to improve maintenance of buildings downtown—a prime concern of many participants.

► **VARIETY OF DINING & RETAIL OPTIONS:** Although the community favors more support for existing downtown businesses, many desire more diversity of retail and dining options. Convenient dining options like food trucks, coffee stands, and cafés were commonly suggested as potential draws catering to tourists and locals alike. While the community overwhelmingly favors expanding business opportunities downtown, preserving the waterfront, scenic vistas, and the city's unique sense of place is a critical priority.

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**GATEWAYS:** Several residents voiced the opinion that the citizens of St. Marys are the community's greatest ambassadors. Widespread support exists to reflect this friendly and welcoming character to visitors. The community sees improving gateway "front door" experiences as one way to reflect the values of the community. To create a sense of welcoming, many envision attractive, landscaped gateways to guide visitors and locals downtown. Locals stressed that gateways and other new programmatic and wayfinding signage should reflect the open, historic charm of the community.

**STREETSCAPING:** Widespread support exists for extending the graceful, live oak-planted medians and streetscaping improvements up Osborne Street to welcome visitors downtown and ease the visual transition between downtown and the midtown corridor. Further momentum exists to continue a streetscaping program downtown to create a unified and signature appearance along the city's major streets. Greening St. Marys Street with the addition of attractive plantings, wide sidewalks, and other pedestrian improvements could serve the diverse public goals of creating a sense of welcoming, retaining more tourists downtown, addressing issues of flooding, and promoting St. Marys as a historic and eco-friendly destination.



# Cumberland Island National Seashore

*Know where to go. Know things to do.*



Activities are encouraged all over the Island, but a few places are simply the best. Find a fun thing to do today, and figure out how to get there.

- Camping
- Bird Watching
- Stargazing
- Backpacking
- Photography
- Fishing

Pay attention to boundaries. A few places are simply off-limits.



# st. marys top issues

**D**uring the public engagement process, participants from throughout the community shared their vision for downtown St. Marys' future and raised important issues that must be addressed for the city to achieve continued success. A diverse set of concerns were discussed, many of which can be compiled into broad categories. Priorities addressed in previous proposals and studies often mirrored the critical issues raised by the city's citizens. Together, these ideas laid the groundwork for a plan of action. Throughout this process, a steering committee of dedicated St. Marys citizens reviewed all of the information compiled in public input sessions and previous plans, honing down the priorities to create a successful strategy for downtown.

Having too many priorities equals having no priorities, and St. Marys has only so much time, energy, and resources. Thus, tackling a succinct list of priorities is an essential element of a successful plan. St. Marys' Steering Committee was instrumental in channeling public input, previous plans suggestions, and elements of responsible planning into five key categories addressed in the St. Marys work plan: capitalizing on existing tourism, growing a destination downtown, tackling important improvements, enhancing connectivity, and improving downtown streetscaping. All improvements undertaken should maintain and build on the assets beloved by the community, including St. Marys' unique sense of place, friendly and safe small-town feel, history, and natural environment.

**CAPITALIZING ON EXISTING TOURISM:** With 40,000–60,000 annual visitors to Cumberland Island, the community agrees that ferry-goers provide the lifeblood of downtown. Retaining more of this existing traffic is essential to creating a vibrant, economically stable downtown. The community sees opportunities for keeping more tourist dollars downtown by exploring options, including:

- ▶ Expanding ecotourism opportunities & heritage tourism
  - ▶ Creating complementary attractions like an eco-education "Discovery Center"
  - ▶ Promoting heritage tourism
  - ▶ Creating a wedding destination
  - ▶ Expanding boating & maritime activities
-



**ENHANCING CONNECTIVITY:** The ability to bike, walk, and ride a golf cart around St. Marys' quiet live oak–shaded streets is a beloved element of the city's unique coastal lifestyle. The community cherishes the accessibility of the city's streets and sees opportunities for alternative transportation as a major selling point for downtown. Many local citizens suggested enhancing connectivity within the city and between downtown and surrounding neighborhoods. Targeted connectivity enhancements include:

- ▶ Preserving connectivity and safety for pedestrians, bikes, and golf carts
- ▶ Creating trails that link downtown with surrounding neighborhoods
- ▶ Taking advantage of the city's natural environment with a marsh walk

**STREETSCAPING:** While many of St. Marys' quiet side streets feature beloved, graceful canopies of live oaks and the dappled shade of Spanish moss, many locals see wide asphalt stretches of St. Marys Street and Osborne Street north of St. Marys Elementary as poor reflections of the community's sense of place, Southern hospitality, and reputation as an environmentally sensitive destination. Momentum exists throughout the city to enhance and beautify St. Marys' existing corridors. The community demands that any new improvements reflect the city's historic character and commitment to environmental sustainability. Specific streetscaping improvements recorded by community members include:

▶ **ST. MARYS STREET**

*Short-term projects:*

- Explore creating parklet concepts and temporary greening for parking areas
- Reflect the city's character with crosswalk painting and sidewalk art

*Long-term projects:*

- Reduce width of asphalt streets
- Install large canopy street trees
- Address issues of flooding and impervious surfaces
- Widen sidewalks and create opportunities for outdoor dining

▶ **OSBORNE STREET**

- Extend Osborne's historic medians north to the railroad tracks
- Create a cohesive experience by extending existing streetscaping improvements
- Create a gateway experience for visitors to historic downtown St. Marys



THE ST. MARYS STRATEGIC VISION & PLAN

# st. marys work program

**T**he Carl Vinson Institute of Government is using an organized and systematic approach to downtown redevelopment and revitalization modeled after the Main Street Four-Point Approach.<sup>®</sup> The process involves creating a community vision based on broad community engagement and input that leads to the development of an implementation plan with a step-by-step guide for success. The plan focuses on four program components: organization, promotion, design, and economic development. To be successful, communities must address issues and opportunities in each category, working with broad public support for the betterment of the community.

Across each of the four program components, there is one critical element: public input and engagement. Local citizens living day in and day out in St. Marys know more than anyone what is needed and what is wanted. Community support and buy-in is essential to successfully address issues and seize opportunities. A community must, first and foremost, meet the needs of residents—after that, opportunities to increase tourism and other economic opportunities will follow. St. Marys has created a work plan built upon the input of local residents that addresses the following components: **organization, promotion, design, and economic development.**

These four points work together, each supporting and assisting the others, to improve the social, political, physical, and economic vitality of downtown St. Marys. The following work program items emerged directly from one-on-one interviews, focus group conversations, community survey responses, and previous plans for the city. All program items included in the St. Marys Work Program reflect strategies designed for enacting the vision of St. Marys put forward by local citizens. Community leaders and dedicated staff members should view all included work program items as potential action items geared toward full implementation of the community's vision of St. Marys.



# 1 organization

Organization refers to working to establish accord and co-action among the various and diverse groups that have a stake in the downtown district. By getting everyone in the downtown district as well as other community stakeholders to work together toward a unified goal, change becomes possible.

# 2 promotion

The goal of promotion is two-fold: creating a positive image of downtown that will both ignite community pride and improve consumer and investor confidence in the downtown. Promotion includes advertising, retail promotion, special events, and the marketing of events.

# 3 design

Design simply means re-creating downtown to be a safe, beautiful, and welcoming space for all who visit, work, and live there. Design includes giving attention to public and private buildings, storefronts, signage, public spaces, parking areas, street furniture, public art, landscaping, merchandizing, window displays, and promotional materials.

# 4 economic development

(the Four-Point Approach uses the term “economic vitality”): Economic development means building on and strengthening a community's existing economic assets while diversifying the economic base. Economic development can be achieved through techniques to retain and expand successful businesses, thus providing a balanced commercial mix. Other strategies include sharpening the competitiveness and merchandizing skills of business owners and attracting new businesses the local market can support.



# st. marys work program

# 1 organization

- 1. DOWNTOWN AMBASSADORS:** Throughout the public engagement process, citizens repeatedly cited their neighbors and St. Marys friendly people as one of the city's greatest assets. To help promote downtown businesses and retain more Cumberland visitors downtown, several community members suggested reviving the downtown ambassadors program. As a team of dedicated volunteers, the downtown ambassadors should be present at each ferry boarding and departing to provide visitors with information about downtown businesses, events, and amenities. Downtown ambassadors could even provide coffee to guests at a designated stand or food truck. First and last impressions are critical for a community's image. Greeting Cumberland Island tourists—the lifeblood of downtown—could go a long way toward boosting visitors to downtown businesses.





2. **DOWNTOWN FISH MARKET:** Throughout St. Marys, citizens expressed their love of and connection to the city's working waterfront. Fishing is a beloved pastime and significant draw for St. Marys, and shrimping remains an important local industry. As seen in popular events like the Rock Shrimp Festival, fishing is an important element of St. Marys' character that should be promoted. Currently, visitors to the city, many of whom are environmentally conscious, have no options to buy fresh local seafood downtown. With the growing popularity of the "foodie" movement and locally harvested food, a downtown fish market could be a major attraction that builds on St. Marys' unique character. Much like a farmers market, the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) could help organize local fishers in a weekly waterfront fish market. If the program proved successful, fishers and suppliers could consider forming a co-op to create a permanent seafood market downtown.
3. **PUBLIC SHOWERS FOR FERRY-GOERS:** Retaining Cumberland Island visitors is critical for the long-term economic health of downtown. Many citizens throughout the community shared the sentiment that most Cumberland visitors, anxious for a shower and a warm bed, leave immediately upon their return to St. Marys. To retain more Cumberland traffic, the city could consider working with the National Park Service to develop clean, private shower facilities at the Cumberland Island Welcome Center. Providing clean showers within the immediate vicinity of the ferry could go a long way toward keeping Cumberland visitors downtown.
4. **SUNSET DINNER CRUISE & FERNANDINA FERRY:** Two related issues arose during the public input process: building on St. Marys' appeal as a maritime destination and increasing the variety of dining options downtown. To target these priorities, the city could consider partnering with the St. Marys Convention & Visitors Bureau to bring a weekly sunset dinner cruise downtown. A sunset cruise service would be a great way to capitalize on the breathtaking scenery surrounding the city while providing additional entertainment and dining options downtown. To further develop St. Marys as a bustling maritime destination, the city could work with local ferry operators to extend ferry service to Fernandina Beach. Ferry service (perhaps themed as "the Beach Boat") to Fernandina could build on St. Marys' existing allure as the gateway to Cumberland Island while providing tourists and locals with convenient beach access.

## ...downtown ambassadors.....

St. Marys hosts 40,000 to 60,000 annual visitors to Cumberland Island. The Cumberland Island ferry docks in the center of downtown daily to transport these visitors to the island. The city should work to capitalize on the incoming crowds by advertising what St. Marys has to offer as people board and disembark the ferry. Information about local restaurants, hotels, bed and breakfasts, fun activities, and excursions should all be promoted in this high-profile location.

The rendering (left) shows a "Downtown Ambassador" kiosk where visitors can learn about the various offerings of the city. Flags promoting downtown St. Marys play in the riverfront breeze, imparting a sense of arrival and informing visitors they are in a historic downtown.



5. **MARSH CRUISE:** Public input revealed that the community cherishes St. Marys' expansive river and marsh views and the city's pristine natural surroundings. Ecotourism opportunities like Cumberland Island that take advantage of the city's surrounding natural environment are major attractions and the primary reason visitors come downtown. To build on these existing draws, the city could explore incentivizing boat tours that allow locals and visitors alike to experience the marshes surrounding the city.
6. **MARSH ZIP LINE:** Outdoor recreation and ecotourism opportunities are both major draws for St. Marys and important components of the city's high quality of life for residents. To build on environmental tourism opportunities like Cumberland Island, the city could consider partnering with the National Park Service to develop a zip line over some of St. Marys' surrounding marshes. Taking advantage of immaculate marsh and river views, a zip line could provide an exciting new attraction and an opportunity to educate visitors on the Georgia coast's fragile environment.
7. **FISHING PLEASURE CRUISE:** Outdoor recreation opportunities like fishing and sailing are major community assets and an important element of the coastal lifestyle that helps make St. Marys such a great place to live. During public input sessions, local participants expressed a desire for expanded fishing and outdoor recreation opportunities as well as attractions that build on strengths like Cumberland Island. Chartering a weekly fishing pleasure cruise from downtown would be an excellent way to build on Cumberland tourism while creating a draw for locals. An organized fishing pleasure cruise with a professional angler guide and adult refreshments could create a unique and fun downtown experience, particularly with St. Marys' naval community.
8. **BIKES ON THE FERRY:** Biking is a popular pastime and important element of St. Marys' coastal ambiance. Bike-friendly policies could help build on the city's reputation as an outdoor sports and ecotourism destination. While biking is permitted on Cumberland Island, currently bikes are not permitted on the Cumberland Queen Ferry. Partnering with the National Park Service, the city could work with local ferry operators to accommodate bicycles. An additional fee for transporting bikes could generate revenue for ferry operators and the National Park Service.
9. **ST. MARYS BIKE RACE:** Building on St. Marys' appeal as an outdoor destination, the city, Main Street, or the Convention & Visitors Bureau could consider securing a corporate sponsor for an annual downtown bike race. A criterium is a common type of bicycle race consisting of multiple laps along a closed loop of city streets. Cities like Albany, Duluth, and Athens have all had success attracting visitors and drawing local spectators downtown with the excitement of a major bike race. Many cities use bike races to create a temporary festival atmosphere downtown, often with major streets closed to traffic, live music events, and relaxed beverage restrictions.



- 10. GOLF CART RENTALS & CHARGING STATION:** Voices throughout St. Marys support alternative transportation options like biking, walking, and using golf carts. The healthy amount of transportation options available in the city emerged as a major asset during the public engagement process. To capitalize on existing transit options, the city could explore incentivizing golf cart rentals downtown. City officials could further supplement golf cart rentals by developing a golf cart charging station at a centralized downtown location. Particularly for visiting seniors and those with limited mobility, golf carts rentals could be an excellent way to explore downtown and get a feel for what makes St. Marys special, while increasing the city's attraction as an eco-friendly destination.
- 11. CREATE A FIRST FRIDAY EVENT:** First Fridays are a way to reintroduce residents to their downtown with family-friendly activities. Many First Friday events feature extended hours at downtown retailers while live music and other festival-like activities are provided. These events would help community members associate downtown St. Marys with energy and fun, keeping people excited about their downtown and encouraging them to return.
- 12. RESTAURANT WEEK ART & WINE WALK:** Throughout focus group sessions, in interviews, and on the community survey, many people discussed enhancing dining options and supporting the local artists in and around St. Marys. Building on existing popular festivals and events, a "foodie"-centric event that targets locals and visitors could create a popular draw downtown. A restaurant week and art walk event could also support the artists and boost local downtown businesses. Local restaurants could set up booths, and food trucks could be encouraged to do business along the waterfront. As part of the art walk, business owners could showcase local artwork for a one-month period. During the month-long event, the community could host an evening open house during which the public would be free to walk store-to-store appreciating local art while sipping wine and sampling local foods. An art walk could prove popular with both locals and tourists, while bringing more evening activity downtown. By exposing many different people to local restaurants and art in a fun and festive atmosphere, an art walk event could help to promote downtown as a community destination. Even children and students at St. Marys Elementary could get into the act with art lessons, finger painting, and prizes.
- 13. MOVIE NIGHT IN THE PARK:** As a site for festivals, events, concerts, and more, the riverfront and waterfront park is treasured by citizens from all over the area as the heart and soul of St. Marys. Further activating this critical community gathering space could help retain visitors downtown and capitalize on the park's local attraction. Throughout the public input process, many people said that they see more evening activities as an important element in creating a more vibrant downtown experience. A monthly movie night at the park was suggested as a way to extend activity downtown into the twilight hours. St. Marys Main Street, the Downtown Development Authority, or the Convention & Visitors Bureau might consider working with downtown restaurants to create

themed “Dinner and a Movie” specials catering to moviegoers. Supplementing an alfresco movie screening with a temporary beer or wine bar would create the entertainment options and evening activities the community desires.

**14. FOOD TRUCK PARK:** Public input results revealed that increasing the diversity, quantity, and quality of dining options downtown is a key community desire. Many suggested easing restrictions to allow more food trucks downtown, particularly during ferry departures and arrivals. A temporary food park at the Gateway property would provide a unique service to visitors and locals, while bringing activity to this unprogrammed community asset. Many focus group participants mentioned that the food choices downtown lacked ethnic diversity. Food trucks are often very diverse in their offerings and could bring exciting new flavors and a new attraction to downtown St. Marys.

**15. LIVE MUSIC AT EVENTS:** The community strongly favors more live music downtown. At all programmed events, St. Marys Main Street, the Convention & Visitors Bureau, and others should capitalize on the demand for live music and take advantage of the existing St. Marys Waterfront Pavilion. Attracting more live music over the long-term will likely require incentivizing the entertainment venues that the community desires. Developing incentives for music-friendly bar and grill establishments could significantly increase the amount of live music downtown over time while attracting more young people and Navy personnel to the area.

**16. EXPAND THE FARMERS MARKET:** Community survey responses indicate that St. Marys citizens widely advocate greatly expanding the existing Saturday farmers market. Voices from all over endorse creating a space for locals to purchase fresh eggs, meats, produce, and even local arts and crafts. Participants in the public input process widely supported a more frequent farmers market event with increased variety and high-quality locally grown items. The Fernandina Beach Market Place, the Kingsland Royal District Market in Georgia, and even the Riverside Arts Market in Jacksonville were all hailed as aspirational examples for the St. Marys market to follow. In the short-term, contacting vendors at the Kingsland and Fernandina markets could go a long way toward enhancing the market. Underutilized parking lots make a great space for pop-up farmers markets and could help bring activity to overlooked downtown spaces.

## food truck park.....

**AFTER:** In the short-term, this publicly owned space can be used for a variety of events. The rendering shows what a waterfront food cart festival could look like. Visitors could bring picnic blankets and enjoy unique cuisine beside the water, increasing the variety of dining options downtown while further capitalizing on St. Marys’ beautiful riverfront and Cumberland Island tourist traffic. Live music, prizes, and an off-leash dog area could add to the festivities.





**BEFORE:** The photograph (left) shows a view of the Intracoastal Gateway Property overlooking the river and dock. In time the community and marketplace will determine the best long-term use for this prominent downtown lot.



**AFTER**



# pop-up market

**BEFORE:** Across Osborne Street from busy St. Marys Elementary, this vacant lot currently detracts from the handsome school building and attractive planted medians. The location of this lot holds potential for future infill development.



BEFORE



AFTER

**AFTER:** Due to the vacant lot's busy location and underutilized space, temporary "pop-up" events like a weekend antiques market could be successful here until a more permanent use for the property has been developed.



**17. FLEET WEEK:** Kings Bay Naval Base is a critical economic engine for St. Marys and the surrounding region. Several community members advocated building stronger ties with the naval base to activate downtown St. Marys. A Fleet Week program could be a good way to honor local servicemen and women while bringing more Navy personnel downtown. Traditionally, Fleet Week brings recently deployed Navy personnel to major cities for a week. The city, Kings Bay Naval Base, and St. Marys Main Street could work together to create a week of events for returning submarine crews. A weeklong ceremony with nightly fireworks and festivities along the waterfront could celebrate the role of Navy servicemen and women in the St. Marys community and honor local veterans while promoting downtown as a destination.

**18. WALKING SCHOOL BUS:** St. Marys Elementary School is a major asset for the community that contributes to the city's family-friendly atmosphere. People are the key to a successful, vibrant downtown, and St. Marys Elementary School helps keep activity in the heart of the city. To encourage healthy lifestyles and instill a strong sense of community investment in the next generation, the St. Marys Elementary Parent Teacher Organization and the city could work together to organize a walking "school bus" downtown. Organizing a rotating pool of parent volunteers would help to ensure children arrive safely to and from school daily, growing the city's reputation as a great place to raise a family.

**19. POP-UP MARKETS:** Citizens throughout St. Marys continually requested a greater variety of retail options downtown. At the same time, many voices in the community want active storefronts and infill development in vacant lots downtown. One solution to these issues could be pop-up markets in vacant building and lots downtown. Also called "flash retailing," pop-up markets serve as temporary retail spaces selling any manner of merchandise in empty storefronts and other underutilized spaces. To encourage pop up markets as a unique draw for downtown, the DDA should consider working with downtown property owners to determine which vacant storefronts or vacant lots could serve as venues for pop-up markets. These spaces could then be listed on Storefront.com or similar sites that market these temporary spaces to pop-up retailers. The resulting funds could serve as a supplemental income stream for building owners while bringing interesting and ever-changing retail options downtown.





# st. marys work program 2 promotion

1. **ECOTOURISM PACKAGE:** The 40,000–60,000 annual visitors to Cumberland Island are a major source of commerce for downtown St. Marys. Locals agree that ferry service to Cumberland Island is the main reason out-of-towners visit downtown. To capitalize on this existing traffic and St. Marys' reputation as an ecotourism destination, the St. Marys Downtown Merchants Association and local businesses should consider developing an ecotourism package with local retailers offering outdoor sports rentals, accommodations at local hotels and campsites, Crooked River State Park passes, access to the White Oak Conservation Center, passes to Cumberland Island, and so forth.
2. **TOURIST FACT SHEET:** Improving communication between downtown merchants, the city government, and stakeholders like the Convention & Visitors Bureau proved a major concern among community members in focus group and interview sessions. One citizen suggested that a tourist information sheet be distributed to all downtown merchants with frequently asked questions by visitors. The fact sheet should include times of ferry boarding, bicycle rental locations, where to get a cup of coffee, and so on. A tourist fact sheet could take the form of a monthly newsletter to downtown merchants with the relevant dates and times of festivals and events downtown.
3. **FUN PHOTO CUTOUTS FOR FAMILIES:** To enhance the whimsy and family-friendly attraction of downtown, St. Marys could create fun marine animal photo opportunities. St. Marys is known for rock shrimp, sea turtles, and manatees. Creating artistic stands representing these marine animals could be a great opportunity for family photographs and supplement downtown's attraction to children and families.



4. **CARRIAGE RIDES:** Carriage rides have been suggested to boost St. Marys' appeal as a maritime and heritage tourism destination. Particularly in conjunction with historical programs and events, carriage rides could complement downtown's existing programming and historic attractions. The Convention & Visitors Bureau or Downtown Development Authority could consider contacting one of the many carriage tour companies in Savannah or St. Augustine to determine if carriage rides in the city would be feasible. Developing carriage rides in the city would be particularly valuable for enhancing the city's attraction as a wedding destination.
5. **OUTDOOR DESTINATION:** The community sees the many outdoor recreational opportunities surrounding St. Marys as a major asset. Building on the popularity of Cumberland Island, kayaking, boating, biking, and water and outdoor sports in St. Marys, the city should promote itself as a premier outdoor sports and ecotourism destination. Targeting a demographic already drawn to St. Marys makes good sense for the community and capitalizes on the city's existing resources. While the city could consider pursuing outdoor enthusiasts through specialty magazines or interstate billboard advertisements, social media provides free promotional tools with a nearly unlimited audience. Developing a hashtag campaign (#gooutdoorsStMarys) and encouraging local outdoor enthusiasts to post their pictures on a city or Convention & Visitors Bureau-run Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter account dedicated to outdoor opportunities could be an effective and economical marketing tool for the city.



## photo cutouts

The area along the waterfront shown in the rendering is a frequent crossing point for thousands of tourists traveling to the Cumberland Island ferry. With a beautiful riverfront view, this is an excellent spot for a family photo. Many community members requested more attractions for children and families downtown. The rendering shows manatee and rock shrimp cartoon cutouts along the waterfront—a fun photo opportunity for kids of all ages!



- 6. MARKETING DOWNTOWN ST. MARYS:** Throughout the public engagement process, the idea that St. Marys just needs to market itself more effectively arose countless times. Ultimately, the community would like downtown St. Marys to be a destination for the local community and for tourists. Public input shows that St. Marys is a unique waterfront community that many local residents and tourists don't know much about. There is a demand to develop a comprehensive marketing plan to capture both local and tourist traffic downtown.
- 7. SOUTHERNMOST CITY:** From the city's founding in 1792 until the acquisition of East Florida in 1821, St. Marys served as the southernmost city in the United States. As a cultural crossroads between America and Spanish East Florida, St. Marys thrived in the early 1800s as legal and illicit trade filled the city's waterfront. St. Marys' unique role as America's southernmost city could be celebrated to enhance the city's heritage tourism profile. Perhaps taking advantage of the bicentennial of Florida's acquisition, the city could issue an MOU to local artists to commemorate St. Marys' tenure as America's southernmost settlement. Installing a creative, artistic memorial near the southernmost point of the city could supplement St. Marys' many historic attractions and add to the waterfront. Commemorating the city's southernmost status holds the potential for further programming. As an example, a Southernmost City Festival incorporating live music and soul food could be a great addition to existing waterfront programming.
- 8. WEDDING DESTINATION:** St. Marys' historic charm, waterfront location, and easy accessibility help make the city an ideal wedding destination. The city, Downtown Development Authority, and Convention & Visitors Bureau could collaborate to brand the city as a wedding destination. The city could work with local business owners, inns, and bed and breakfasts to create a wedding package for couples. Building on assets like the city-owned Orange Hall mansion, the Howard Gilman Memorial Waterfront Park, and St. Marys' historic houses of worship, the city could promote St. Marys in the Jacksonville media markets and elsewhere as a wedding destination.
- 9. TALL SHIP FESTIVAL:** St. Marys has a rich maritime history, and many community members favor expanding the city's profile as a maritime destination. Beginning in the 19th century, St. Marys was a hub for tall ships, and the St. Marys River was often clogged with boats from all around the Atlantic. An annual Festival of Sail would honor this heritage, create a regional attraction, and elevate St. Marys' potential as a maritime destination. The city, Convention & Visitors Bureau, and other stakeholders could partner to introduce the festival, which could feature a display of tall ships from around the world, a boat race with a cash prize, demonstrations of traditional maritime skills, and more attractions for visitors and the local community.



# St. Marys

## WEDDINGS & EVENTS GUIDE



HISTORIC ST. MARYS, GEORGIA | WEDDING & EVENT LISTING

### VENUES

BORELL CREEK LANDING  
CAMDEN COUNTY COURTHOUSE  
CLUBS OF KINGS BAY / NAVAL BASE  
CUMBERLAND ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE  
CROOKED RIVER STATE PARK  
GOODBREAD HOUSE  
GREYFIELD INN, CUMBERLAND ISLAND  
ORANGE HALL  
OSPREY COVE  
RIVERVIEW HOTEL  
SPENCER HOUSE INN  
ST. MARYS WATERFRONT PARK  
HISTORIC TABBY RUINS

### HISTORIC CHURCHES

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
CHRIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
ST. MARYS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
OUR LADY OF THE SEA CATHOLIC CHAPEL

### ACCOMMODATIONS

EMMA'S COTTAGE HOUSE  
GOODBREAD HOUSE BED & BREAKFAST  
SPENCER HOUSE INN BED & BREAKFAST  
RIVERVIEW HOTEL  
CUMBERLAND ISLAND INN & SUITES  
GREYFIELD INN

### FLORISTS

DONINI'S FLORIST  
ST. MARYS FLORIST  
KINGS BAY FLORIST

### CAKES

SWEET TEMPTATIONS CAKERY  
SWEETS4U

### CATERERS

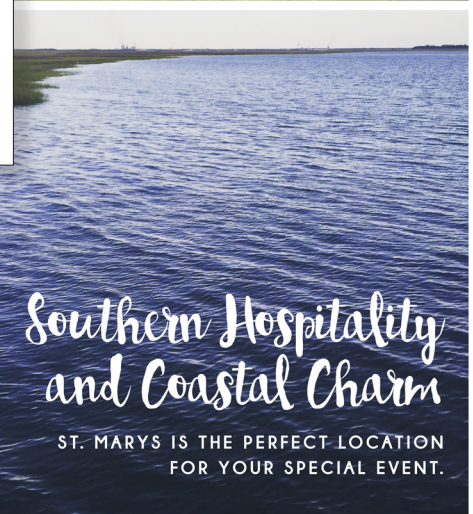
CREATIVE CATERING  
CAPTAIN SEAGLE'S  
PLAN-IT FINE FOODS  
SONNY'S BBQ  
ST. MARYS SEAFOOD & MORE

### DISC JOCKEYS

DJ CONNECTION  
TOTAL ENTERTAINMENT GROUP

### RENTALS

JUST PERFECT INNOVATIVE EVENTS  
CAMDEN PARTY RENTALS  
RENT ALL PARTY CENTER  
BEACHVIEW TENT RENTALS



*Southern Hospitality  
and Coastal Charm*

ST. MARYS IS THE PERFECT LOCATION  
FOR YOUR SPECIAL EVENT.

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THISTLE PHOTOGRAPHY

**EVENT PLANNERS**  
JUST PERFECT INNOVATIVE EVENTS  
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VICTORIA CARRIAGES

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WEDDING CHAPEL

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CAMDEN COUNTY PROBATE COURT AT  
(912) 576-3785.

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ST. MARYS CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU  
400 OSBORNE STREET | ST. MARYS, GEORGIA 31558  
(912) 882-4000 / (800) 868-8687  
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wedding  
& events  
guide

- 10. SNOWBIRD MARKETING:** St. Marys' mild climate creates an opportunity to build on the city's existing popularity with retirees. Promoting the city's outdoor recreational opportunities and mild climate in northern media markets could help attract more seasonal "snowbird" traffic.
- 11. SHOP DOWNTOWN CAMPAIGN:** Building on the "Keep it in Camden" program, St. Marys Main Street or the Camden Chamber of Commerce could partner with downtown business owners and local schools to create a "shop downtown" campaign as a way to integrate students into the local business community. A campaign would also remind community members to consider spending money locally rather than at national chain stores or online retailers. For every \$100 spent in locally owned stores, \$68 returns to the community through taxes, payroll, and other expenditures. For every \$100 spent in a national chain, only \$43 stays local. Spend it online, and nothing stays local.
- 12. PROMOTING THE ARTS:** Increasing the presence of arts and culture in St. Marys was a commonly expressed idea during public input sessions. To increase the quantity and diversity of art in the city, community members brought up the idea of unplanned public art. Public art is created through a series of trials and errors, failures, experiments, and successes. For the artistic process to succeed, there must dedicated places for people to express their creativity. Particularly in the underutilized buildings across from St. Marys Elementary in close proximity to other galleries, the city can consider using vacant structures and lots as blank slates for creative expression. Partnering with local arts associations, galleries, and St. Marys Elementary School, the city could target a series of spaces that allow art to unfold over time. Events like a sunset parade or an artistic sea dragon sculpture in the St. Marys River were all expressed as unique opportunities to showcase local art. If early efforts at developing spaces for public art prove successful, the city could consider incentivizing gallery and studio spaces in the buildings across from St. Marys Elementary. Developing an annual artist-in-residence program that allows a selected local artist to display work throughout downtown would be another way to increase the city's profile as an arts destination while promoting the role of local artists.
- 13. WATERFRONT PROGRAMMING:** Festivals and events are a major attraction downtown. The community enjoys and supports popular events like the Rock Shrimp Festival, Scarecrow Stroll, and Independence Day parade. Expanding popular events would be a great way to enhance traffic downtown and further utilize St. Marys' Howard Gilman Memorial Waterfront Park, a beloved spot for community gatherings. Developing a First Friday event, a "Pops in the Park"-type symphonic program, an oyster roast and concert, and a wine-tasting festival would all enhance the allure of downtown St. Marys and increase the city's reputation as a regional destination.



**14. SIGNAGE BY CAMDEN COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL:** Engaging the wider community and bringing more locals and youth downtown were popular topics during the public input process. Programmatic signage outside of Camden County High School would help promote downtown events and activities. Informing the wider community, particularly students and youth, of events downtown could encourage a greater local presence downtown—a major step toward creating a vibrant downtown experience.

## signage by camden county high school



BEFORE



AFTER

**AFTER:** The rendering above shows a perfect location across from the entrance to Camden County High School where downtown signage could be installed. In this concept, the signage is a covered chalkboard that could easily be updated with new announcements.

**15. INTERPRETING HISTORY:** St. Marys' residents appreciate the city's rich history and would like the city's story to be told more effectively. While the city hosts five Georgia historical markers, many of downtown's most important historic assets lack a narrative to inform visitors of their importance. Interpretive historical signage is planned for the St. Marys' history walk, but many of the city's most relevant historic assets are several blocks from the history walk site. The city or Convention & Visitors Bureau could consider working in conjunction with local historical societies and the Historic Preservation Commission to create an annotated tourist map or audio recording that could be downloaded by prospective tourists interested in exploring St. Marys' history. Regular history tours, perhaps by costumed actors, are another possible option to capitalize on St. Marys' special heritage.

**16. ST. MARYS FOUNDER'S TRAIL:** The community overwhelmingly appreciates St. Marys' rich historic character and sense of place. There is an opportunity to highlight the city's historic assets and create a new attraction downtown. Similar to Boston's Freedom Trail, designating a loop from the new History Walk and Oak Grove Cemetery to Orange Hall and other downtown historic sites would be an excellent way to connect St. Marys' historic assets while creating a fun, interactive, and educational experience downtown.

**17. LIVING HISTORY EVENTS:** Established in 1792, St. Marys boasts a rich heritage as one of Georgia's oldest cities. From the War of 1812 to service as America's southernmost settlement and the final resting place of Acadian refugees, St. Marys' residents treasure the city's rich history and early heritage are treasured by residents. In historical settlements like Williamsburg and elsewhere, living history and historical reenactments have become popular and educational attractions. Working with the Historic Preservation Commission, local historical societies, and local history and drama students, the city could explore creating historical reenactments. Costumed volunteers in period clothing could act out major events from the city's history or even day-to-day life in the Federalist Era. While creating a unique attraction downtown, living history events could promote St. Marys' past and tell the story of the city to both visitors and local citizens.

**18. YOGA IN THE PARK:** Local citizens coming downtown on a regular basis is critical for the long-term vibrancy of St. Marys. The waterfront park is already popular with morning joggers and other locals looking for exercise or a morning respite. Main Street or the Convention & Visitors Bureau could consider contracting with a private instructor to develop a weekly or biweekly Yoga in the Park program. Morning yoga, meditation, or tai chi could help to supplement existing morning activity along the waterfront. Expanding morning activity downtown is critical for creating demand for breakfast and coffee options

downtown  
tourist map .....



EST. 1787

# ST. MARYS GEORGIA

## HISTORIC DOWNTOWN

### POINTS OF INTEREST

#### INFORMATION

- 1 ST. MARYS WELCOME CENTER
- 2 CUMBERLAND ISLAND VISITOR'S CENTER
- 3 LANG'S MARINA EAST - FERRY TICKETS

#### RESTAURANTS

- 4 LANG'S MARINA RESTAURANT
- 5 RIVERSIDE CAFE
- 6 SHARKBITE BAR & GRILL
- 7 PAULEY'S RESTAURANT
- 8 LATTE DA'S COFFEE & GELATO
- 9 THE BLUE GOOSE
- 10 CEDAR OAK CAFE
- 11 CAPTAIN SEAGLE'S RESTAURANT

#### LODGING

- 12 RIVERVIEW HOTEL
- 13 SPENCER HOUSE INN B&B
- 14 GOODBREAD HOUSE B&B

#### HISTORICAL ATTRACTIONS

- 15 ST. MARYS SUBMARINE MUSEUM
- 16 OAK GROVE CEMETERY
- 17 THE PEACEMAKER TALL SHIP
- 18 CUMBERLAND ISLAND NAT'L SEASHORE MUSEUM
- 19 ORANGE HALL MUSEUM

#### SHOPPING

- 20 COTTAGE SHOP AT THE BLUE GOOSE
- 21 UP THE CREEK EXPEDITIONS
- 22 THE COMPANY HOUSE
- 23 THE GOLDEN PINEAPPLE
- 24 COTTLE & GUNN
- 25 DIRTY MONKEY SOAP CO.
- 26 MS. WENDY'S WONDERFUL WORLD OF BOOKS

#### CHURCHES

- 27 OUR LADY STAR OF THE SEA CATHOLIC CHAPEL
- 28 FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
- 29 FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH









# st. marys founders' walk



**FOUNDER'S WALK:** Similar to Boston's Freedom Trail, the St. Marys Founder's Trail designates a loop from the new History Walk and Oak Grove Cemetery to other important downtown historic sites. By linking points of historical interest, the trail creates a convenient way for tourists to explore downtown while getting a sense of St. Marys' history and strong sense of place. Connecting St. Marys' historic assets in a fun and interactive way helps make St. Marys' history more accessible to visitors and locals alike.

near the ferry—a frequent request during public input sessions.

**19. FOUNDER'S DAY EVENT:** Engaging students at St. Marys Elementary, expanding popular festivals and programming, and celebrating St. Marys' rich history were common themes in community input sessions. Creating an annual Founder's Day event could help to promote and communicate St. Marys' role in Georgia history while cultivating an appreciation for the past in the next generation of



# prom night at the park



Howard Gilman Memorial Park is a hub for community members all around St. Marys. Students and families from all over Camden County converge at the park every spring to take prom photos along the beautiful water-front. The city and downtown merchants could collaborate to create an official event for Camden County High School's prom day, offering beautiful photo backdrops and photography services.



St. Marys' citizens.

- 20. PROM PHOTOS & EVENTS:** St. Marys' beautiful Howard Gilman Memorial Waterfront Park is a critical asset for the city and a major draw for the community. The waterfront park is already a popular destination for local weddings, engagement photos, and prom pictures. St. Marys Main Street, the Downtown Merchants Association, and Camden County High School could partner to bring a temporary arbor, photo booth, romantic lighting, and themed decorations for prom photos at the park. Capitalizing on the park's existing popularity with prom couples, downtown restaurants could organize candlelight dinners or special prix fixe menus on prom night. Local merchants could even consider hanging Japanese lanterns across Osborne Street or along the waterfront to further the romantic ambiance on prom night. A prom night fireworks display would be a potential draw for all ages. Providing safe youth-oriented programming downtown would go a long way toward helping students build a relationship with downtown, which would increase activity and the long-term health of the area.
- 21. ORANGE HALL WEDDING VENUE:** Voices throughout St. Marys expressed appreciation for historic Orange Hall but see it as underutilized. Building on growing demand for destination weddings, St. Marys' city-owned antebellum Orange Hall is ideally suited as a regional wedding venue. The facility has served as a popular venue in the past and already features a downstairs kitchen, restroom facilities, and areas fitting for wedding day preparations. Minimal grounds improvements could create an irresistible venue for prospective couples. Using the building as a wedding venue could help raise funds for the building's renovation and eventually generate revenue for the city.
- 22. RIVERVIEW CENTENNIAL:** To improve the relationship between the city and local businesses, St. Marys could create a campaign to celebrate the centennial of St. Marys' Riverview Hotel. Since 1916, the Riverview has been the anchor and hub of downtown St. Marys—accommodating illustrious guests from John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie to average folks from around the nation seeking the serenity of Cumberland Island. In addition to the Riverview's tourist accommodations, the hotel is also a destination for the local community. Seagulls Pub at the Riverview is a community institution and active gathering place downtown. Celebrating the Riverview's centennial could help promote the hotel as a downtown destination and strengthen relationships with the downtown business community.
- 23. DOWNTOWN GOLF CART TAXI:** While most of St. Marys' downtown businesses are clustered along Osborne Street, most visitors to the city stick close to the waterfront ferry terminal. Moving visitors throughout downtown is essential to retaining more tourist dollars and creating a healthy customer base for businesses throughout downtown. Working with downtown merchants, the city could consider developing a complementary golf cart taxi service targeting visitors along the waterfront. By circulating visitors through the downtown area, a golf cart taxi service would help to give travelers a unique and more comprehensive view of what St. Marys has to offer.





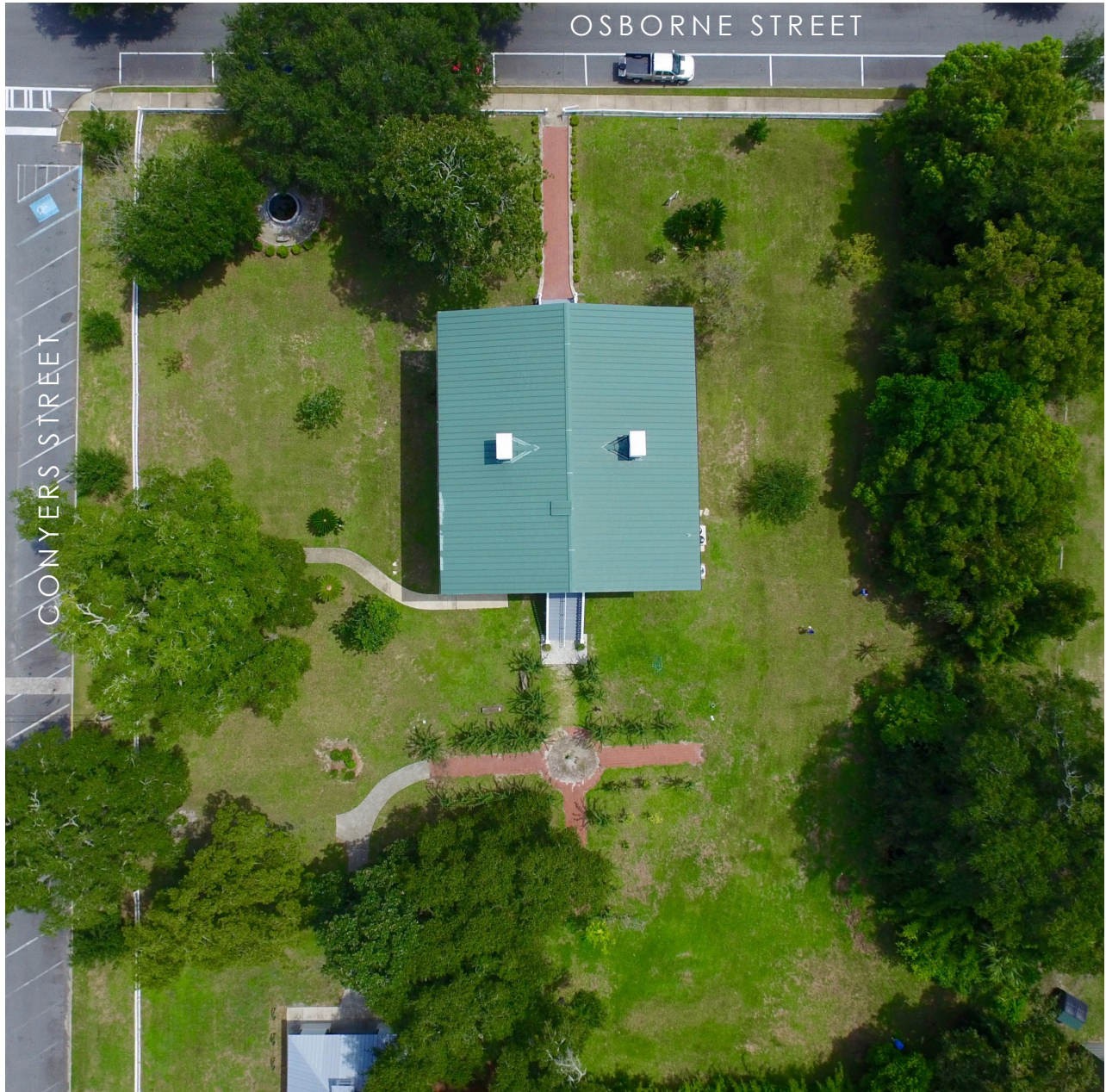
# historic orange hall

WEDDING VENUE

**T**he beautiful antebellum Orange Hall mansion is seen as one of St. Marys' most important and beloved historical resources. For decades, Orange Hall served as St. Marys' public library and has been an important community gathering space for many years. While currently housing a museum and the Orange Hall Foundation, the property is seen by many community members as underutilized and deserving of more local investment. Until a few years ago, Orange Hall was a popular wedding venue, bringing life to this resource, generating revenue for the city, and further endearing the historic home to the community. Accommodations like the public restroom facility and small downstairs kitchen helped to create an inclusive wedding destination. The building's proximity to St. Marys' historic churches and bed and breakfasts also supplemented the home's attraction



as a wedding destination, bringing more tourism dollars downtown. Significant numbers of community members desire a greater role for Orange Hall in the future of the city. For this resource to live up to its potential, several improvements should be prioritized. A before aerial photo reveals the disjointed paths and substandard maintenance of the home's surrounding landscape. The dead-end paths and inconsistent materials detract from Orange Hall's stately beauty. Improperly pruned dwarf crape myrtles in the incomplete back courtyard permanently block the views of any prospective wedding ceremony.



**orange hall property: before, plan view**



# historic orange hall design concept

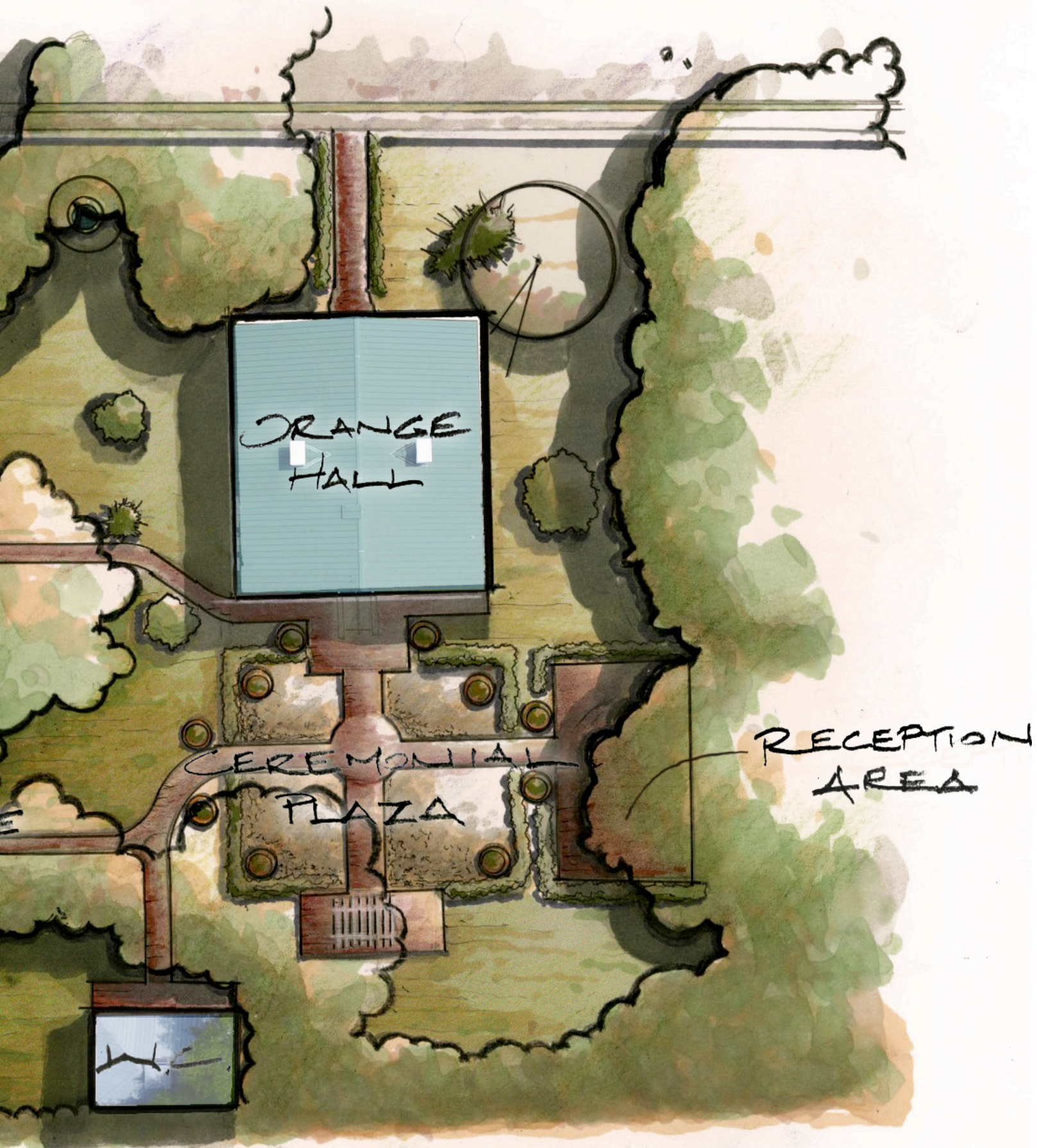
The conceptual plan for Orange Hall illustrates a completed back courtyard, flexible pea gravel plaza, paved and universally accessible brick pathways, a brick reception area, and an arbor-shaded plaza for wedding ceremonies. Crowded and obtrusive crape myrtles have been replaced with large citrus trees in terra cotta pots along the periphery of a flexible plaza space. These potted citrus trees are intended to honor Orange Hall's history while evoking the elegant Italian Renaissance landscape designs popular during the antebellum period. Parterres, or rectilinear flower beds bordered with boxwood, were among the most common elements of Southern ornamental garden designs from the 1820s to the 1850s. Parterres are suggested for the hedges surrounding the ceremonial plaza and reception area. Few other plantings are proposed, with the exception of a new magnolia in the front yard to replace an identical tree visible in old photos of Orange Hall. While a seedling has been placed near the site of the historical magnolia in the rendering, the slow growth rate of the southern magnolia ensures that any reception in the rear courtyard would be visible from the street for several decades. Planting a larger tree at the same site, perhaps donated and dedicated to a local philanthropist, would help to block any activity in the rear of the house while framing Orange Hall's impressive façade.

CONYERS STREET

SERVICE  
ENT.

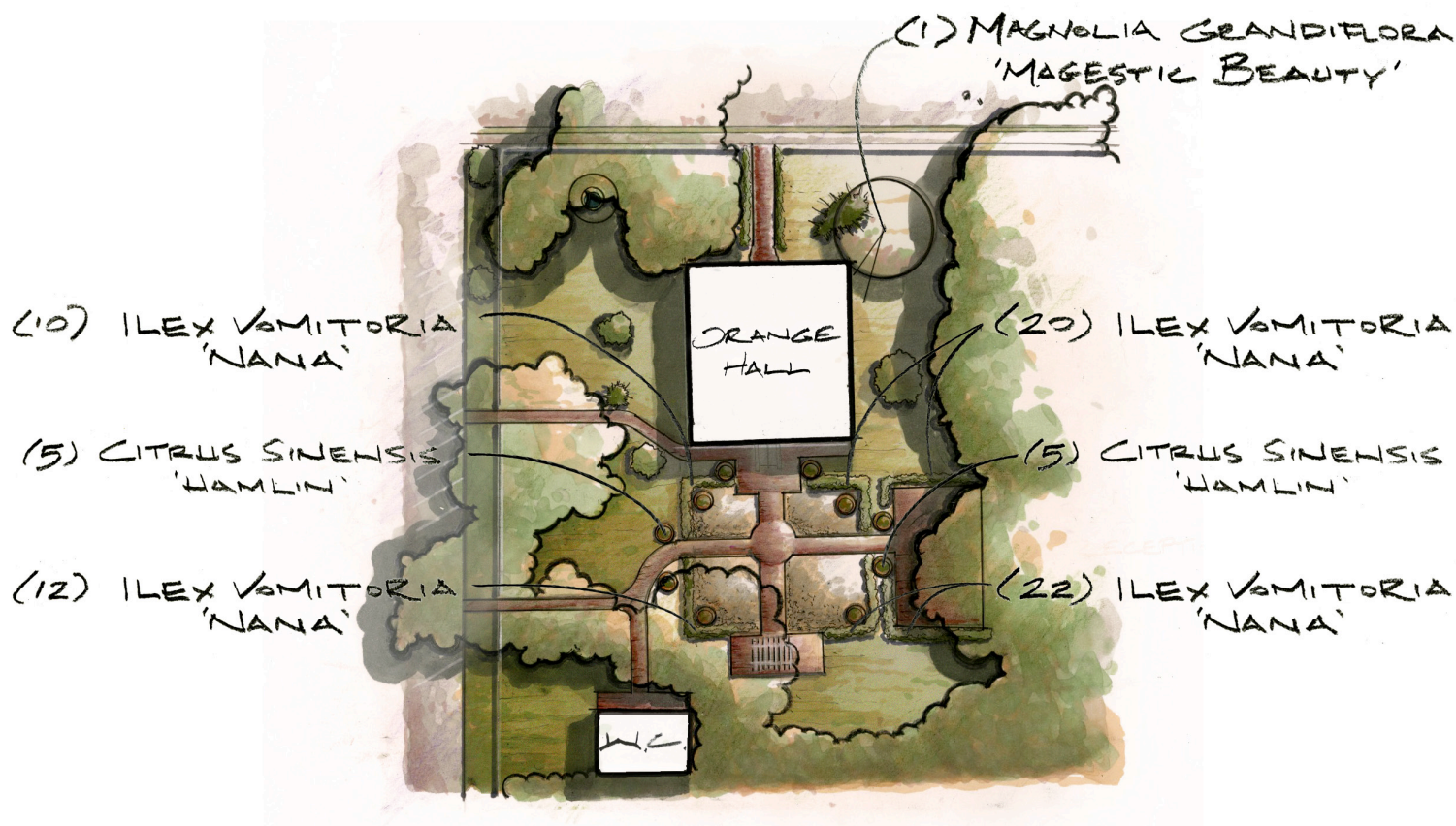


OSBORNE STREET





# historic orange hall planting plan



► THE PLANTING PLAN SHOWN ABOVE ILLUSTRATES THE RECOMMENDED PLANTS FOR THE HISTORIC ORANGE HALL SITE.



**BOTANICAL NAME:** Citrus sinensis 'Hamlin'

Common Name: Hamlin Orange Tree Height: 15-25' Spread: 10'-20' Spacing: N/A Quantity: Ten (10)  
Comments: Hardy to 20°Fahrenheit, the Hamlin orange is among the most cold-hardy cultivars of sweet orange and the only variety recommended for the lower Georgia coast. Grow in large terra cotta pots to control size, provide emergency freeze protection, and create a sophisticated look.



**BOTANICAL NAME:** Ilex vomitoria 'Nana' Common

Name: Dwarf Yaupon Holly Height: 3-5' Spread: 3-6' Spacing: 2' On Center Quantity: Sixty-four (64)  
Comments: A native, low maintenance alternative to English boxwood. As a natural dwarf variety, the dwarf yaupon is easily kept within bounds by regular pruning. Ideal shrub for short hedges, borders, and parterres.



**BOTANICAL NAME:** Magnolia grandiflora 'Majestic Beauty'

Common Name: Majestic Beauty Southern Magnolia Height: 40-50' Spread: 20-25' Spacing: N/A Quantity: One (1)  
Comments: A quintessential large Southern specimen tree. Historically used on Orange Hall's antebellum grounds. Refrain from pruning lower limbs to encourage a graceful, pyramidal form.





**BEFORE:** Currently, the front landscape of Orange Hall does not conform to the high standard of maintenance visible at the Howard Hillman Waterfront Park and elsewhere downtown. The tired boxwood hedge along the brick walk needs rejuvenation and selective replanting. Turf areas are spotty and could benefit from some TLC. The small magnolia intended to replace a historical specimen tree will take many years to achieve a substantial impact. Underutilized concrete planters and benches crowd the landscape and introduce an inharmonious modern material.



**AFTER:** An after view of the same site illustrates some simple and inexpensive improvements to Orange Hall's historical landscape. The boxwood hedge has been reinvigorated with selective replanting and proper maintenance. The sweeping turf of the front garden has been rejuvenated with regular watering and aeration. Concrete planters and benches have been relocated, and plantings have been protected from foot traffic and water loss with generous applications of mulch. A stately new magnolia frames the view of Orange Hall's handsome front façade, restoring the front landscape to the building's historical elegance.

# historic orange hall front yard



# historic orange hall courtyard

**BEFORE:** Orange Hall's incomplete and ill-maintained back courtyard poorly reflects the elegance and sophistication of the historic property. Paths to the rear of the building are disjointed and use inconsistent materials. The undersized variety of crape myrtles and inappropriate pruning ensures permanently blocked views from the courtyard area.

**AFTER:** The rendering shows a renovation of Orange Hall's back courtyard. Properly edged and accessible brick walkways complement the historical materials of Orange Hall and link the back courtyard to the surrounding areas. A clipped boxwood hedge encloses a flexible pea gravel courtyard to create a flexible and historically sensitive venue for a variety of events. Permanently stunted crape myrtles have been removed and replaced with orange trees in large terra cotta pots, reflecting the history of Orange Hall while allowing for a level of versatility at ceremonial occasions. A new brick patio and attractive, sturdy arbor create a focal point and location for formal occasions.

**AFTER, WEDDING:** With the recommended improvements, Orange Hall's back courtyard provides the perfect location for elegant outdoor weddings.



**BEFORE**



**AFTER**



**AFTER, USED FOR WEDDING**







## BEFORE

Orange Hall's wide south lawn provides flexibility but offers limited aesthetic appeal. Improperly pruned crape myrtles again create mangled forms that block views and contribute little to the beauty of the historic building. The incomplete brick pathway terminates at no point in particular.



# historic orange hall reception area



**AFTER:** A view of the south lawn shows a well-defined plaza space and attractive brick patio sized to accommodate outdoor wedding shelters and perfect for dancing. Sophisticated potted citrus trees modeled on those at the Villa Medici at Castello again help to frame patio and courtyard areas while reflecting the unique history of Orange Hall. Hanging string lights and Japanese lanterns create a festive atmosphere for this wedding celebration.





BEFORE

**BEFORE:** The photograph above shows the Lang's Marina building at the waterfront on St. Marys Street East. Currently, the building has no signage on the front but has a small sign on the side of the building.

**AFTER:** (digital rendering, right) A whimsical rock shrimp mural now greets tourists with St. Marys' unofficial mascot. Attractive painted signage now brings life to the front of the building. A new and more inviting industrial garage door complements the building's façade. Murals are a great way to promote downtown and local businesses while adding character to the overall streetscape.



AFTER



# façade improvements lang's marina





promoting what downtown  
has to offer through  
**kayak signage**







**BEFORE:** The photograph above shows Knuckleheads, a local business adjacent to the Cumberland Island ferry terminal. Knuckleheads offers everything from kayak rentals to public restrooms and snacks, but there are no signs to inform Cumberland Island visitors that these amenities exist.

**AFTER:** The rendering (left) shows the following improvements:

- ▶ Knuckleheads signage informs and attracts visitors.
- ▶ A painted kayak advertises frequently requested amenities like public restrooms, kayak and bicycle rentals, and fishing supplies.
- ▶ A sandwich board targeted to tourists reads: "Get everything you need for Cumberland Island!"







# park rules sign

**BEFORE:** Located at the entry to Howard Gilman Memorial Waterfront Park, these cluttered signs do a poor job of welcoming to guests to the otherwise beautiful park. The jumbled rules are listed in an unfriendly and unattractive way, spoiling an otherwise lovely entryway. The old signs read:

\$500.00 REWARD  
FOR ANY INFORMATION  
LEADING TO THE  
ARREST AND CONVICTION  
OF ANYONE CAUSING  
DAMAGE TO THE  
WATERFRONT PARK OR  
OTHER CITY PROPERTY  
CONTACT: ST. MARYS POLICE DEPT. 882-4488 OR 911  
NO SWIMMING OR WADING IN FOUNTAIN  
NO SKATEBOARDS BIKES OR ROLLER BLADES ALLOWED  
NO PROFANITY

**AFTER:** The rendering shows the cluttered signs replaced with a consolidated, attractive, and friendly sign. The new signage rephrases the messages of old signs in a welcoming tone that reflects St. Marys' renowned southern hospitality and friendly coastal atmosphere.

The new sign reads:

COME WITH A SMILE  
BE FRIENDLY  
WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE  
THE FOUNTAIN IS NOT YOUR PERSONAL SWIMMING POOL  
HELP KEEP THE PARK CLEAN  
SORRY, NO SKATEBOARDING OR ROLLER BLADING  
PLEASE WALK YOUR BICYCLE

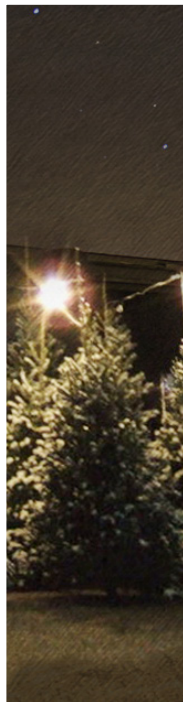
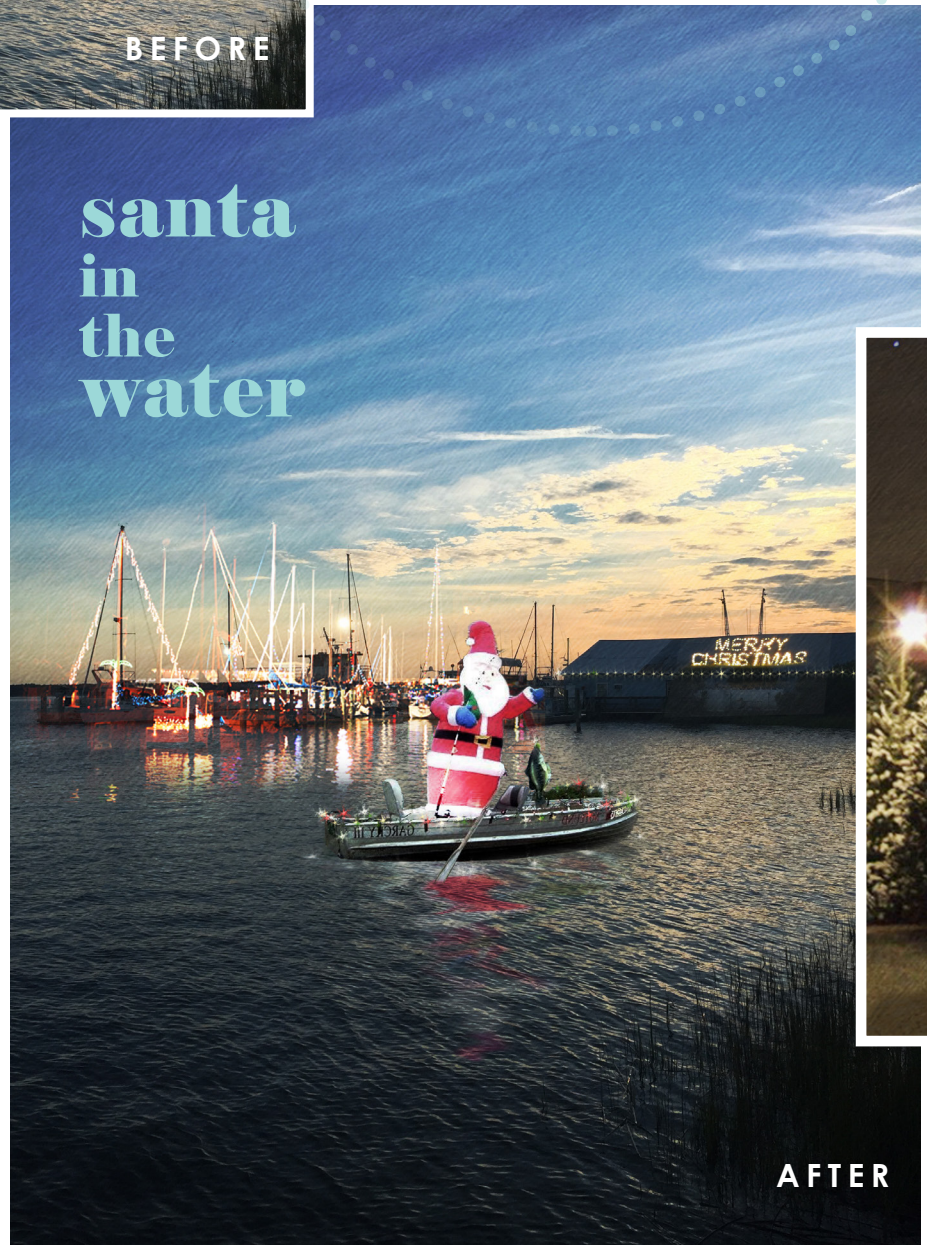




# promoting downtown through local attractions

Christmas is a special time in St. Marys. During the holidays, the community gathers downtown for special events like the White Lighting Ceremony and Christmas in the Park. Buildings and streets are decorated throughout downtown. The water is just as much a part of downtown as the buildings and streets, so why not decorate it as well? The rendering shows an anchored fishing boat sitting in the water with an illuminated Santa Claus on board. Boats in the marina are decorated with colored lights beautifully reflecting off the water. Alight with season's greetings, the Lang's Marina building is also spreading cheer along the waterfront.

## santa in the water





# downtown christmas tree sale

BEFORE

**BEFORE:** This paved lot is located at the corner of Osborne and Stable Alley. Targeting undeveloped lots and attracting infill development would help to bring more activity downtown.

AFTER

**AFTER:** Temporary uses, such as a Christmas tree sale, could occupy this downtown space until a more permanent use is implemented. Bringing activity to empty lots makes downtown a more vibrant experience.





# st. marys work program 3 design

- 1. MARSH WALK:** The community loves that St. Marys is a walkable, bikeable, and golf cart-friendly city. These values contribute to St. Marys' high quality of life and help to attract house hunters. Many community members voiced support for expanded bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. Momentum exists to develop a marsh walk connecting Howard Gilman Memorial Waterfront Park to the surrounding marsh and adjoining neighborhoods. A marsh walk could enhance alternative transportation options in the city while encouraging environmental education and engagement.
- 2. BIKE PATHS:** While biking is already a popular way to get around St. Marys, many community members would like to see more bike lanes and dedicated pathways. The city's topography and beautiful natural surroundings help encourage biking and pedestrian activity. The city could enhance St. Marys' attraction to bikers and nature lovers with a dedicated rails-with-trails pathway along the St. Marys Railroad. A rails-with-trails pathway would allow the St. Marys Railroad to continue operating while connecting bike riders and pedestrians with major assets like the St. Marys Aquatic Center, St. Marys Public Library, and St. Marys Little Theatre. Working with surrounding municipalities, Camden County, and the PATH Foundation, the city could explore tying the trail to the 68-mile Georgia Coast Rail-Trail—creating an incredible attraction for St. Marys and the surrounding region. Additionally, the same stakeholders could explore a riverfront bike path following the original route of the Atlantic, Waycross & Northern Railroad. In the short-term, painting dedicated bike lanes, particularly along the former rail lines, on downtown streets could enhance the city's environmentally friendly image, honor St. Marys' history, and provide a cost-effective expansion of the city's biking infrastructure.







BEFORE

**BEFORE:** This photograph shows a view along St. Marys Street looking east toward the waterfront. Although this is an important gateway for tourists entering downtown via Dilworth Street, currently the area lacks a sense of downtown arrival. Wide expanses of unutilized asphalt send a poor environmental message and contribute to stormwater runoff, pollution, and flooding.



## st. marys marsh walk

**AFTER:** The digital rendering illustrates the same view with the unified streetscaping improvements proposed for Osborne and St. Marys streets. The programmed paved asphalt area has been transformed into an ecologically sensitive bioswale. This attractive feature treats and detains excess stormwater while beautifying the surrounding streetscape. Welcoming new signage and handsome live oaks impart a sense of arrival. The proposed marsh walk, designated with pedestrian-scaled signage and a painted egret icon along the sidewalk, guides tourists on a scenic path around downtown.





## st. marys marsh walk

St. Marys' reputation as a walkable, bikeable, and golf cart-friendly city is a point of pride among local residents. Many community members voiced support for expanded bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. Momentum exists to develop a marsh walk connecting Howard Gilman Memorial Waterfront Park to the surrounding marsh and adjoining neighborhoods.





The marsh walk proposal illustrated in the plan above uses existing street infrastructure to create a themed marsh walk trail. By creating parklets in underutilized city rights-of-way and encouraging exploration of existing city-owned resources, the marsh walk concept illustrated minimizes costs while providing a new eco-friendly attraction for the city.



# st. marys marsh walk







BEFORE

**BEFORE:** (above) The photograph above shows a beautiful spot overlooking the marsh located along the marsh walk route.



AFTER

**AFTER:** The rendering (left) shows the area with a new bench and educational marsh signage, offering those traveling along the marsh walk route a place to relax and enjoy one of the many breathtaking views of St. Marys.





**BEFORE:** This old water treatment plant is currently underused. It is located in an ideal spot along the marsh walk route and has spectacular views.

**AFTER:** The rendering above shows the water treatment plant building with new signage pointing the way to a marsh scenic viewing deck. The scenic viewing deck has a shaded seating area with an attached awning and telescopes to enjoy the view.



# st. marys marsh walk



**BANNER DESIGN CONCEPT:** This is an example of possible printed banner signage along a screening wall that blocks access to undesirable areas around the treatment plant.



# st. marys marsh discovery center







**AFTER:** The rendering above shows the water treatment plant building remodeled as a marsh discovery center. The center would be a place where visitors could learn about the marsh wildlife and it could hold classes, workshops, special events, and children's activities.



- 3. BIKE-FRIENDLY STREETS:** St. Marys citizens treasure the city's countless opportunities to bike and explore the city on foot. Biking is an important part of St. Marys' coastal character and represents a unique selling point to new residents. St. Marys could enhance this element of the local culture and create a commitment to alternative transportation by doubling down on the right to bike throughout the city. Sharrows, technically known as shared lane pavement markings, indicate the safest place to bike along city streets. Sharrows alert drivers that cyclists are present and guide bikers to the best place to ride, creating a safer environment for both bikers and motorists. Following the example of forward-thinking, bike-friendly cities like Oakland and Minneapolis, St. Marys could explore placing wide "super sharrows" along major corridors like St. Marys, Dilworth, and Osborne streets. Placing super sharrows at the center of these roads helps to send the message that bikers have a legitimate right to the road.





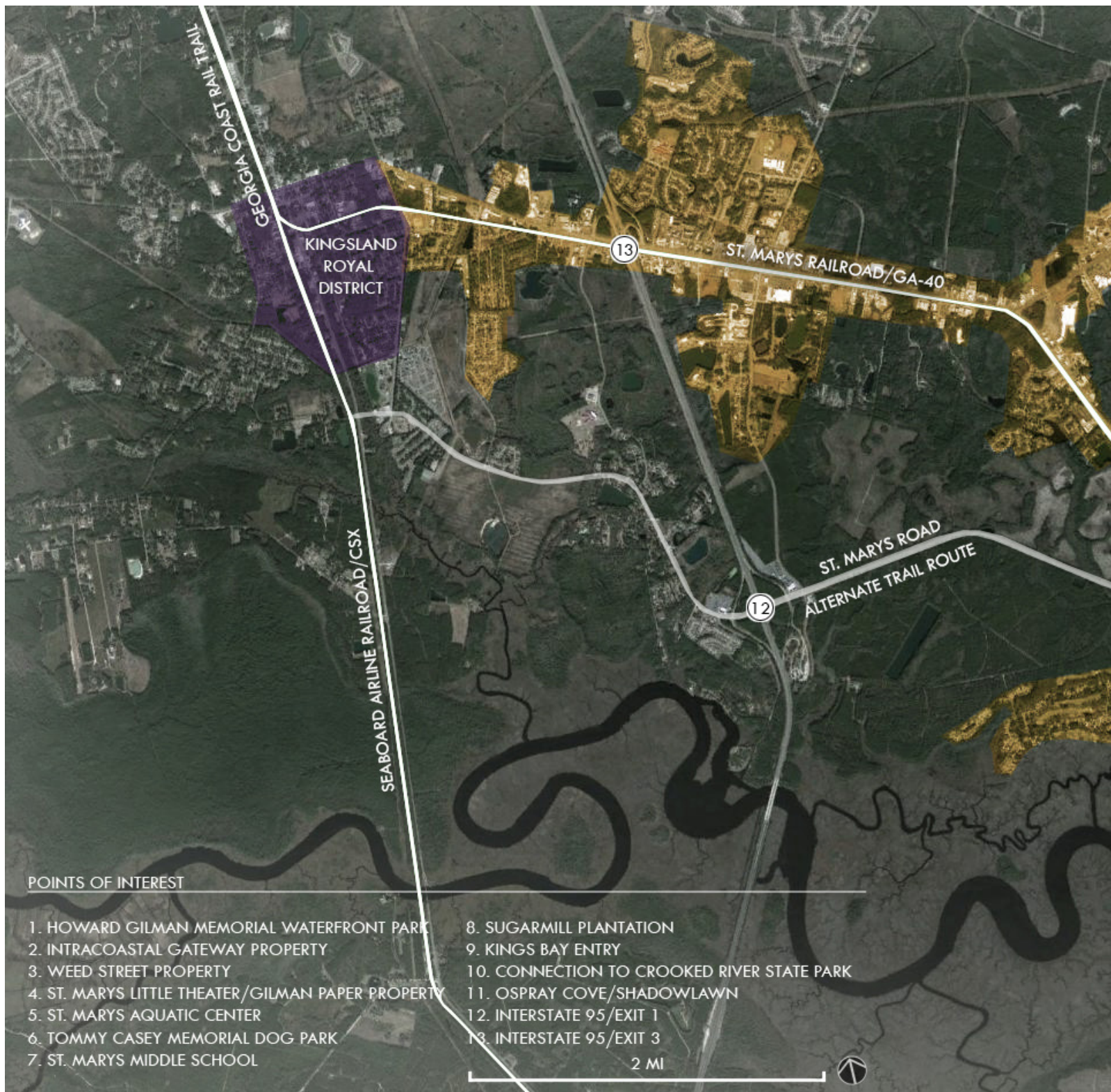


**BEFORE:** This photo above shows the St. Marys Railroad switch northeast of downtown along Gallop Street. This stretch of the city currently lacks pedestrian accommodations, and much of the railroad's right-of-way is underutilized.



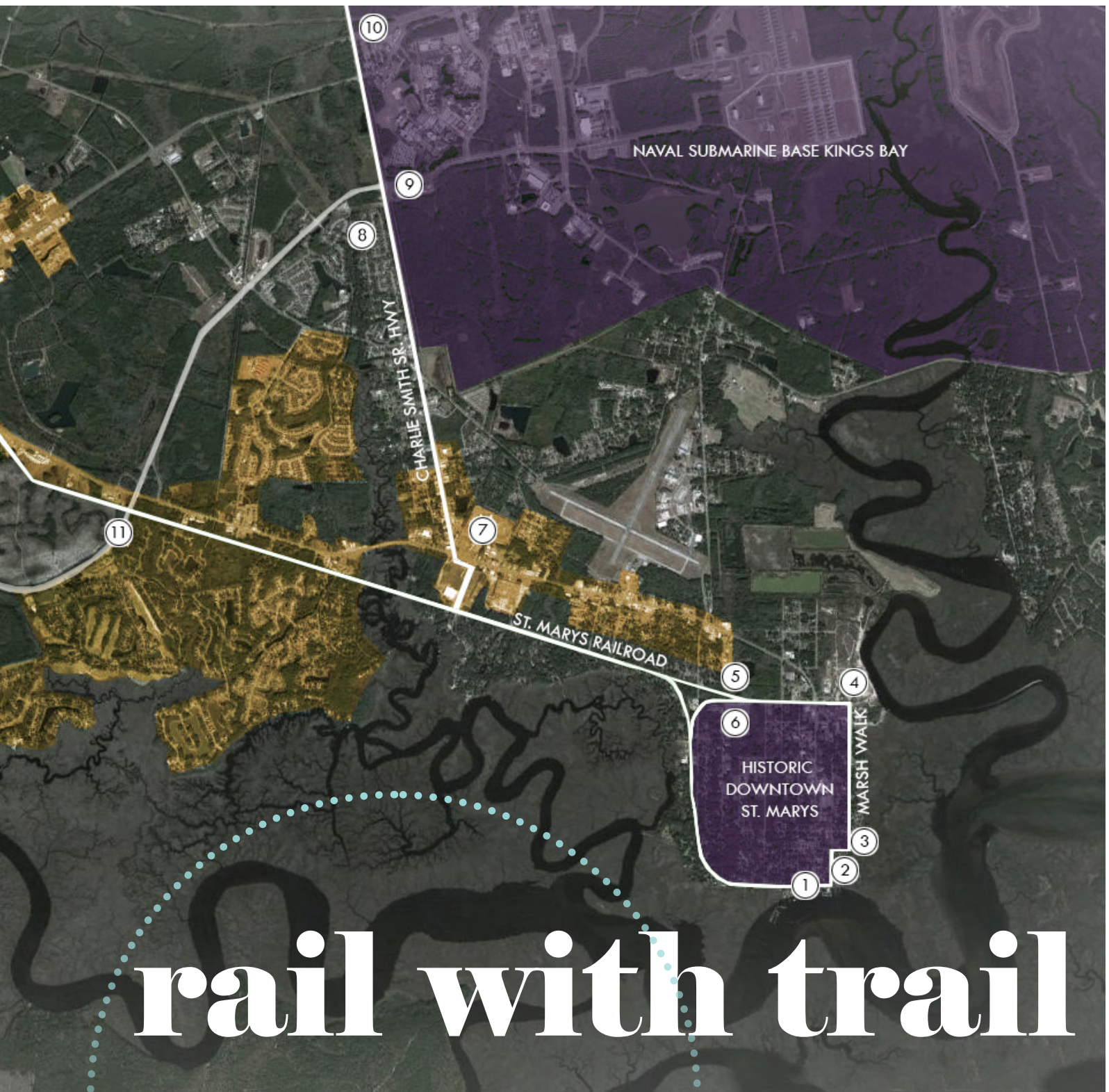
**AFTER:** An after view of the same site shows what a rails-with-trails pathway might look like. While keeping all existing rail infrastructure intact, the same right-of-way now accommodates a wide multi-use trail and an attractive planting of native grasses. Signage denotes the connection to the Georgia Coast Rail Trail network.





Although biking is already a popular way to get around St. Marys, many community members would like to see more bike lanes and dedicated pathways and trails connecting downtown to surrounding neighborhoods. The city could enhance St. Marys' attraction to bikers and nature lovers with a dedicated rails-with-trails pathway along the St. Marys Railroad right-of-way. A rails-with-trails pathway like the one proposed in the plan below would allow the St. Marys Railroad to continue operating while connecting bike riders and pedestrians with major





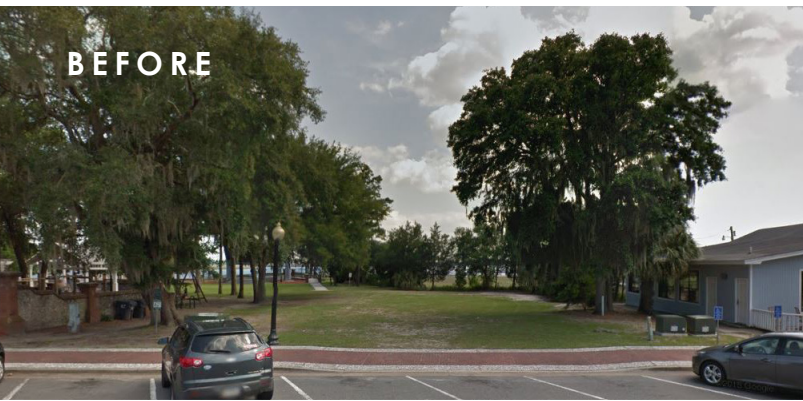
assets like the St. Marys Aquatic Center, St. Marys Public Library, and St. Marys Little Theatre. Either via a continued path along the railroad right-of-way or an alternative path along St. Marys Road, the plan illustrates a dedicated connection between St. Marys and the 68-mile Georgia Coast Rail-Trail—creating an incredible attraction and major eco-friendly draw for St. Marys and the surrounding region.



- 4. DOWNTOWN SPLASH PAD:** St. Marys has the potential to build on the city's family-friendly small-town image by creating more attractions for children and families. Many in the community voiced the desire for a splash pad at the waterfront park downtown. Splash pads are a popular draw for families and could be themed to reflect St. Marys' position as an ecotourism destination. Splash pads are cost-effective investments requiring no life guards and little maintenance.
- 5. DOWNTOWN SERVICE MEMORIAL:** Voices from all over St. Marys appreciate the city's critical role as the home of the Kings Bay Naval Base. The community values the contribution of military veterans, and several community members expressed a need to honor local veterans downtown. The city could consider partnering with Kings Bay, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the American Legion to create a service memorial downtown. The memorial could honor both the service of military members as well as other groups and individuals who should be remembered for service to the country. Placing the memorial at the waterfront or along the new History Walk would provide an appropriate venue to reflect the community's support for local service members.

## downtown splash pad

BEFORE



**BEFORE:** (left) This vacant space is located adjacent to Lang's Restaurant on St. Marys Street beside Howard Gilman Memorial Waterfront Park. This is a popular pedestrian cut-through to the playground just beyond the park's walls.

**AFTER:** (below) Responding to the need for more children's and family-friendly programming along the waterfront, the rendering shows the same lot transformed with the addition of a splash pad. Local children can beat the summer heat in the splash pad or play on a fun pirate ship-themed addition to the existing playground.





6. **THEMED TRASHCANS:** Many cities use elements like trashcans to enhance the image of downtown areas. Throughout the public input process, many community members mentioned the desire for uniform trash cans downtown. Creative, themed trashcans could be used to advertise special characteristics of downtown St. Marys or reflect the city's historic character.



The rendering above shows how dumpsters provide a blank canvas for creative painters. The dumpsters are shown painted in a nautical theme with tall ships and sea life.



**7. REDUCE STREET FLOODING:** Stormwater and tidal flooding along St. Marys Street and Ready Street were noted as deterrents to downtown activity. When tides are especially high or when a significant amount of rain falls during a high tide, the drainage infrastructure is inadequate and water covers portions of the street. This problem is expected to worsen over time. In the short-term, a few simple actions can be incorporated into streetscape renovations that will improve drainage and better accommodate high tides that currently cause problems.

- ▶ **RAIN GARDENS:** Incorporate plantings designed to capture and infiltrate water, sometimes called rain gardens or bioswales, into the streetscape plan. This will create areas designed to hold water where it currently puddles in the street.

- ▶ **MAKE USE OF GREENSPACES:** By connecting bioswales and other stormwater drainage features to existing parks and greenspaces, water has a chance to permeate the soil before reaching the river. This increases evaporation and infiltration, reducing the volume of stormwater. Making use of existing greenspaces allows water to spread out and move across the landscape rather than collect in the streets.

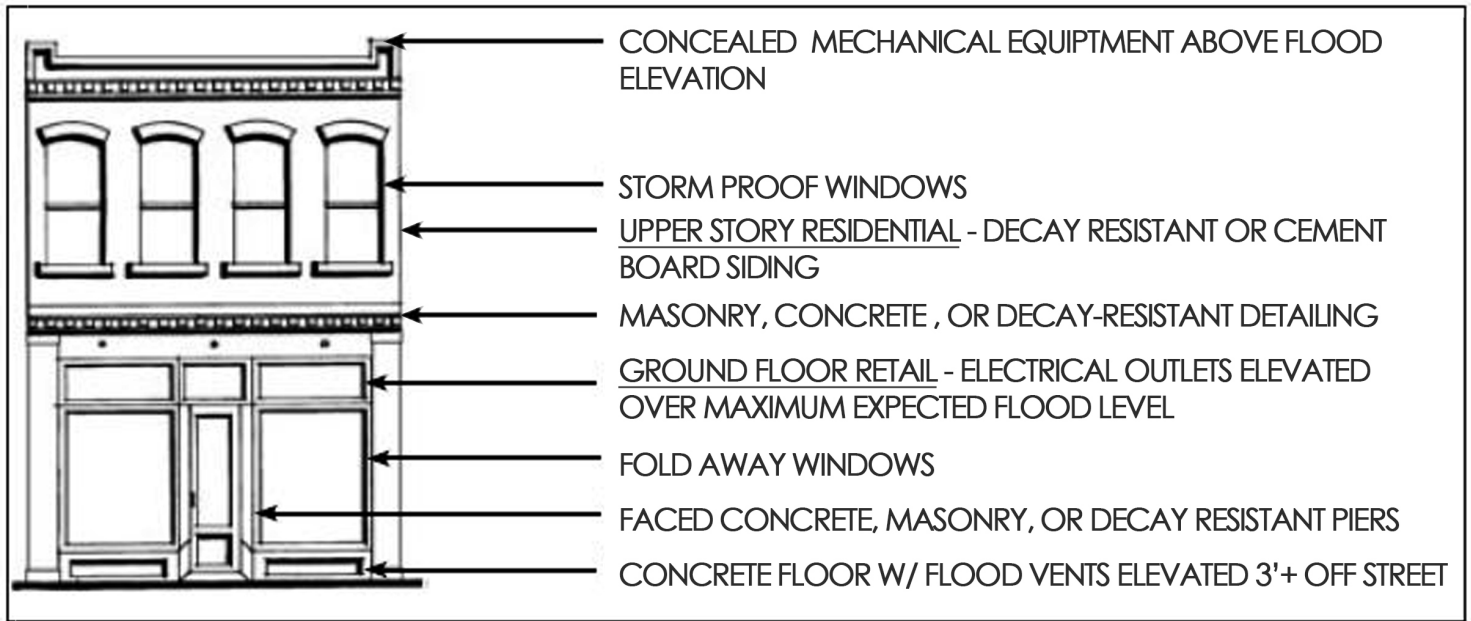
- ▶ **REDIRECT WATER FROM ROOFTOPS:** The city should consider disconnecting building downspouts from street drainage systems. Instead, the downspouts could be directed into rain gardens or bioswales, or into rain barrels or cisterns where the water can be reused later. This provides additional storage for rain water, which prevents it from contributing to flooding.

- ▶ **INCREASE TREE COVER:** Increasing tree cover offers a wide range of benefits, from providing shade and lowering temperatures to increasing property values. While tree roots absorb a great deal of excess precipitation, trees also intercept rainfall on their leaves. Street trees can significantly reduce the amount of water that may cause street flooding.

- ▶ **USE PERMEABLE PAVERS FOR PARKING AREAS:** Impervious surfaces increase the intensity and duration of nuisance flooding. Using permeable pavers for parking areas would reduce the amount of impervious surfaces on St. Marys' streets. Permeable pavers allow water to penetrate and recharge the groundwater table, reducing the volume of water that may cause flooding by providing more storage and infiltrating more of it into the ground.

- ▶ **PROTECT UNDEVELOPED AREAS:** Particularly along the marsh and waterfront, protecting undeveloped areas is essential to reducing the threat of future flooding. Preserving sensitive areas allows space for tidal flooding while maintaining St. Marys' scenic natural surroundings and sense of place.

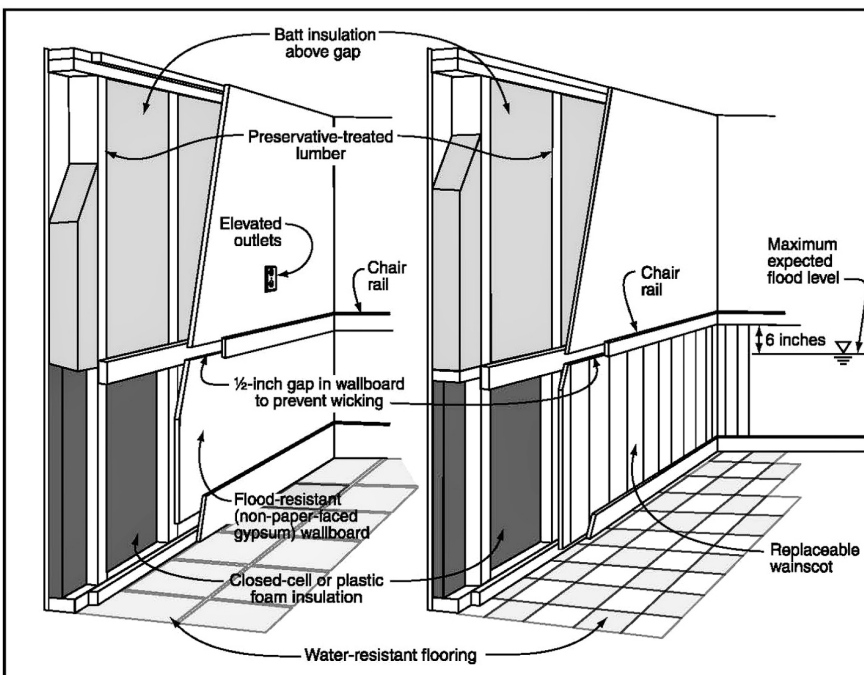




### FLOOD RESISTANT INFILL DEVELOPMENT

ACCORDING TO THE NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION, WET FLOODPROOFING IS A METHOD OF FLOOD PREPARATION THAT USES DESIGN AND BUILDING MATERIALS TO ALLOW FOR THE ENTRY OF FLOODWATERS WHILE MINIMIZING NEGATIVE IMPACTS AND FLOOD DAMAGE. WET FLOODPROOFING RELIES ON MATERIALS LIKE CONCRETE, MASONRY, CLAY TILE, AND MORE TO PROTECT AGAINST THE STRESSES OF INUNDATION AND DEBRIS. PARTICULARLY IN DOWNTOWN SITUATIONS WHERE ACTIVITY IS NECESSARY AT STREET LEVEL, A WET FLOODPROOFING STRATEGY ALLOWS FOR FLOOD RESILIENCY OF NEW BUILDINGS WITHOUT SACRIFICING STREET LIFE.

FOR MORE INFORMATION SEE: [http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/sustainable\\_communities/urban\\_waterfront\\_print.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/sustainable_communities/urban_waterfront_print.pdf)



# flood resilient infill

FEMA PARTIAL WET FLOODPROOFING INTERIOR GUIDE: THE FIGURE ABOVE PRODUCED BY THE FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY ILLUSTRATES SOME TECHNIQUES AND APPROPRIATE MATERIALS FOR PARTIAL WET FLOODPROOFING OF INTERIOR SPACES

FOR MORE INFORMATION: [http://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/9a50c534fc5895799321dcdd4b6083e7/P-936\\_8-20-13\\_508r.pdf](http://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/9a50c534fc5895799321dcdd4b6083e7/P-936_8-20-13_508r.pdf)



8. **GATEWAY ENHANCEMENTS:** Currently, a major issue in the community is the lack of an attractive gateway experience. Entry gateway landscaping and signage are the first and last opportunity the community has to communicate St. Marys' values and unique sense of place. The purpose of gateway signage is to announce the presence of and entry into a community. By defining the main entrances into St. Marys with distinctive signage and a planting pattern, passersby would be more likely to recognize and access downtown. Well-styled and landscaped gateways are also public signals that the city cares about how people perceive their downtown. Extending planted medians up Osborne Street would be a major signal that St. Marys welcomes visitors and has a strong sense of community pride. Creating distinctive directional signage and planting live oaks at Osborne and Dilworth streets could also help guide visitors and announce that they have arrived downtown.

# osborne street gateway

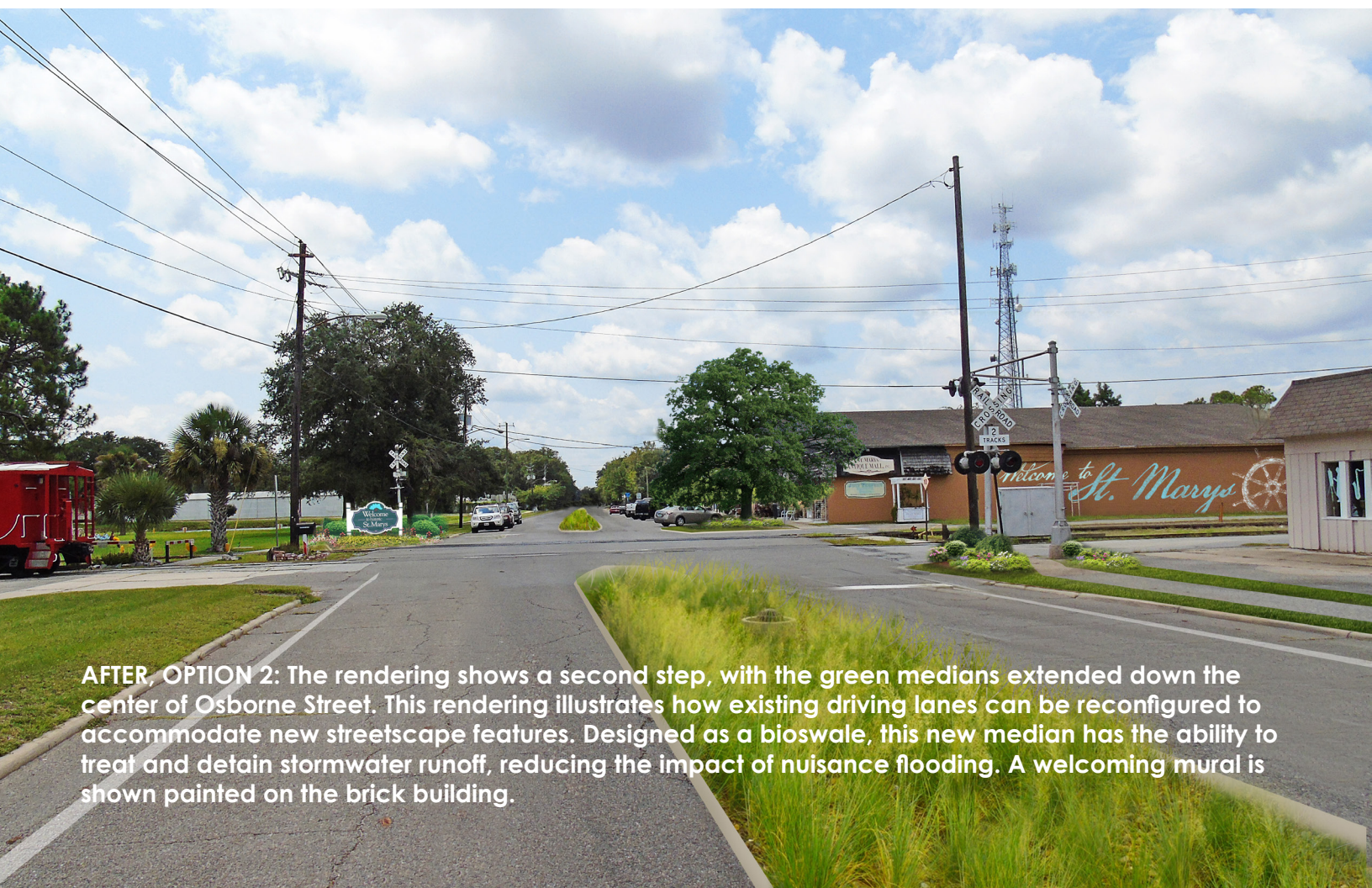


**BEFORE:** The photograph shows Osborne Street at the railroad crossing facing downtown St. Marys. This is the main gateway to downtown and an important opportunity to make a welcoming and attractive first impression.





**AFTER, OPTION 1:** The rendering shows a first step in beautification, including some basic greening at the corner of Osborne and Gallop Streets and the installation of welcome signage. A large oak tree planted on the right side of the street frames the gateway into downtown St. Marys.



**AFTER, OPTION 2:** The rendering shows a second step, with the green medians extended down the center of Osborne Street. This rendering illustrates how existing driving lanes can be reconfigured to accommodate new streetscape features. Designed as a bioswale, this new median has the ability to treat and detain stormwater runoff, reducing the impact of nuisance flooding. A welcoming mural is shown painted on the brick building.





## osborne street gateway

**AFTER, OPTION 3:** A third step in the beautification of Osborne Street includes all items in Options 1 and 2, plus the addition of center median oak trees. Osborne Street's historic live oaks are among the city's most treasured resources. Planting more oaks would impart a sense of arrival along the approach to downtown St. Marys while creating a beautiful gateway for generations to come.







**9. STREETSCAPING IMPROVEMENTS:** Improving the appearance of the streetscape downtown was a major issue among public input participants. Widespread support exists for extending the graceful, live oak-planted medians and streetscaping improvements up Osborne Street to welcome visitors downtown and ease the visual transition between downtown and the midtown corridor. Further momentum exists to continue a streetscaping program downtown that would create a unified and signature appearance along the city's major streets. Greening downtown streets with attractive plantings and improving pedestrian rights-of-way could serve a diverse set of public goals: creating a sense of welcome, retaining more tourists downtown, addressing issues of flooding, and promoting St. Marys as a historic and eco-friendly destination.

► **DANCE STEP SIDEWALKS & DOWNTOWN WHIMSY:** The community values St. Marys' relaxed and unpretentious coastal lifestyle. Several community members suggested highlighting this culture and bringing some whimsy into the downtown experience. Public engagement participants cited examples of dancing footprints in Seattle sidewalks, quotes in walls, and colorful sidewalks as positive, memorable streetscaping elements. Particularly around St. Marys Elementary School, placing boxes of chalk along downtown sidewalks could encourage spontaneous creative expression and establish a distinctive St. Marys attraction.

► **LIVE OAK REPLANTING PROGRAM:** St. Marys' historic live oaks are among the community's most beloved resources. People from all across the community see the city's lush canopy as a critical component of St. Marys' unique character. Replanting live oaks enhances the city's eco-friendly focus and should be a component of any expanded streetscaping effort.

► **ST. MARYS STREET IMPROVEMENTS:** St. Marys Street is the hub of tourist traffic and the heart of downtown St. Marys. While the construction of Howard Gilman Memorial Waterfront Park and other improvements along the river have vastly improved the allure and overall look of downtown, currently St. Marys Street lacks aesthetic appeal. The street's wide expanses of unbroken asphalt and lack of shade detract from the city's eco-friendly image and make active street life and pedestrian activity unappealing. Implementing a "road diet" and reworking traffic lanes could allow the space for the shade trees, dedicated bike lanes, and wide sidewalks desired by the community. Additionally, any streetscaping effort could build on the city's position as an ecotourism destination by incorporating storm water remediation practices and green infrastructure like permeable pavement systems.

► **PARKLETS:** Throughout St. Marys, community members envisioned replicating the lively street experiences of cities like Charleston, Beaufort, or Fernandina. Streetscapes in these and other cities typically feature wide sidewalks, street trees, outdoor seating, and other amenities. To provide the active downtown experience desired by local residents, "parklets," or

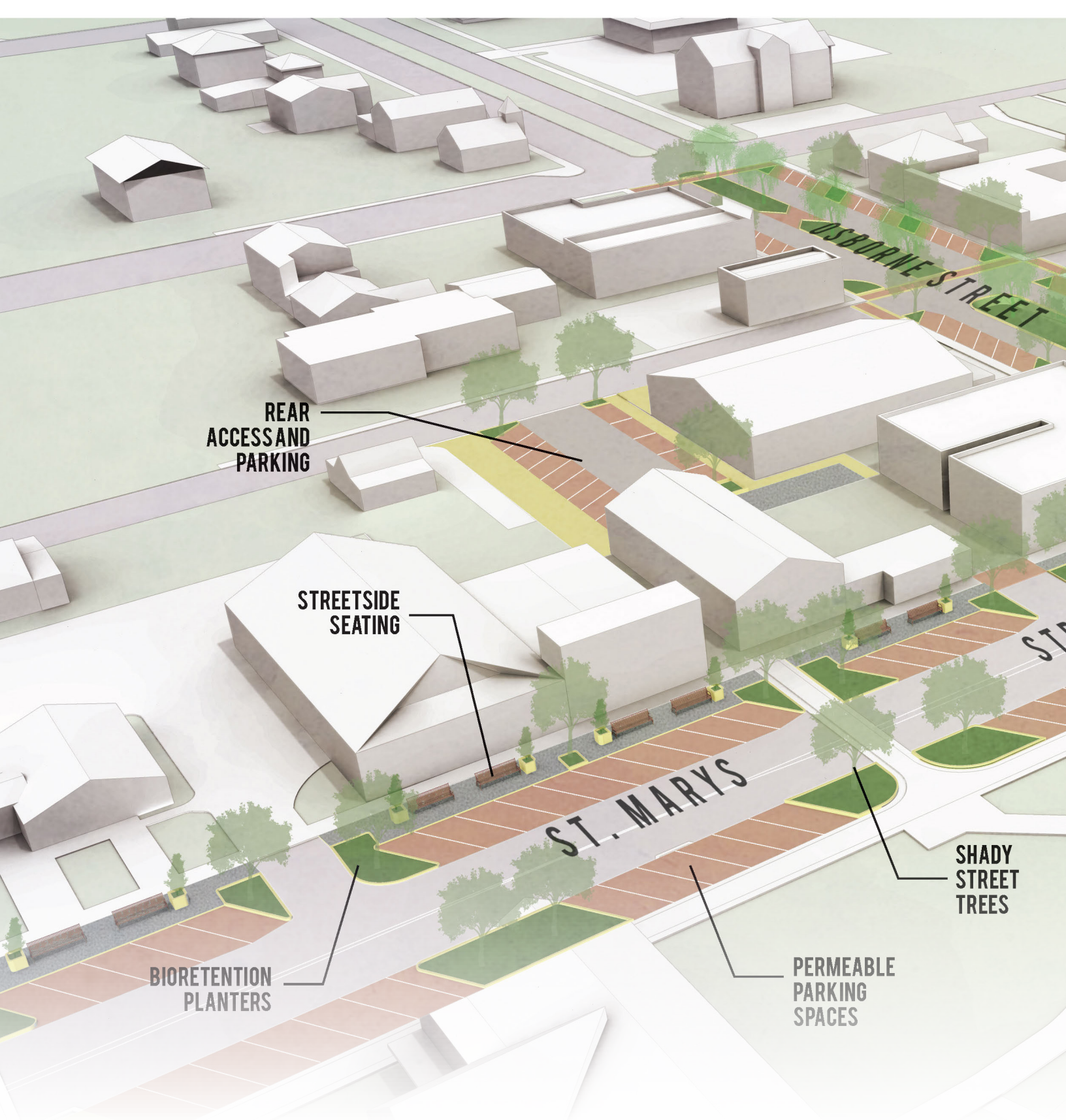


temporary sidewalk extensions installed in existing parking lanes, could be strategically employed to create wide sidewalks for pedestrian activity and café seating prior to intensive and time-consuming streetscaping upgrades. Attractively landscaped parklets typically utilize multiple parking spaces to extend active street life outward at sidewalk level to the width of the adjacent parking space.

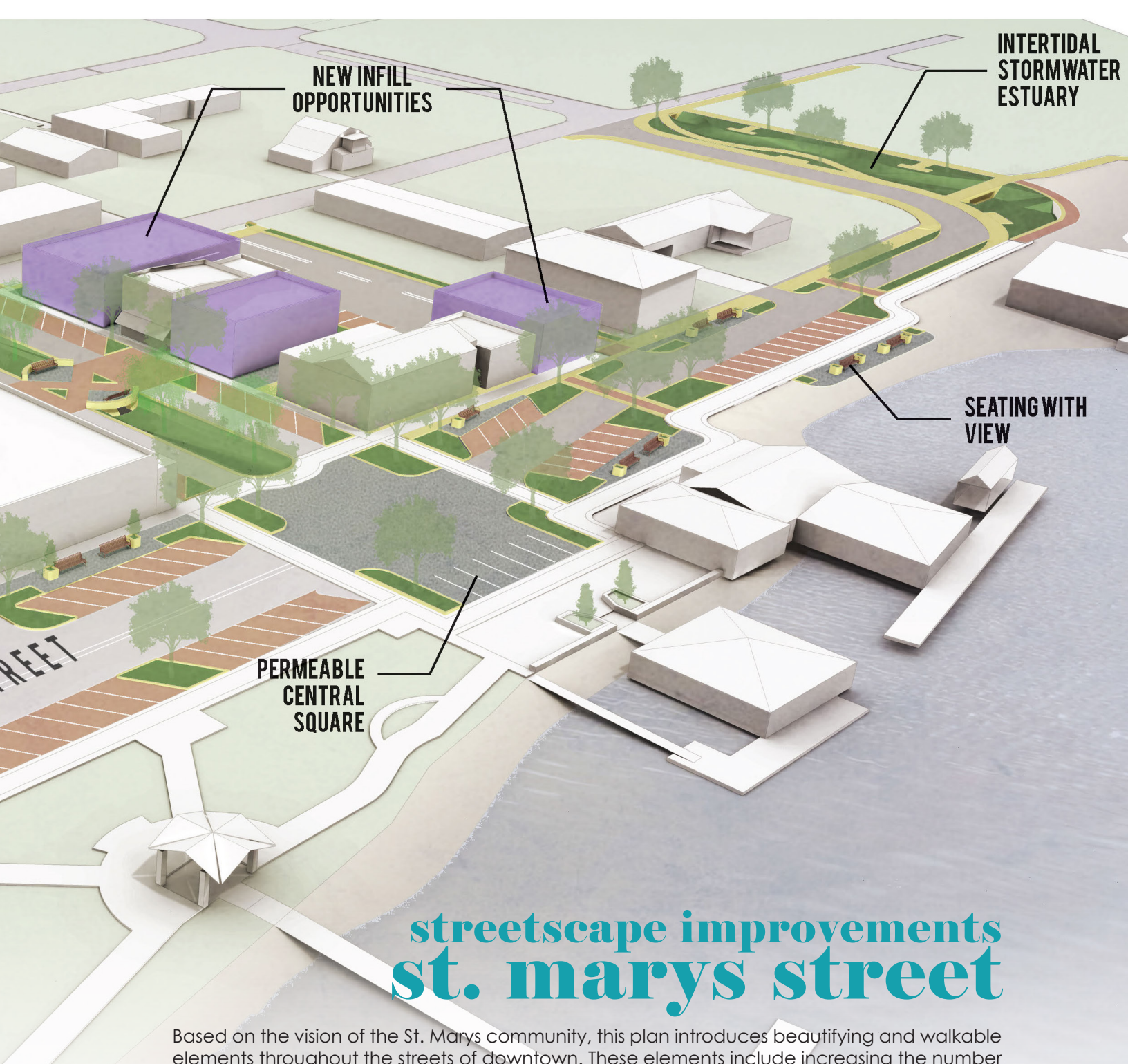
► **OSBORNE STREET IMPROVEMENTS:** Osborne Street serves as St. Marys' "main drag." Osborne Street is the hub of business activity downtown and the most common point of entry for Cumberland Island visitors. Currently, the street's beautiful, live oak-lined medians serve as a gateway to downtown. By reconfiguring traffic lanes and allowing parking along Osborne Street, medians could be extended northward from St. Marys Elementary School to the St. Marys Little Theatre. Extending these medians along Osborne, prioritizing live oak plantings, and installing dedicated bike lanes would create the signature gateway experience that the community desires while sending a welcoming image to visitors. Incorporating progressive storm water management strategies along Osborne Street could also go a long way toward addressing the frequent flooding in the area and create a themed ecological corridor straight to Cumberland Island.











## streetscape improvements st. marys street

Based on the vision of the St. Marys community, this plan introduces beautifying and walkable elements throughout the streets of downtown. These elements include increasing the number and width of designated crosswalks, replacing asphalt parking with attractive permeable pavements, installing ground planters which act as bio swales with shade trees and grasses, and creating shaded places to relax and enjoy the city's incredible waterfront views.

This plan includes widening the existing sidewalk on the north side of St. Marys Street and repaving the intersection of St. Marys and Osborne streets, a popular site for festivals and events. Repaving this intersection recognizes it as the central hub of town. The proposed design repaves the intersection with permeable cobblestone pavers, creating "St. Marys Square," a special community gathering space downtown.

Finally, east of the Osborne Street intersection, converting this section of St. Marys Street from a two-way to a narrower one-way street would allow more room for wide sidewalks, handsome street trees, attractive outdoor dining, and enhanced walkability.



# downtown st. marys streetscaping plan

## **DOWNTOWN ST. MARYS STREETSCAPING PLAN: GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE**

Green infrastructure uses natural processes to reduce stormwater volume, improve water quality, and if desired, collect rainwater for other uses. These practices are designed to restore hydrologic function to the urban landscape, reducing or eliminating the need for traditional “gray” infrastructure that channelizes potentially toxic stormwater runoff into streams and the ocean.

Features such as bioretention planters containing sand, mulch, and plants can collect stormwater runoff from the street and remove contaminants before they enter the soil, while other features like permeable pavement systems allow rainwater to filter directly into the soil before it reaches conventional storm drains.

Green infrastructure is often attractive when integrated into existing features of the built environment, including streets, parking lots, and landscaped areas. These features can serve multiple purposes simultaneously, including calming traffic, increasing walkability, providing green spaces, adding shade, and enhancing foot traffic in retail areas.

While green infrastructure can potentially have higher installation costs, these technologies have been shown to be more cost-effective over time when compared to traditional infrastructure. Initial installations can be integrated into already planned infrastructure improvement projects to help mitigate these initial costs. Overall, green infrastructure contributes to better air and water quality, improving quality of life and offering educational opportunities.

## **TIER 1 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Tier 1 recommendations are more achievable in the short-term and are generally less costly to install. These features reduce stormwater runoff and flooding, but also have the added benefits of beautifying the street and calming street traffic.

### **► PERMEABLE PAVEMENT**

Attractive permeable pavement can be installed in all parking locations throughout downtown and in crosswalks as well as in special cobblestone paved areas along the sidewalk and at the central intersection of the proposed St. Marys Square.



#### ► BIORETENTION PLANTERS

Leftover spaces in the streetscape like striped areas or spaces between the street corner and a parking spot offer potential spaces for handsome bioretention planters. These features beautify the streetscape, reduce local flooding, and can enhance pedestrian safety when used to calm traffic.

#### ► STREET TREES

While providing shade and forming an attractive canopy for pedestrians, street trees installed in bioretention planters can intercept and absorb rainfall. While addressing stormwater quantity and quality, trees also help reduce the urban heat island effect, decrease greenhouse gasses by absorbing CO<sup>2</sup>, and capture urban air pollutants.

### TIER 2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Tier 2 recommendations are intended as longer term goals, some of which may accompany new building construction downtown.

#### ► RAINWATER CISTERNS

Rain barrels or cisterns can be located alongside or near the buildings where they collect rainwater. These inexpensive devices can reduce water consumption and associated costs, reduce demand for potable water, increase available water supply for other uses, and can significantly reduce stormwater discharges from roofs. Many cities have made complementary or subsidized cisterns available for private landowners through federal grants and other sources.

#### ► GREEN ROOFS

Green roofs have a longer lifespan than traditional roofs, reduce energy costs, provide a habitat for wildlife, and can be coupled with other rooftop amenities like a rooftop restaurant or public space with seating areas. Green roofs range in complexity and weight from simple, lightweight grass cover to heavier multilayered structures with larger plants and trees.

#### ► INTERTIDAL STORMWATER ESTUARY

In addition to the green infrastructure features listed thus far, a more comprehensive solution to nuisance flooding downtown could be a constructed wetland mimicking a natural estuary. Located at the absolute low point of downtown St. Marys, this widened pool is capable of collecting the sum of stormwater run-off from surface streets and stormwater conveyance systems.

A weir structure, this feature can retain stormwater, creating a wetland pond that provides an attractive park space with seating alongside both of its banks. In extreme rain events, the weir can allow overflow into the St. Marys River. Conversely, during an extreme high tide event, that same weir can allow tidewater to penetrate and overflow into this estuary. While creating a beautiful new public space and incorporating eco-friendly practices into the fabric of downtown, the space also serves as an important habitat for amphibians and migrating birds.



# streetscape improvements st. marys street

**BEFORE:** (right) The photograph shows the boat drop area located on St. Marys Street along the waterfront. Because this is the first place visitors to Cumberland Island National Seashore see as they depart on a ferry or visit the Visitor's Center, this site is a great opportunity to welcome visitors and show what makes St. Marys special. Between 40,000 and 60,000 people pass through here annually to visit Cumberland Island. Currently, these visitors are welcomed with a view of garbage bins, which, though necessary, could easily be moved to a more discreet location.



**AFTER:** The rendering below shows several improvements made to the area:

- ▶ Garbage bins have been moved to the back of the lot (on the left).
- ▶ A large palm tree planted in the center median offers shade.
- ▶ The center median has been transformed into a bioswale to collect stormwater.







BEFORE

# swings

**BEFORE:** (left) The photograph shows an underutilized and poorly maintained space located next to Lang's Marina on the waterfront.

**AFTER:** (below) Mimicking the design of the popular swings at Howard Gilman Waterfront Park, the rendering shows pergola swings placed along the waterfront. Improved landscaping and a comfortable place to sit allow visitors to enjoy the pristine waterfront views along St. Marys Street.



AFTER



# streetscape improvements st. marys street

St. Marys Street east of the central square at Osborne is converted into a one-way street, allowing wider sidewalks, additional seating, beautiful street trees and plants, and ample parking. Additional protected cross-walks improve walkability.







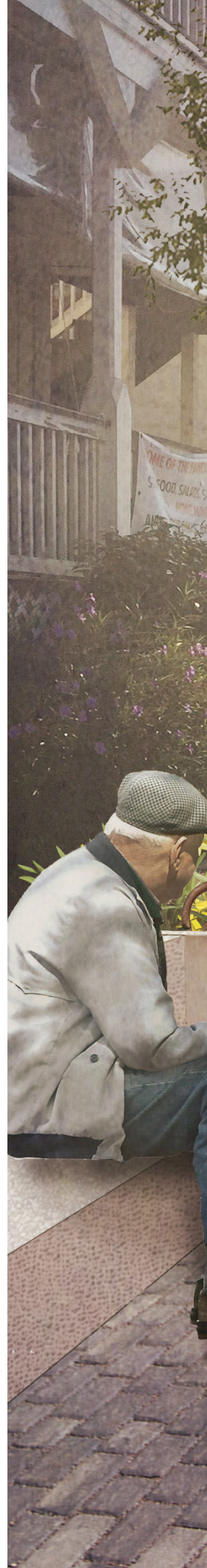


# streetscape improvements st. marys street



The rendering (right) shows a view of the same streetscape treatments in front of the Riverside Café, facing east, which is a beautiful and engaging social space rather than an area exclusively for parking.

This view illustrates the green infrastructure proposed in these streetscape designs. Permeable pavement underneath the parking and seating areas, as well as bioretention planters for the trees and other street plantings, stormwater to infiltrate directly into the ground.







AFTER



# intertidal stormwater estuary

A weir structure can retain stormwater, creating a wetland pond that can be used as an attractive park space with seating alongside both of its banks. In extreme rain events, the weir can allow overflow into the St. Marys River. Conversely, during an extreme high tide event, that same weir can allow tidewater to penetrate and overflow into this estuary.

While creating a beautiful new public area and incorporating eco-friendly practices into the fabric of downtown, the space also serves as an important habitat for amphibians and migrating birds.







AFTER



# intertidal stormwater estuary

In addition to the green infrastructure features listed thus far, a more comprehensive solution to nuisance flooding downtown could be a constructed wetland mimicking a natural estuary. Located at the absolute low point of downtown St. Marys, this widened pool is capable of collecting the sum of stormwater run-off from surface streets and stormwater conveyance systems.



**SECTION:** This artificial estuary provides a nice place to retreat and relax, and a mechanism to control stormwater during very high tide events. The depth of this wetland from bank to bottom could vary between five and ten feet, and the water depth will vary depending on natural the influence from runoff and the river. In between natural events, the estuary will retain a steady amount of water to provide a wetland pond for local invertebrates and native plants.

**PLAN VIEW:** To accommodate the proposed estuary, Ready Street is shifted 30 feet to the west, and converted from a 42-foot wide split two-way road to a narrower 20-foot wide one-way road heading west. The one-way road also allows more parking, wider sidewalks, and street trees.







# st. marys street improvements parklets

A parklet is a sidewalk extension that provides more space and amenities for people using the street. Usually parklets are installed on parking lanes and use several parking spaces. Parklets typically extend out from the sidewalk at the level of the sidewalk to the width of the adjacent parking space.

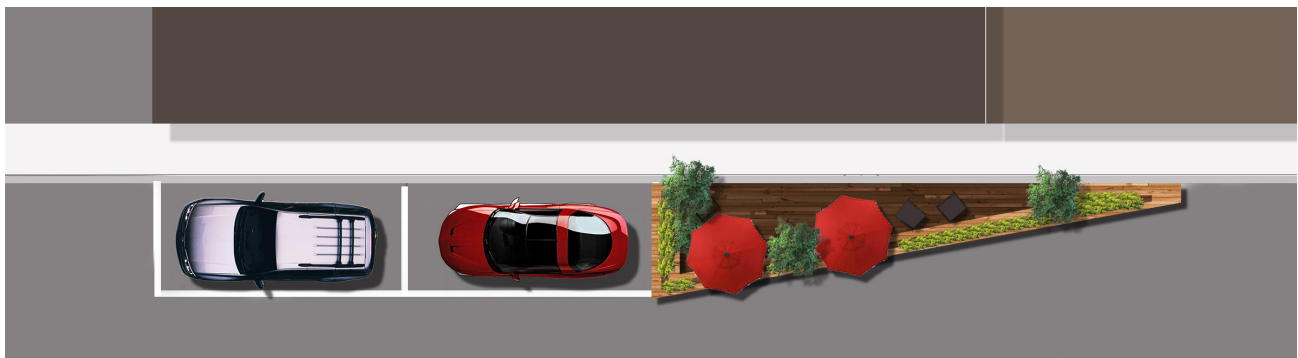
Parklets are intended for people. Parklets offer a place to stop, to sit, and to rest while taking in the activities of the street. In instances where a parklet is not intended to accommodate people, it may provide greenery, art, or some other visual amenity. A parklet may accommodate bicycle parking within it, or bicycle parking may be associated with it.

## PARKLET DESIGN 1

**BEFORE:** The photograph (above, right) shows a painted striped area on St. Marys Street next to Pauly's Café.

**AFTER:** (below, right) A parklet is a sidewalk extension that provides more space and amenities for people using the street. Parklets offer a place for pedestrians to stop, sit, and rest by creating spaces for people in otherwise underutilized space. This parklet concept is designed for quick and easy removal without damaging the curb or street.

The rendering shows a parklet in the painted striped area on St. Marys Street East. This design is constructed out of wood with built-in planters and room for a few tables, chairs, and umbrellas.



**PLAN VIEW:** The rendered plan view shows the design of a parklet fitting the dimensions of an unutilized striped area on St. Marys Street. The triangular design is constructed of wood and can be easily removed if necessary. The proposed parklet provides a nice place to sit under the umbrellas, enjoy an outdoor lunch, or just hang out. Potted trees and plants offer shade and beautify the space.







# st. marys street improvements

## parklets

### PARKLET DESIGN 2

**BEFORE:** The photograph below shows an area on St. Marys Street in front of Sharkbite Bar and Grill. Outdoor dining is popular along this stretch of the waterfront. The parking spaces provide an excellent location for a parklet with their close proximity to local restaurants and walking distance to the Cumberland Island ferry.

**AFTER:** (right) The digital rendering shows a parklet design concept with a shipwreck theme. Wooden seating areas are constructed out of an old sailboat, while new tensile structures provide shade and represent sails. The sails and boat base could be painted with "Welcome to St. Marys, Georgia" to welcome visitors to downtown. The area could also have bike racks and coastal plants.

AFTER

BEFORE









# st. marys street improvements

## sea turtle crosswalks

**BEFORE:** The photograph (right) shows the parking area across the street from Howard Gilman Memorial Waterfront Park. Without a defined crosswalk, many visitors jaywalk across St. Marys Street to access the attractive park entry.

**AFTER:** The rendering below shows the parking area across the street from Howard Gilman Memorial Waterfront Park with a defined paved entry area. New stenciled sea turtles define a safe mid-block crossing while reflecting St. Marys' strong sense of place.







**BEFORE:** (right) This neglected corner of Howard Gilman Memorial Waterfront Park needs some improvements. Without a defined path, park visitors have trampled the grass to access the playground. The six trash bins lining the wall make for an unsightly entry.

**AFTER:** (above) The rendering shows the trash bins and lanscape improved. A new sidewalk has been added for better accessibility.



## st. marys street improvements screening park dumpsters



# st. marys street improvements information kiosk

**BEFORE:** The photograph below shows the entry signage for Cumberland Island National Seashore visitor parking. The large dumpster does not reflect St. Marys' environmentally friendly image and does little to welcome new visitors.

**AFTER:** The rendering shows the site improved by moving the dumpster to another location. Landscaping improvements around the parking sign creates a more welcoming experience to visitors. A new kiosk with a sign that includes a map of landmarks, key locations, and tourist attractions has been installed to inform Cumberland Island visitors about all St. Marys has to offer.









# streetscape improvements osborne street

**I**mproving streetscaping downtown emerged as a major issue during public input sessions. Throughout the community, St. Marys residents expressed the desire for more attractive, cohesive streetscaping and a unified look for downtown. As a community that values walking, biking, golf carts, and other alternative transportation options, St. Marys citizens want universally accessible streets. South of St. Marys Elementary, Osborne Street's historic medians create a beautiful experience for pedestrians, drivers, visitors, and locals alike. Significant demand exists to extend Osborne Street's medians north to the railroad tracks, creating a sense of place. Additionally, to create a true ecotourism destination city, the people of St. Marys want streets that reflect a commitment to ecological sensitivity and address the growing threat of sea level rise. The Osborne Streetscaping Plan takes these desires into account with the following improvements:

- ▶ Osborne Street's historic medians have been extended for four blocks to the St. Marys Railroad.
- ▶ New medians serve as bioswales capable of treating and detaining excess stormwater runoff.
- ▶ Medians have been planted with graceful live oaks and native grasses, further treating runoff while beautifying this important gateway.
- ▶ On-street parking areas and crosswalks have been repaved with permeable brick pavers, calming traffic and making pedestrian activity safer while reducing stormwater runoff.
- ▶ Osborne Street's driving lanes have been minimized. Sharrows have been introduced to calm traffic and create safe streets for cyclists, motorists, and other users.





THIS PARK  
IS A MEMORIAL  
TO CAPTAIN  
EMERIL JOHNSON  
BORN 1803 DIED 1871



# osborne streetscape improvements plan









# osborne & church streets improvements

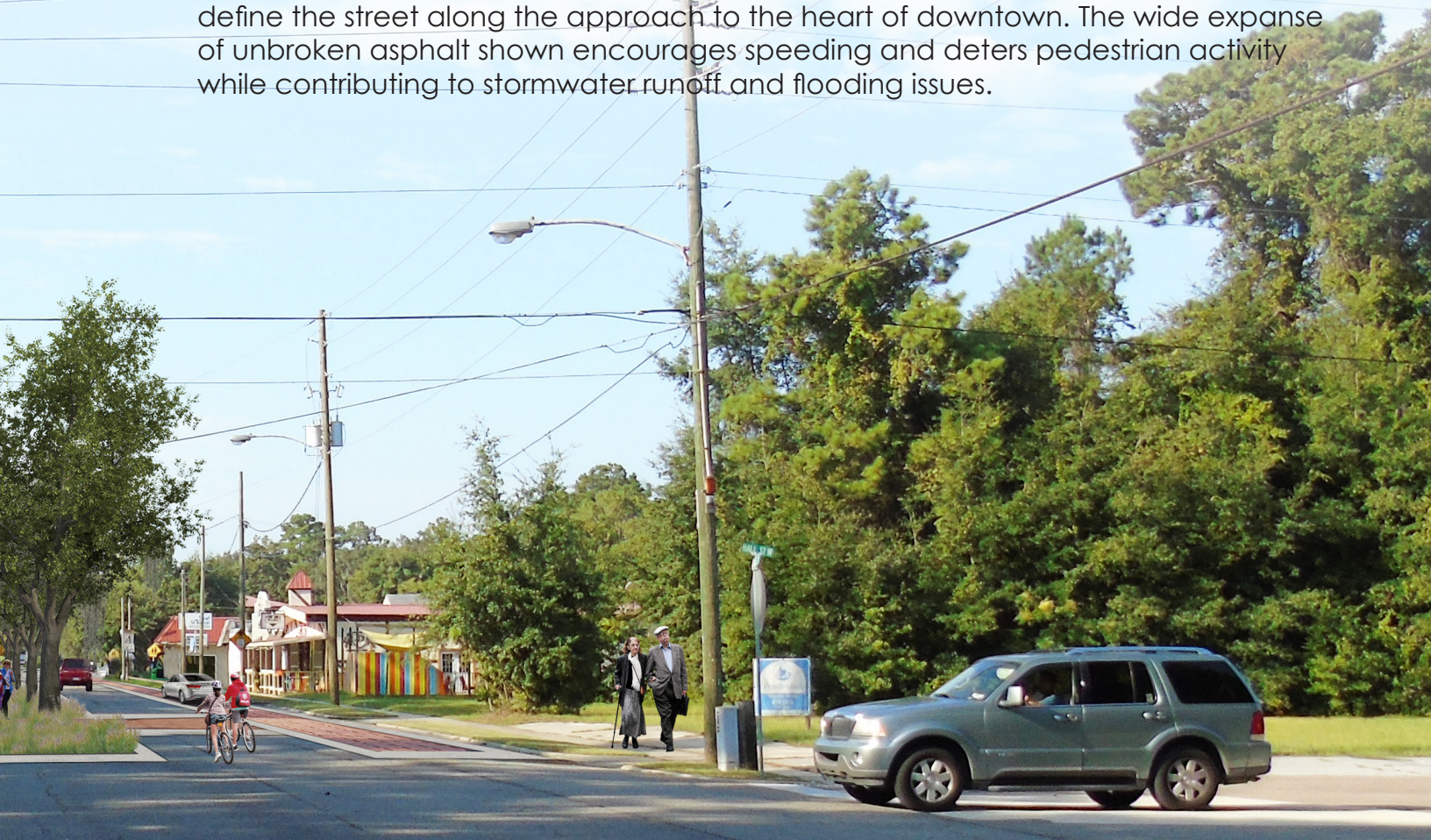


**AFTER:** This illustrative rendering shows the difference investing in streetscaping could make for this portion of downtown. The historic medians that create a unique sense of place on the southern end of Osborne Street have been extended and reimagined as landscaped bioswales. While providing new spaces for graceful live oaks and creating safe crossings for pedestrians, the bioswale median concept shown also treats and detains stormwater runoff and addresses nuisance flooding issues. To create a cohesive look for downtown St. Marys





**BEFORE:** The before image shows Osborne Street looking south toward St. Marys Elementary. This stretch of Osborne Street lacks the historic medians that shade and define the street along the approach to the heart of downtown. The wide expanse of unbroken asphalt shown encourages speeding and deters pedestrian activity while contributing to stormwater runoff and flooding issues.



and provide safe, defined crossings for pedestrians, the attractive brick crosswalks seen along St. Marys Street have been applied to this stretch of Osborne Street. Permeable brick pavers (examples include Pine Hall Brick's StormPave® or RainPave®) have been installed for crosswalks and on-street parking areas to further address stormwater runoff and flooding. Angled on-street parking has been replaced with parallel parking to provide space for the median and other improvements.



# osborne & ashley streets improvements

BEFORE



**SOUTH, BEFORE:** This view looking south at the intersection of Osborne and Ashley streets shows the wide, unbroken asphalt of Osborne Street in an area with limited pedestrian accommodations.

AFTER



**SOUTH, AFTER:** This rendering shows the same view with the installation of a vegetated bioswale median, handsome live oaks, and permeable brick on-street parking and crosswalks. Introducing permeable brick paving for crosswalks helps to announce the presence of pedestrians to drivers, while calming traffic and addressing issues of stormwater runoff.



**BEFORE:** Looking north at the intersection of Osborne and Ashley streets in front of Greater Trinity United Methodist Church, this photo illustrates Osborne Street's lack of material variation.



**NORTH, AFTER:** Shrinking the parallel parking and driving lanes creates the opportunity to extend Osborne Street's medians along this block. The medians shown in the above rendering have been planted with live oaks and ornamental grasses to treat and contain stormwater runoff. Permeable brick pavers create attractive, environmentally sensitive on-street parking areas.



# osborne & gallop streets improvements

**BEFORE:** This view just south of the railroad tracks is the unofficial entry to downtown St. Marys. Thousands of tourists travel down Osborne Street to visit the natural beauty of Cumberland Island. Currently, this stretch of downtown lacks a sense of entry and welcoming. With no businesses or development on the left side of the photo, the on-street parallel parking is currently underutilized.

**AFTER:** This view of the same block shows the on-street parallel parking converted to a driving lane. Space formerly devoted to underutilized on-street parking now accommodates a vegetated bioswale median. Once again, these medians help to divide traffic, treat stormwater runoff, and create a graceful sense of arrival. Permeable brick paving has been installed in parking areas and crosswalks to help infiltrate stormwater while creating a cohesive and attractive materials palette for downtown St. Marys.











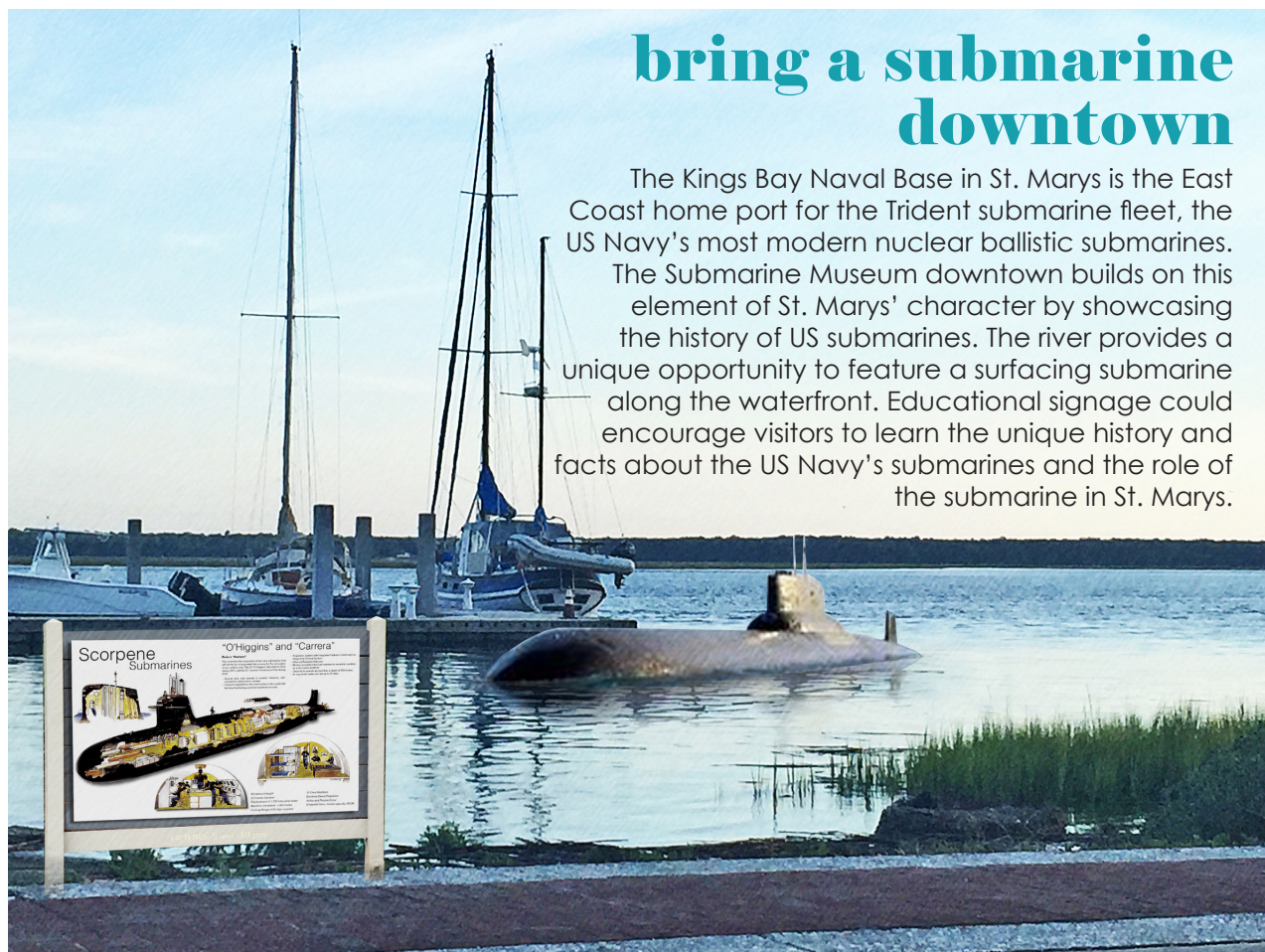
# st. marys work program 4 economic development

- 1. CAPITALIZE ON NPS DESIGNATION:** Currently, much of the downtown is included in the St. Marys Historic District. National Registry status grants access to certain tax benefits for rehabilitation and renovation of historic properties downtown. To leverage these benefits and promote them to downtown property owners, the city could consider retaining a tax credit consultant through the National Park Service. A dedicated point person could assist downtown property owners with the appropriate paperwork and help guide interested investors through the process. The same employee could work to promote the National Park Service's existing 20% Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit available to downtown property owners.
- 2. BRING A SUBMARINE DOWNTOWN:** Working with the Navy, the city could consider bringing a decommissioned submarine or vessel downtown. Many cities have requested decommissioned vessels to create tourist attractions in struggling downtowns. Like St. Marys, Bremerton, Washington, has a major naval presence as the Pacific home of the Trident fleet of submarines. Following a long decline, in 1992 Bremerton acquired the *U.S.S. Turner Joy*, a decommissioned naval destroyer, to use as a draw for tourism. That same year, Bremerton began the process of revitalizing its downtown community by building a waterfront boardwalk and marina complex. Since 1992, the city has attracted an array of new development along a waterfront park similar to St Marys'. The city now boasts an active downtown thanks in part to investments like the *Turner Joy*.
- 3. RECRUIT DOWNTOWN RESTAURANTS:** The public overwhelmingly desires more restaurants, fine dining options, and convenient places for tourists to get lunch and coffee downtown. The community also would like options that stay open later in the evening and spots that might be attractive to Navy personnel from Kings Bay. An incentives package to recruit new businesses must be developed to attract the dining options the community desires. In addition, businesses



in other similarly sized towns could be identified and recruited. Statesboro has been very successful in bringing new restaurants downtown. Incentives that could be adopted by St. Marys include waiving food and beverage license fees for up to three years. The city should get creative with targeted incentives. Powder Springs, for instance, provides up to 50% matching funds, not to exceed \$10,000, for the improvement of the interior space and exterior façades of new restaurants downtown. The city also offers a \$3,000 grant for façade renovations and \$7,000 for interior renovations.

- 4. DOWNTOWN LIVING OPTIONS:** Throughout the public input process, citizens expressed a desire for more people downtown and places that attract younger generations. St. Marys could activate downtown and attract younger residents by incentivizing downtown living options. According to a recent survey by the Nielsen Company, 62% of young professionals prefer mixed-use, walkable downtown living. Downtowns across the nation are also seeing a boom in empty nesters, often higher income retirees and middle-aged couples looking to downsize while adopting a more walkable lifestyle close to cultural amenities, restaurants, and retail options. In addition to providing a 24-hour consumer base for downtown businesses, more people living downtown





also means more eyes on the street, a boost to public safety with no capital outlay. To incentivize downtown infill and residential development, the city should consider rezoning to allow for mixed-use development downtown. City leaders could work with the Historic Preservation Commission to develop pre-approved residential infill design plans. Additional incentives might include sprinkler and wiring grants to encourage downtown upper-story living.

# downtown living options

**BEFORE:** (right) This historic building on St. Marys Street across from Lang's Marina is currently vacant and in need of repair. The building's prime waterfront location gives the property great potential for residential and commercial redevelopment.



**AFTER:** The rendering shows the building's original double deck porches restored. Retail stores occupy the bottom level, while apartments provide waterfront loft living on the second story. A sidewalk has been added to conform to proposed streetscaping improvements. Additional landscaping around the building further beautifies this once neglected property.



- 5. DOWNTOWN HOTEL SUCCESSION PLAN:** While development of the Gateway property remains a Downtown Development Authority goal, other options could be explored. Currently the Riverview Hotel hosts most guests coming downtown for the Cumberland Ferry. In addition to serving tourists, the Riverview is a community institution and a major anchor of downtown activity. To ensure that lodging remains downtown long into the future, the city or Downtown Development Authority could work with hotel management to develop a long-term succession plan. While the hotel would need some upgrades like building a small pool and conducting room renovations to attract small groups and conventions, any future renovations should retain the unique character of the Riverview—an authentic St. Marys experience. The city could also acquire or lease one of the vacant buildings downtown to create a convention center. Using existing buildings downtown will help to bring more activity to the area while preserving St. Marys' historic character and sense of place, a major community priority.
- 6. PROCEDURE REVIEW:** Ensuring a business-friendly climate that welcomes new entrepreneurs and business development is a popular sentiment throughout the community. Regulatory headaches and other hurdles can create burdens for citizens who want to invest in downtown. Prior to adopting new incentives for desired businesses, the city should undergo a thorough procedure review from the perspective of a potential business owner. Questions to keep in mind during this review include but are not limited to the following: Are any requirements duplicated? Are signage and other requirements too onerous? How can we expedite the process of forming a business? Looking at local restrictions from a new perspective or even a second-party review could go a long way toward enticing new commercial activity and jobs downtown.
- 7. TAX INCENTIVES:** Throughout the public input process, St. Marys citizens strongly expressed the desire for an attractive business climate and increased support for local businesses. Developing a targeted incentives package could help support existing businesses and lure complementary businesses downtown. St. Marys officials should consider working with the Coastal Regional Commission to develop a streamlined tax incentive application.
- 8. INCUBATOR SPACE:** Vacant buildings and the desire for new businesses were often mentioned as important issues in downtown St. Marys. To address both of these priorities, the Downtown Development Authority could create an incubator space. Incubators help downtowns in several ways. They fill empty commercial space, making people perceive downtown as active and thriving. Additionally, if successful, businesses eventually move out of the incubator space and take on the full responsibilities of a small business in an available downtown location. By working with students from St. Marys Elementary and Camden County High School, a business incubator space could even be targeted toward youth empowerment and nurturing an entrepreneurial spirit in the next generation.





# re-imagining the riverview hotel

A LOCAL LANDMARK

Since 1916, the Riverview Hotel has been an anchor and hub of life in downtown St. Marys. The Riverview remains an important gathering space for Cumberland visitors and the larger community. While retaining the character of this community asset, the Riverview is ideally located for future conferences and special events that would attract new visitors to St. Marys. The rendered plan view shows proposed exterior improvements and the modern upgrades necessary to attract small conventions to the hotel.



# RIVERVIEW HOTEL: PLAN VIEW





# re-imagining the riverview hotel

A LOCAL LANDMARK

## IMPROVEMENTS INCLUDE:

- ▶ A reconfigured brick patio that could serve as a flexible multipurpose space. Tents could be installed here if needed for events
- ▶ A small swimming pool with a waterwall fountain
- ▶ A covered verandah with tables and chairs. That could be converted into an outdoor stage
- ▶ A pool deck with lounge chairs
- ▶ A new entry and windows to the adjacent Submarine Museum building, which could be used as event space in the future
- ▶ A screened area to hide unsightly trash receptacles and back-of-house items
- ▶ A new restroom located in the historic white brick structure
- ▶ Attractive cast iron gates that enclose the property for privacy but allow for vehicle access when necessary
- ▶ An adjacent empty lot that becomes a pick-up and drop-off service hub where large trash dumpsters will be stored off-site and shared with surrounding businesses. The plan features a service exit to the lot









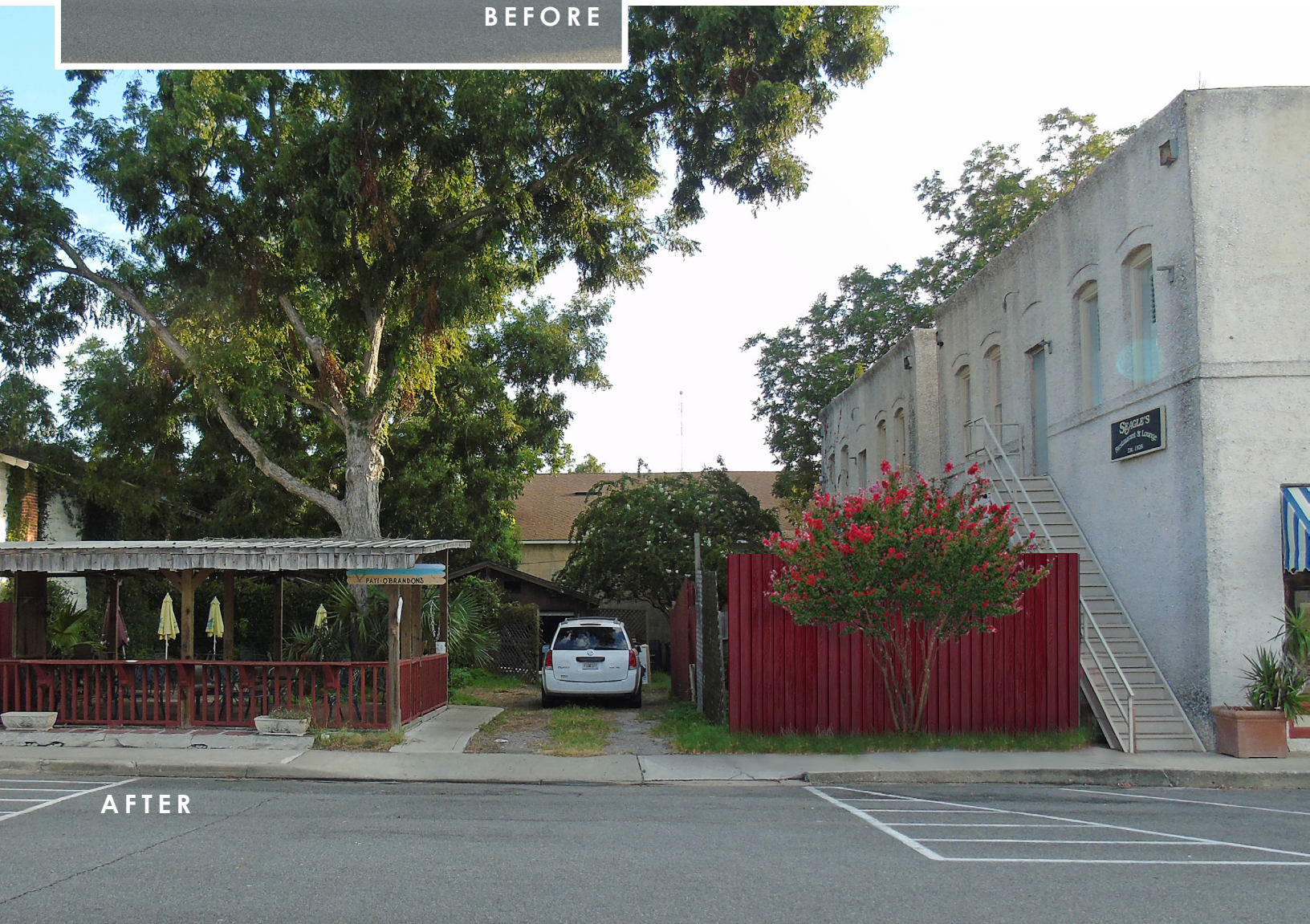
# reimagining the riverview hotel

A LOCAL LANDMARK

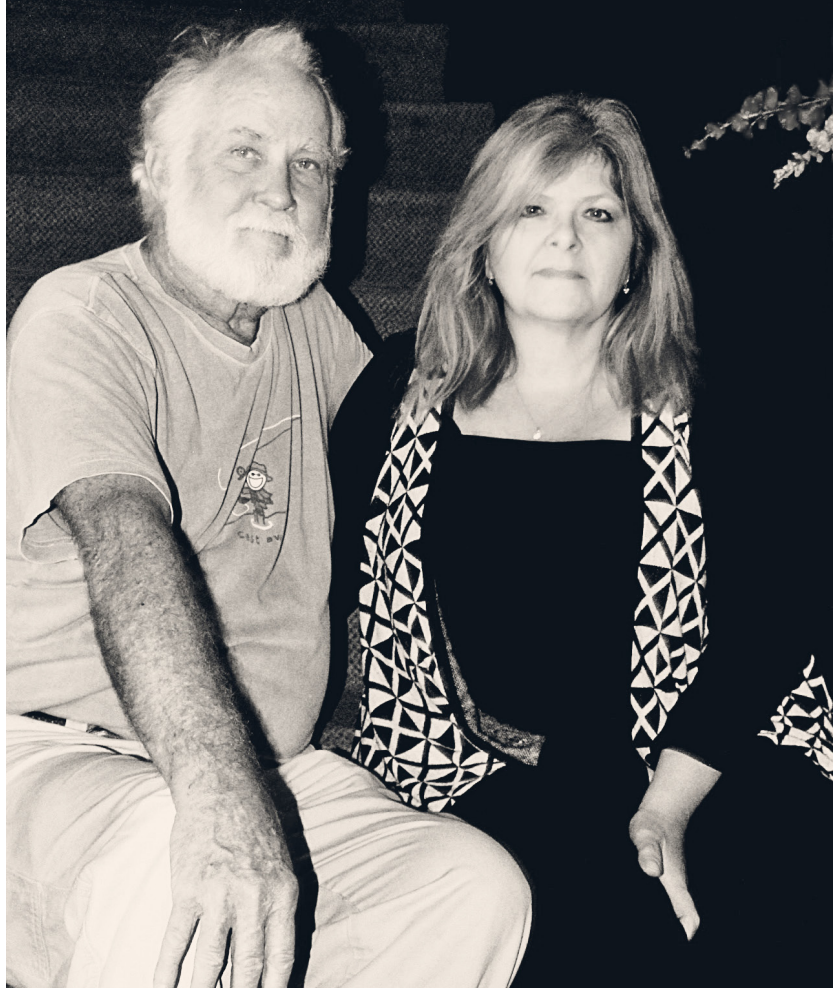
## an easy fix

**BEFORE:** The photograph shows a row of newspaper and advertisement stands located on the Riverview Hotel property fronting St. Marys Street.

**AFTER:** The rendering below shows how it would look if the newspaper and advertisement stands were removed. Visual clutter is decreased and the property is instantly more attractive.







## jerry & gaila brandon

OWNERS, RIVERVIEW HOTEL

A unique destination unlike any other, the Riverview Hotel embodies the character and easy coastal atmosphere of the city. Under the decades of dedicated preservation and day-to-day management of the inn by Jerry and Gaila Brandon, the Riverview remains a hospitable accommodation for tourists from across the world and, as home to Seagle's Cafe & Saloon, a hub for the entire community. To visit the Riverview is to glimpse the authentic character of St. Marys, a place where everybody knows your name and Cindy—always quick with a joke—never fails to remember your drink. Visiting Seagle's and the Riverview makes any visitor feel like a part of the larger community, a rare commodity in this day and age. Rather than diminish the look and atmosphere that make the Riverview so special, any recommendations included for the Riverview are intended to preserve and build on this one-of-a-kind resource's existing character. These improvements will help to ensure that the inn's critical role as a hub for the community and tourists alike continues well into the Riverview's next century. We would like to thank Jerry, Gaila, Cindy, and all of our friends at the Riverview Inn for their limitless hospitality and immense devotion to the city of St. Marys.





- 9. CREATE UPPER-STORY HOUSING INCENTIVES:** The community believes downtown needs more living options to create a thriving, active feel. St. Marys could take steps to promote and incentivize upper-story housing and lofts downtown as a secondary income stream for property owners. For instance, cities like Dahlonega have had success implementing wiring and fire safety grants to encourage upper-story housing redevelopment. Additionally, when marketing the city's downtown housing, it would be the Downtown Development Authority's responsibility to list upper-story housing options on its website, in addition to developing a waiting list to promote the option. To make people aware of the downtown living option, the Downtown Development Authority could partner with clubs within the community to host an "Upstairs Downtown Tour" of current apartments or staged prospective spaces.
- 10. SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT:** The community widely supports assisting downtown small business owners. Small local businesses are critical to St. Marys' economic health and create a reason for the community to come downtown. The city should consider taking advantage of existing resources to ensure the health of downtown businesses. The University of Georgia-Small Business Development Center's (SBDC) mission is to provide the tools, training, and resources needed to help small businesses grow and succeed. Whether this means assisting with access to capital, developing a business plan, conducting business training, providing marketing support, or satisfying other needs, the SBDC can help ensure local businesses are sustainable enterprises. Bringing SBDC representatives to talk with downtown business owners could boost the city's economic health and work to promote a culture of entrepreneurship downtown.
- 11. TEMPORARY SIGNAGE:** Signage restrictions in St. Marys' historic downtown area were a major complaint among local small business owners. The city and Historic Preservation Commission must work together to clarify existing signage ordinances for downtown property owners. Temporary signage should be encouraged and, like the Cottle & Gunn's winged armoire, reflect downtown's quirky and creative spirit. The city could consider incentivizing signage like banners, kites, and flags to create a touch of whimsy downtown and elevate the city's coastal ambiance.
- 12. LOT SIZE REDUCTION FOR INFILL:** Voices throughout the community expressed the idea that downtown needs more people, more diverse entertainment options, and more activity. More people living and working downtown helps provide the critical mass needed for new dining and retail opportunities downtown. Current minimum lot sizes in the central business district are too large to permit significant infill development. Reducing the 6,000 square foot minimum lot size by half—copying the minimum lot size of commercial buildings downtown—would substantially increase the potential for downtown infill development.
- 13. LOCAL BUSINESSES IN HOMES:** To attract the jobs and economic activity vital for a thriving downtown, the St. Marys community would like to see fewer restrictions









on aspiring entrepreneurs. Many cities allow homeowners to maintain offices in their homes, saving money for business owners and keeping economic activity downtown. Changing St. Marys' zoning to allow for home galleries and small offices would help incentivize new businesses in the downtown area and create a friendly climate for local entrepreneurs.

**14. WATERFRONT BREWERY:** Creating more fun, local destinations and entertainment downtown is an important priority for St. Marys citizens. Repeatedly in public input sessions and in survey responses, community members expressed the desire for more places to unwind downtown. Many voices suggested a downtown microbrewery might be a hit with both locals and tourists. Following the trend toward more local food and beverages, a waterfront brewery could help retain tourist dollars by catering to environmentally conscious Cumberland Island visitors. Many cities have attracted breweries to downtown areas by amending zoning laws or establishing revolving loan funds for new businesses. Similar targeted incentives could help make a microbrewery feasible downtown.

**15. BLIGHT TAX:** Property maintenance is commonly seen as a roadblock to the success of downtown. St. Marys should consider stricter code enforcement and going further than basic standards of maintenance. St. Marys could look to similar cities for model blight ordinances. The city of Perry has a strong anti-blight ordinance that includes an ad valorem tax increase on blighted properties (Sec. 5-73). Perry's ordinance sets out the process for clearly identifying blighted properties (Sec. 5-74) and standards of exterior structural maintenance (Sec. 5-33). St. Marys should adopt Perry's tough stance on issues of blight and property maintenance.





**16. MARINA IMPROVEMENTS:** While St. Marys' marina is seen as an asset to downtown, the community demands that the facility be updated and better maintained. The city should consider partnering with private property owners to improve and expand the city's existing marina. As a governmental agency, the City of St. Marys is eligible to apply for the US Fish & Wildlife Service's Boating Infrastructure Grant Program (BIG). Cities throughout the country have partnered with private marina owners to improve boating facilities with BIG funding. The BIG Program includes two funding tiers, Tier One (noncompetitive) and Tier Two (nationally competitive). Both tiers require 25% local matching funds, with the federal share not to exceed 75% of total costs. Under Tier One, each state may receive funding for eligible projects up to \$200,000 annually. In 2014, 27 states requested \$2,485,306 in Tier One grants, with all recommended for funding. No grant proposals from Georgia were submitted.

If the community determines that an entirely new marina is required, the city could consider applying for Tier Two funding. Tier Two funds are made available through a nationally competitive process. Tier Two proposals are typically large-scale projects with a maximum federal award of \$1.5 million. Proposals received are reviewed, evaluated, and ranked by a national panel, with the final decision for funding made by the director of the US Fish & Wildlife Service. In 2014, 15 states requested \$16,841,448 in federal funding for 24 eligible projects. Sixteen of these projects were recommended for funding, including a \$1.5 million grant for the development of a new 42-slip marina on Hutchinson Island in Savannah.





. MARYS STRATEGIC VISION & PLAN

# st. marys action plan





**St. Marys' action plan** guides St. Marys' mayor, council, and local officials by clarifying what resources are required to reach the community's vision for downtown. Through a series of action items, the action plan communicates the "when, what, and who" critical to community implementation. These steps include when action items need to be completed, what resources are required, and who is responsible for implementation. A well-developed action plan serves as a blueprint for the project managers, St. Marys' City Manager and Main Street Coordinator, to break down a sweeping community vision into smaller, more manageable action items. These action items should meet the criteria for SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-based) goals. By following the SMART process, St. Marys' future vision becomes a reality through practical and achievable steps.



## ORGANIZATION ACTION ITEMS



# revise food truck ordinance

**LEAD:** JEFFREY ADAMS, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

**PARTNERS:** CRAIG ROOT

**TIMELINE:** IMMEDIATELY–FEBRUARY 2016

**FUNDING:** N/A

**OBSTACLES:** COUNCIL ACTION REQUIRED

**STEPS:**

1. JEFF INITIATED ORDINANCE REWRITE
2. GET DRAFT ORDINANCE APPROVAL FROM CITY AUTHORITY
3. GET SIGN OFF OF ENDORSEMENT FROM DDA
4. PUT BEFORE MAYOR AND COUNCIL FOR APPROVAL





## hire event planner/city/cvb

**LEAD:** DONNA ASBELL, CVB BOARD

**PARTNERS:** ANGELA WIGGER, TOURISM DIRECTOR, CVB

**TIMELINE:** IMMEDIATELY–DECEMBER 2016

**FUNDING:** CITY CONTRACTOR/EMPLOYEE FINANCING

**OBSTACLES:** N/A

**STEPS:**

1. BUDGET MEETING WITH CITY COUNCIL
2. JOB DESCRIPTION FOR EVENT PLANNER
3. ESTABLISH CALENDAR FOR 2016
4. START PLANNING EVENTS PRIOR TO EVENT PLANNER HIRING SO HE/SHE STARTS WITH A PLAN



## PROMOTION ACTION ITEMS



### bike event: three rivers ride

**LEAD:** TERRY LANDRETH, DDA BOARD; OWNER, CAMDEN BICYCLE CENTER

**PARTNERS:** CAMDEN CYCLING CLUB AND FELLOWSHIP OF CHRISTIAN ATHLETES (FCA)

**TIMELINE:** FEBRUARY 2016—OCTOBER 2016

**FUNDING:** ENTRANCE FEES AND SPONSORSHIPS

**OBSTACLES:** SAFETY ISSUES: NO DEFINED BIKE LANES DOWNTOWN, NO BUFFERED BIKE LANES

**STEPS:**

1. WANT TO GROW FROM 200 PARTICIPANTS TO 500
2. CONTINUE COMMUNICATION AND CONNECTION WITH EXISTING PARTICIPANTS
3. RECRUIT VOLUNTEERS FOR EVENT
4. FUNDRAISING, INCLUDING SPONSORS FOR EVENT
5. BEGIN MARKETING FOR EVENT
6. CITY PROCESS FOR REQUIRED PERMITS
7. BEGIN PLANNING MEETINGS





## mounted/streaming tourist camera

**LEAD:** MOUNTED/STREAMING TOURIST CAMERA

**DESCRIPTION:** CAMERA ON STREETLIGHT STREAMING TO TOURISTS' PHONES—INSTANT POSTCARD BACKGROUND TO ENHANCE TOURISM—SUNSET, RIVERVIEW, OR ORANGE HALL OPTIONS

**LEAD:** KAY WESTBERRY, HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

**PARTNERS:** PEGGY TRADER, LOCAL RESIDENT

**TIMELINE:** NOW—DECEMBER 2016

**OBSTACLES:** COST

**FUNDING:** UNKNOWN

**STEPS:**

1. CHECK ON EXPENSE
2. CONTACT TECH EXPERT
3. ASK FOR FUNDING
4. WORK WITH WELCOME CENTER TO MONITOR AND TRANSMIT PHOTOS TO COMPUTERS OR PHONES OF VISITORS



## PROMOTION ACTION ITEMS



### kids photo op

**DESCRIPTION:** A SHRIMP, TURTLE, OR FISH-SHAPED WITH CUTOUT FOR FACES

**LEAD:** PEGGY TRADER, LOCAL RESIDENT

**PARTNERS:** KAY WESTBERRY, HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

**TIMELINE:** FEBRUARY 2016

**FUNDING:** MINIMAL – MAYBE PLYWOOD AND PAINT

**OBSTACLES:** FINDING A VOLUNTEER CARPENTER FOR CUTOUT

**STEPS:**

1. OBTAIN HPC APPROVAL
2. LOCATE SITE
3. CREATE SHAPE WITH CUTOUT AND PAINT IT





## splash park

**LEAD:** LINDA WILLIAMS, ST. MARYS CITY COUNCIL

**PARTNERS:** KAY WESTBERRY, HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

**TIMELINE:** NOW—JULY 2017

**FUNDING:** TAD/CITY FUNDING

**OBSTACLES:** COST AND SPACE

**STEPS:**

1. START RESEARCHING SPLASH PARKS
2. DETERMINE PROPOSED LOCATION
3. VISIT EFFECTIVE, ATTRACTIVE SPLASH PARKS
4. GET ENGINEERING DONE
5. BEGIN CONSTRUCTION



## PROMOTION ACTION ITEMS



# community prom event at the waterfront park

**LEAD:** PEGGY TRADER, LOCAL RESIDENT

**PARTNERS:** JUST PERFECT EVENT PLANNERS

**TIMELINE:** DECEMBER 2015

**FUNDING:** NONE; EVENTUAL FUNDING FROM CITY/PRIVATE INVESTORS

**OBSTACLES:** PARK FEES OR RESTRICTIONS FOR EVENT

**STEPS:**

1. SHARED THE VISIONING SLIDESHOW WITH THE TWO OWNERS OF JUST PERFECT.
2. DISCUSSED THE POSSIBILITIES OF NOT ONLY SHOTS AND "SCENE-SCAPING" FOR PROM, BUT OFFERING UNIQUE DINING OPTIONS FOR THE EVENT IN THE PARK.
3. MEET AGAIN TO DISCUSS ISSUES/IDEAS MOVE FORWARD WHEN POSSIBLE.





## aquatic center trail at st. marys civic park

**LEAD:** TERRY LANDRETH, DDA BOARD; OWNER, CAMDEN BICYCLE CENTER

**PARTNERS:** PSA AND CAMDEN CYCLING CLUB

**TIMELINE:** DECEMBER 2015—JULY 2016

**FUNDING:** PSA FUNDING

**OBSTACLES:** CONSTRUCTION ISSUES, WETLANDS, PROMOTION OF THE TRAIL, CONNECTIVITY

**STEPS:**

1. COMPLETE CONSTRUCTION
2. PLACE SIGNAGE TO THE TRAIL
3. PROMOTE THE TRAIL TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC
4. ENSURE CONNECTIONS TO OTHER TRAILS
5. USE THE TRAIL IN BIKE AND RUN EVENTS
6. POTENTIAL TRACK USAGE OF THE TRAIL



## DESIGN ACTION ITEMS



### st. marys tabby trail

**LEAD:** TERRY LANDRETH, DDA BOARD; OWNER, CAMDEN BICYCLE CENTER

**PARTNERS:** PSA AND THE CITY OF ST. MARYS

**TIMELINE:** 24 MONTHS

**FUNDING:** CITY, GRANTS, FUNDRAISING, STATE OPPORTUNITIES, PATH FOUNDATION

**OBSTACLES:** HIGH COST, SIGNAGE, HISTORIC PRESERVATION, CONNECTIVITY ISSUES

**STEPS:**

1. COMPLETE RTP GRANT FOR COMFORT STATION AT TABBY RUINS
2. COMPLETE COST ESTIMATE AND DESIGN FOR TRAIL
3. COMPLETE TIGER GRANT SUBMITTAL
4. RESEARCH OTHER FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES





## turtle stencils across st. marys street

**LEAD:** KAY WESTBERRY, HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

**PARTNERS:** PEGGY TRADER, LOCAL RESIDENT; CITY OF ST. MARYS PUBLIC WORKS

**TIMELINE:** FEBRUARY—MARCH 2016

**FUNDING:** PAINT FOR STREET FROM PUBLIC WORKS

**OBSTACLES:** PUBLIC OPINION

**STEPS:**

1. INTRODUCE BEFORE HPC
2. CREATE A TURTLE STENCIL
3. WORK WITH PUBLIC WORKS TO PAINT CROSSWALKS





## osborne & st. marys streets improvements

**LEAD:** JOHN HOLMAN, CITY MANAGER

**PARTNERS:** BOBBY MARR, PUBLIC WORKS DIRECTOR; CITY OF ST. MARYS

**TIMELINE:** JANUARY 2016–JANUARY 2018

**FUNDING:** A MIX FROM GENERAL FUND, SOLID WASTE FUND, LMIG, POTENTIAL GRANTS, INCLUDING TIGER GRANT

**OBSTACLES:** PERMITTING, COSTS, ENGINEERING, AND GRANT FUNDING AVAILABILITY

**STEPS:**

1. DESIGN AND ENGINEERING
2. START PERMITTING PROCESS
3. GRANT APPLICATIONS
4. SECURE FUNDING



# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTION ITEMS



## discovery center

**DESCRIPTION:** CONVERT DECOMMISSIONED WEED STREET WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT TO A USEFUL AND PRODUCTIVE ASSET FOR THE CITY

**LEAD:** LINDA WILLIAMS, ST. MARYS CITY COUNCIL

**PARTNERS:** DAVID REILLY, ST. MARYS CITY COUNCIL

**TIMELINE:** NOW–DECEMBER 2018

**FUNDING:** WILL DEPEND ON ECONOMIC SUPPORT FROM GSU AND GRANTS APPLIED FOR. ALSO ENSURE IT WAS INCLUDED IN TAD AREA FOR POTENTIAL TAD FUNDING.

**OBSTACLES:**

1. GSU ENDORSING AND SUPPORTING THE VISION TO CONVERT DECOMMISSIONED WEED STREET WTP TO A COASTAL MARSH/MARINE LIFE LEARNING FACILITY
2. SECONDARY VISION FOR SITE IS FOR LEARNING CENTER TO CO-EXIST WITH A REVENUE-PRODUCING ENTITY SUCH AS AN OYSTER HATCHERY (THE WATER CHEMISTRY IN RIVER HAS TO SUPPORT THIS ASPECT OF VISION)
3. WANT TO ALSO INCLUDE THIS AREA AS A POINT OF INTEREST OFF OF FUTURE TABBY TRAIL, WHICH THE COSM HOPES WILL BE FUNDED BY A TIGER GRANT. AWARDING OF TIGER GRANT CAN TAKE SOME TIME FROM APPLICATION TO CONSTRUCTION, ASSUMING A WINNING APPLICATION

**STEPS:**

1. CONTINUE WORKING WITH GSU TO FACILITATE FIRMLY ESTABLISHING THE VIABILITY OF THIS VISION WITH GSU LEADERSHIP.
2. CONTINUE WORKING WITH UGA MARINE LIFE BIOLOGIST TO ESTABLISH VIABILITY OF WEED STREET WTP MARSH AND RIVER WATER TO SUPPORT AN INDUSTRY LIKE THE OYSTER HATCHERY.
3. PREPARING A RAILS TO TRAIL GRANT REQUEST AND TIGER GRANT REQUEST FOR THE TABBY TRAIL AND REST AREA ALONG THE TRAIL. THIS ACTION FORM IS SEPARATELY SUBMITTED BY TERRY LANDRETH, WITH WHOM WE ARE WORKING IN SUPPORT OF THE TABBY TRAIL



# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTION ITEMS



## workshop — google: let's put our cities on the map

**LEAD:** BECKY MYERS, ST. MARYS MAIN STREET MANAGER

**PARTNERS:** JORDAN TIPPETT, UGA SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTER (SBDC)

**TIMELINE:** DECEMBER 2015

**FUNDING:** N/A

**WHY IT MATTERS:** 97% OF PEOPLE SEARCH FOR GOODS AND SERVICES ONLINE, YET ONLY 37% OF BUSINESS OWNERS HAVE “CLAIMED” THEIR LISTING ON A SEARCH ENGINE. WITHOUT TAKING THIS STEP, SMALL BUSINESSES ARE OFTEN VIRTUALLY INVISIBLE TO POTENTIAL CUSTOMERS, ESPECIALLY IN THE IMMEDIATE GEOGRAPHIC AREA

**OBSTACLES:** GETTING THE WORD OUT TO DOWNTOWN BUSINESSES TO ENSURE PARTICIPATION

**STEPS:**

1. SCHEDULE THE TRAINING DATE, TIME, AND LOCATION
2. PUBLICIZE THE EVENT THROUGH PRESS RELEASES, SOCIAL MEDIA, EMAIL MARKETING CAMPAIGN, DIRECT CONTACT WITH DOWNTOWN BUSINESS OWNERS
3. REGISTER AND CONFIRM ATTENDEES
4. DELIVER TRAINING
5. PHOTOGRAPH TRAINING AND DEVELOP A LOCAL NEWS STORY FOR POSITIVE PRESS
6. FOLLOW UP WITH BUSINESSES IN ATTENDANCE TO OFFER ADDITIONAL TRAINING AND CONSULTING SERVICES



# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTION ITEMS



## vintage market

**LEAD:** DEB COTTLE, COTTLE & GUNN

**PARTNERS:** CHERI RICHTER, DDA

**TIMELINE:** NOW–JUNE 2016

**FUNDING:** APPROX. \$9,000 FROM SPONSORSHIPS, TICKET SALES, ENTRANCE FEES, VENDOR SPACES, REVOLVING LOAN

**OBSTACLES:** CITY PROCESS FOR EVENTS IS CONFUSING, WEATHER DAY OF THE EVENT, SHORT TIMEFRAME, LACK OF KNOWLEDGE OF TYPE OF EVENT FOR LOCALS

**STEPS:**

1. COMPLETE BUDGET
2. BEGIN FUNDRAISING
3. ANSWER CITY/STATE QUESTIONS AND REQUIREMENTS
4. RESERVE LOCATION
5. START MARKETING
6. RECRUIT VOLUNTEERS





# possible funding sources

FOR DOWNTOWN ST. MARYS





## ST. MARYS, GEORGIA

### POTENTIAL PROJECT FUNDING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS

The Carl Vinson Institute of Government has researched funding methods that potentially could be utilized to finance the various improvements desired by the community as well as certain tools that could provide economic development incentives for the City of St. Marys. The potential funding methods include pay-as-you-go financing, community improvement district financing, and various grants. Potential economic development tools include tax abatement transactions and other incentives. Each of the options is discussed below; however, please note that there are detailed criteria relating to the implementation and utilization of each of the options, including specific legal requirements. The summary below is intended solely to be an overview of the potential options.

It is important to note that certain funding sources may be dependent upon the final design of the proposed project. Additionally, each of the options described below requires some form of approval and action on the part of the local governing bodies, including the St. Marys City Council, the Camden County Board of Commissioners, and other stakeholders. ***Accordingly, the implementation of any of the options below will require the support of, and in most cases the initiation on the part of, the elected officials of the area's local governing bodies.*** Local government leaders must make the critical decisions regarding the priority of potential funding sources and other economic development tools recommended.

### POTENTIAL FUNDING METHODS

#### A. PAY-AS-YOU-GO FINANCING

**Summary:** Pay-as-you-go financing involves paying for capital projects with cash on hand. In other words, local governments pay for capital improvements by using current-year revenues rather than long-term financing. The City of St. Marys could utilize pay-as-you-go financing to fund the various proposals included in the St. Marys Renaissance Strategic Vision and Plan (RSVP). The primary consideration will be the willingness of the City of St. Marys to allocate current-year revenues to the project, rather than use those revenues to fund other projects.

**Initial Actions Required:** The following initial step is required to utilize pay-as-you-go financing for the various RSVP projects: (1) the local elected officials and staff of the City of St. Marys must agree to include RSVP projects in their respective budgets.

#### B. SPECIAL PURPOSE LOCAL-OPTION SALES TAX (SPLOST) FINANCING

**Summary:** SPLOST is an optional one percent countywide sales tax used to fund capital outlay projects proposed by a county government and participating municipalities. SPLOST proceeds may not be used for operating expenses or for maintenance of any county or municipal project; rather, the primary intent of SPLOST is to provide a funding source for specifically enumerated and approved capital projects. The tax is imposed when a county board of commissioners calls a local referendum and the



voters subsequently pass the referendum. Currently, SPLOST VII is being levied in Camden County. SPLOST VII was approved by a county-wide referendum on March 19, 2013. When passed, SPLOST VII was estimated to fund over \$600,000 in road and sidewalk improvements in the City of St. Marys, \$387,605 in drainage improvements, and \$909,254 in the improvement of city facilities, and \$9,157,715 in water and sewer projects. SPLOST VII stipulated that 29.82% of funds raised in Camden County be distributed to the City of St. Marys.

While the St. Marys RSVP and included projects were not among the specific projects on the SPLOST VII project list approved by the St. Marys City Council and the Camden County Board of Commissioners, the ballot question approved by the Camden County Board of Commissioners contains standard language providing that SPLOST VII proceeds would be used for, among other things, infrastructure improvements like a marsh walk as well as blanket improvements to roads, sidewalks, stormwater infrastructure, and more. The current SPLOST is set to expire on July 1, 2019. Elected officials from the City of St. Marys and Camden County should meet and discuss projects to include in any renewal of the SPLOST and work to incorporate RSVP projects in a list of proposed SPLOST VIII projects.

***Initial Actions Required:*** Discuss with city attorneys and others whether SPLOST funding could be used for projects included in the St. Marys RSVP. Prior to SPLOST VII's expiration in 2019, prioritize adding the RSVP projects to the list of any proposed SPLOST VIII projects and request that the St. Marys City Council and the Camden County Board of Commissioners take appropriate action, including the adoption of resolutions approving the addition of RSVP projects to the list of proposed SPLOST VIII projects.

### **C. TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES PROGRAM (TAP) FUNDING**

***Summary:*** In 2012, Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) program was created by federal law to replace the Transportation Enhancement (TE) program of the Federal Highway Administration. The Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) is administered in Georgia by the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT). The program was established as a means to provide funding for projects defined as transportation alternatives. These alternatives include on- and off-road pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, safe routes to school projects, rail-trails, recreational trails, community improvement activities, and environmental mitigation. Community improvement activities eligible for TAP funding include, but are not limited to: inventory and removal of outdoor advertising, historic preservation and rehabilitation of historic transportation facilities, streetscaping projects, transportation landscaping projects, and more. Environmental mitigation activity includes stormwater management and control, water pollution prevention or abatement, and more. Federal funds are available under the TAP program to pay for up to 80% of the total project cost (subject to the Sliding Scale). Prospective projects within St. Marys linking downtown to Kings Bay Naval Base and other federal lands may be eligible to use federal agency funds, or the Federal Lands Transportation Program as match for applicable projects. Otherwise, a local match, in the form of cash, in-kind services, or donated services, materials, or real property, from a local sponsor of least 20% of the total project cost is required. Funds may be awarded for use in any or all of the three project phases of construction, planning, and design, and are made available to the project on a cost reimbursable basis.

***Initial Actions Required:*** Contact Goeriga's TAP Coordinator Jeanne Kerney at the Georgia Department of Transportation. There are detailed application and other project requirements for



obtaining TAP program funds. Historically, a Call for Projects occurs to notify municipalities to apply for TAP funding. Accordingly, the following initial steps are required to obtain TAP program funds for the RSVP or other projects: (1) secure a project sponsor, which can be the City of St. Marys, Camden County, the St. Marys Downtown Development Authority (DDA), the Camden County Joint Development Authority, or another potential partner; (2) identify a source for the local match; and 3) monitor the GDOT and Federal Highway Administration's website the announcement of the next Call for Projects.

#### **D. BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT (BID) FINANCING**

**Summary:** Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) can be created in Georgia for the purpose of funding projects and providing supplemental services within the district's boundaries. Through a BID district, property owners can elect to levy annually a millage on real and personal property within the district in order to fund special projects or services. These services extend beyond those already offered by the City of St. Marys and could include advertising, promotion, sanitation, design and rehabilitation standards, security, business recruitment, development, and any service not explicitly duplicated by the municipal government. The creation of a BID requires support of 51% of taxpayers within the proposed district or municipal taxpayers owning at least 51% of the taxable property within the district.

**Initial Actions Required:** In order to create a BID in connection with Downtown St. Marys and the recommendations of the RSVP project, a written petition must be produced by property owners advocating the establishment of the district. This petition, presented to the City of St. Marys, must be signed and acknowledged by either 51% of the taxpayers of the proposed district or Municipal taxpayers owning at least 51% of the taxable property subject to ad valorem real and personal property taxation in the district. The petition presented to the city must also include a proposed district plan, a budget, a formula for imposing assessments on the taxpayers within the district, and design and rehabilitation standards, if desired. Following the submission of a successful petition to the City of St. Marys, the city is responsible to evaluate the feasibility of the proposed district, approve or disapprove of the district plan, and hold a public hearing on the proposed district.

**For More Information:** <http://www.bidlaws.com/cms-assets/documents/131832-589827.georgia-bid-law.pdf>

<http://downtownomega.us/business-improvement-district-bid/>

### **POTENTIAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS**

#### **A. TAX ABATEMENT TRANSACTIONS**

**Summary:** Property tax abatements can be provided in Georgia using a bond-lease transaction. Under the transaction's structure, title to the property subject to the tax abatement is transferred to a development authority that is exempt from taxation. The property is then leased to a private company. Typical tax abatements last between five and 15 years, with ten years being most common. In many localities, the leasehold interest held by the private company is subject to taxation; however, there is no statutory guidance on how such leasehold interest should be valued for ad valorem tax purposes. The Georgia Supreme Court has held that each county may determine the fair market value



of the lease on a “reasonable” basis. Typically, the terms of the lease, and the methodology for valuation of the leasehold interest, are negotiated up front with the county tax assessor, and an agreement referred to as a Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) agreement is executed setting forth the valuation methodology and the amounts that the company will owe during the term of the tax abatement transaction. The development authority will issue bonds to acquire the property, and the bonds are secured by the lease payments from the private company. While actual financing can be the purpose of the bonds, generally the sole purpose of the bond-lease transaction is the tax abatement. In such cases, the private company “buys” the bonds, and thus the company is both the obligor on the bonds through the lease payments and the holder of the bonds. In most bond-lease transactions for tax abatement purposes, the documentation provides that the payments under the lease can be paper transactions in lieu of an actual transfer of funds.

**Actions Required:** Tax abatement bond transactions are typically initiated by private developers seeking the tax abatement or by development authorities seeking to provide incentives for economic development. Tax abatement does not represent a separate funding source for projects. It is important to note that tax abatement bond transactions, and in particular, the leasehold valuation methodology used by local governments, have been the subject of recent litigation at the Georgia Supreme Court that remains unresolved. Bond and local government counsel must be consulted in connection with any such transaction.

## **GRANTS AND ECONOMIC INCENTIVES**

### **A. TRANSPORTATION INVESTMENT GENERATING ECONOMIC RECOVERY (TIGER) GRANT**

**Summary:** The U.S. Department of Transportation’s (DOT) Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) discretionary grants fund capital investments in transportation infrastructure on a competitive basis. For 2016, the DOT is authorized to award up to \$500 million to road, rail, transit, and port projects. TIGER Discretionary Grants have supported innovative projects, including multimodal and multi-jurisdictional projects which are difficult to fund through traditional Federal programs. Successful TIGER projects leverage resources, encourage partnership, catalyze investment and growth, fill a critical void in the transportation system or provide a substantial benefit to the nation, region, or metropolitan area in which the project is located. Due to the naval installations at Kings Bay, St. Mary’s role as an inland port, existing rail infrastructure, and St. Marys’ proximity to Jacksonville metropolitan area, TIGER grants may prove to be an appropriate source of funding for critical multi-jurisdictional infrastructure projects.

**Actions Required:** TIGER Applicants must detail the benefits their project would deliver for five long-term outcomes: safety, economic competitiveness, state of good repair, quality of life and environmental sustainability. The DOT also evaluates projects on innovation, partnerships, project readiness, benefit cost analysis, and cost share. Any public entity, including municipalities, counties, port authorities, and more are eligible to apply for TIGER funding. While a minimum 20% local match is required to receive funding, most successful projects have historically contributed a much larger co-investment. In order to apply for a TIGER grant, While the deadlines for 2016 TIGER funding have not been announced, a pre-application is required to be submitted to be considered for funding. The following initial steps are required to obtain TIGER program funds for the RSVP or other projects: (1) secure a project sponsor, which can be the City of St. Marys, Camden County, or another public entity;



(2) identify a source for the local match; and 3) monitor the GDOT and Federal Department of Transportation's website for announcement of upcoming deadlines.

**For More Information:** <https://www.transportation.gov/tiger>

#### **B. BOATING INFRASTRUCTURE GRANT (BIG) PROGRAM:**

**Summary:** Established in 1998 through the Sportfishing and Boating Safety Act of 1998 and overseen by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the BIG grant program provides grant funds to American states and territories to construct, renovate, and maintain tie-up facilities with features for transient boaters in vessels 26 feet or more in length. Each governor designates a government agency to participate in the BIG program. In Georgia, the BIG program is administered by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The governmental agency may partner with local governments, private marinas, and others to fund eligible projects. Eligible projects include construction, renovation and maintenance of publicly- or privately-owned boating infrastructure tie-up facilities for recreational vessels 26 feet or more in length.

The BIG Program includes two funding tiers, Tier One (non-competitive) and Tier Two (nationally competitive). Both tiers require 25% local matching funds, with federal share not to exceed 75% of total costs. Under Tier One each state may receive funding for eligible projects up to \$100,000 annually. In 2014, twenty seven states requested \$2,485,306 in Tier One grants, with all recommended for funding. No grant proposals from Georgia were submitted. Tier Two funds are made available through a nationally competitive process. Tier Two proposals are typically large-scale projects with a maximum federal award of \$1.5 million. In 2014 fifteen states requested \$16,841,448 in federal funding for 24 eligible projects. Sixteen of these projects were recommended for funding, including a \$1.5 million grant for the development of a new 42-slip marina on Hutchinson Island in Savannah.

**Actions Required:** The Georgia Department of Natural resources is required to provide notice of the start of the grant cycle by the first business day in July. Following selection of an applicable project, the following initial steps are required to obtain potential BIG program funds: (1) secure a project sponsor or co-sponsor, which can be the City of St. Marys, Camden County, other public entities, local authorities and boards, a private marina, or potential developer; (2) identify a source for the local match; and 3) monitor the DNR and United States Fish and Wildlife Service's website for the announcement of upcoming deadlines.

**For More Information:** <http://wsfrprograms.fws.gov/Subpages/GrantPrograms/BIG/BIG.htm>

#### **C. GEORGIA ENVIRONMENTAL FINANCE AUTHORITY (GEFA) LOANS:**

**Summary:** Founded in 1985, the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA) facilitates programs that conserve and protect Georgia's energy, land and water resources. GEFA provides low-interest loans to municipalities for water-related and environmental infrastructure. In 2015, GEFA awarded fifteen Georgia communities financing totaling \$49,961,418 for water, water supply, sewer, solid waste, and wastewater infrastructure improvements. Through the Georgia Land Conservation Program, the Georgia Fund, Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF), Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF), and The Georgia Reservoir Fund programs, GEFA provides low-interest financing to eligible conservation and water resources projects.



**Actions Required:** For Water Resource Programs, GEFA has a single, two-part application for all regular water, sewer, and solid waste loan programs and accepts applications year-round. Competitive, deadline-specific programs may have a separate application. Eligible applicants include local municipalities, county governments, water and sewer authorities, and other entities.

All cities, counties, and non-government organizations (NGOs) are eligible to apply for the Georgia Land Conservation Program (GLCP) for the acquisition or preservation of conservation land. Eligible land conservation initiatives should advance at least one of ten conservation purposes: water quality protection, flood protection, wetlands protection, erosion reduction, protection of riparian buffers and habitats, prime agricultural and forestry lands protection, protection of cultural sites, heritage corridors, and archaeological and historic resources, scenic protection, recreation provisions, and connection of existing or planned areas contributing to land conservation outlined by the Land Conservation Act. Applications for the GLCP loan program are accepted year-round.

**For More Information:** <http://gefa.georgia.gov/>

#### **D. THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION FUND (HPF) GRANT:**

**Summary:** The Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) Grant program is appropriated annually from Congress through the National Park Service. In Georgia, the program is administered by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources' Historic Preservation Division (HPD). HPD reserves ten percent of each year's appropriation for grants to Certified Local Governments (CLGs) like St. Marys. Each CLG is classified as a Category I or a Category II CLG based on their survey standing. A Category I CLG is one that has not completed a historic resources survey or archaeological survey or updated an existing survey since 2000. While Category II CLGs are eligible for an array of survey, planning, and development projects, Category I CLGs are eligible only for grants to complete or update a historic resources or archaeological survey. The HPF grant provides up to 60% of funding (with a 40% local match) to enable cities, towns, and rural areas to undertake projects that aid in the preservation of historic properties.

**Actions Required:** As of Dec. 2, 2015, applications are currently being accepted for Federal Fiscal Year 2016. The following initial steps are required to obtain potential Historic Preservation Fund grants: (1) secure a project sponsor or co-sponsor; (2) identify a source for local match funding; (3) contact Carole Moore, tax incentives and grants coordinator for the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Historic Preservation Division for more information; (4) Submit an application on or before February 1, 2016.

**For More Information:** <http://georgiashpo.org/node/2265>

#### **E. GEORGIA HERITAGE GRANT PROGRAM:**

**Summary:** Since 1994, the Georgia Heritage Program has provided more than \$3 million in matching grants to local governments and nonprofit organizations for 248 historic resources, such as lighthouses, cemeteries, theaters, courthouses, jails, schools, etc. Eligible projects include both development and predevelopment projects. Development projects may include bricks and mortar activities, such as roof, window and foundation repair, or brick repointing. Predevelopment projects may include construction documents, feasibility studies, historic structure reports, or preservation



plans. Applicants eligible for funding include local governments and non-profit organizations with a minimum of 40% matching funding. All projects must meet the standards of the Secretary of the Interior, be listed or eligible for listing on the Georgia and National Register of Historic Places, and are subject to comply with preservation standards for five years.

**Actions Required:** The following initial steps are required to obtain potential Georgia Heritage Grant program funds: (1) secure a project sponsor or co-sponsor; (2) identify a source for local match funding; (3) contact Carole Moore, tax incentives and grants coordinator for the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Historic Preservation Division and check HPD's website regularly for more information.

**For More Information:** <http://georgiashpo.org/node/2266>

#### **F. USDA RURAL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT (RBDG) GRANT:**

**Summary:** The 2014 Farm Bill consolidated the Rural Business Enterprise Grant (RBEG) and the Rural Business Opportunity Grant Program (RBOG) into a single program, the Rural Business Development (RBDG) Grant. Eligible cities have a population of less than 50,000. The RBDG is a competitive grant designed to support targeted technical assistance, training, and other activities leading to the development or expansion of small and emerging private businesses in rural areas that have fewer than 50 employees and less than \$1 million in gross revenues. Maximum and minimum grant amounts are not established and matching funds aren't required. However applications with smaller requests are prioritized. Programmatic activities are separated into enterprise or opportunity type grant activities.

Enterprise-type grant funds must be used on projects to benefit small and emerging businesses in rural areas as specified in the grant application. Uses may include: Training and technical assistance, land acquisition or development, pollution control and abatement, capitalization of revolving loan funds, distance adult learning, rural transportation improvement, community economic development, technology-based economic development, feasibility studies and business plans, Leadership training, rural business incubators, long-term business strategic planning

Opportunity-type grant funding must be used for projects in rural areas as defined by the USDA. Opportunity type grant funding is limited to a maximum award of \$50,000 for unreserved funds. Opportunity-type grants can be used for: community economic development, technology-based economic development, feasibility studies and business plans, leadership and entrepreneur training, rural business incubators, and long-term business strategic planning

**Actions Required:** The following initial steps are required to obtain potential Georgia Heritage Grant program funds: (1) secure a project sponsor or co-sponsor; (2) identify a source for local match funding; (3) contact Carole Moore, tax incentives and grants coordinator for the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Historic Preservation Division and check HPD's website regularly for more information.

**For More Information:** <http://georgiashpo.org/node/2266>



#### **G. DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT REVOLVING LOAN FUND (DD RLF)**

**Summary:** Administered by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA), the purpose of the Downtown Development Revolving Loan Fund (DD RLF) is to assist cities, counties and development authorities in their efforts to revitalize and enhance downtown areas by providing below-market rate financing to fund capital projects in core historic downtown areas and adjacent historic neighborhoods where DD RLF will spur commercial redevelopment.

Eligible applicants include cities or counties with a population of 100,000 or less proposing projects in a core historic commercial area, and development authorities proposing projects in a core historic commercial area in municipalities or counties with the same population requirement. The ultimate user of funds may be a private business or a public entity such as a city or development authority.

Applicants must demonstrate that they have a viable downtown development project and clearly identify the proposed uses of the loan proceeds. Once approved, funds may be used for such activities as real estate acquisition, development, or redevelopment; new construction; rehabilitation of public and private infrastructure and facilities; purchase of equipment and other assets (on a limited basis).

The maximum loan is \$250,000 per project. Applications will be accepted throughout the year and as loan funds are available to the DCA.

**Actions Required:** As of Dec. 2, 2015, applications are currently being accepted for Federal Fiscal Year 2016. The following initial steps are required to obtain potential Historic Preservation Fund grants: (1) secure a project sponsor or co-sponsor; (2) identify a source for local match funding; (3) contact Kimberly Carter, DD RLF Program Manager; (4) Submit an application on or before February 1, 2016.

**For More Information:** <http://www.dca.state.ga.us/economic/financing/programs/ddrlf.asp>

#### **H. GEORGIA CITIES FOUNDATION (GCF) REVOLVING LOAN FUND**

**Summary:** Administered by the Georgia Cities Foundation (GCF) and the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA), Georgia Cities Foundation Revolving Loan Fund is a low-interest loan to encourage downtown revitalization by funding such activities as land and building acquisition and rehabilitation, infill construction of downtown buildings, greenspace construction, and park projects. The Georgia Cities Foundation (GCF) welcomes applications from downtown development authorities (DDAs) in cities across Georgia who are requesting financial assistance for downtown capital projects. The Foundation presently provides loans up to \$250,000 for eligible projects. The below market rate loan has a typical repayment period of 10 years, not to exceed 15 years. The GCF recommends a 50-40-10 financing structure for projects, with 50% of the project cost being financed through conventional lenders, 40% being financed through the revolving loan fund or other low interest loan programs, and 10% owner equity participation.

**Actions Required:** The GCF revolving loan fund is structured as a loan to a loan to a DDA or similar entity. Revolving loans may also be issued to DDAs with an intergovernmental agreement with the city, DDAs working with a private developer, or to a DDA with an intergovernmental agreement with the city, and a sublease to a private owner/developer. Following the identification of an eligible project with initial broad public and private support for downtown revitalization projects in the City, these steps are required to obtain potential GCF revolving loans: (1) secure appropriate private



funding; (2) identify a source for local match funding; (3) contact Perry Hiott, GCF Managing Director and Chris Higdon, Community Development Manager; (4) Submit an application.

**For More Information:** <http://www.georgiacitiesfoundation.org/LoanFund.aspx>

#### **I. LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND [LWCF] GRANT :**

**Summary:** Created by Congress in 1964, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) provides money to federal, state, and local governments to purchase land, water and wetlands for the benefit of all Americans. The LWCF assists local governments with acquiring conservation lands and developing outdoor recreation facilities. Administered in Georgia by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR), \$2 million in grants were available to local governments in Georgia during the 2015 LWCF grant cycle. LWCF grants require grant recipients to provide a minimum of 50% matching funds for each selected project. In-kind support including labor can be applied to the 50% community match. In 2015, a \$25,000 grant minimum and \$100,000 grant maximum was renewed.

**Actions Required:** Although the deadline for this LWCF cycle was November 30, 2015, the LWCF grant is annually renewed. City officials should monitor the Georgia Department of Natural Resources' website for announcements regarding the 2016 LWCF cycle. Following selection of an eligible project, the following initial steps are required to obtain potential LWCF program funds: (1) Secure a local government project sponsor or co-sponsor; (2) Contact Antoinette Norfleet, Grants Program Manager and monitor the DNR's website regularly for updates on the 2016 grant cycle; (3) Complete the LWCF pre-application.

**For More Information:** <http://gastateparks.org/grants/lwcf>

#### **J. RECREATIONAL TRAILS PROGRAM (RTP) GRANT :**

**Summary:** Since the program's creation in 1991, the Recreational Trails Program (RTP) has provided over \$1 billion in Federal Highway Administration funds to develop and maintain recreational trails and trail-related facilities for non-motorized and motorized recreational trail uses. The goal of the RTP program is encouraging all kinds of trail enthusiasts to work together to provide a wide variety of recreational trail opportunities. Overseen by the Federal Highway Administration and administered in Georgia by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR), over \$1.7 million in grants were available to local governments in Georgia during the 2015 RTP grant cycle. Any local government, county, and federal or state may apply for grants for the construction, maintenance, development or rehabilitation of trails facilities, and other trail-related facilities. While grant recipients pay 100% of up-front costs, eligible projects are reimbursed for up to 80% of the final cost. The RTP program generally requires a minimum grant award of \$25,000 and a maximum grant award of \$100,000.

**Actions Required:** Although the deadline for this RTP cycle has passed, funding for the RTP program is annually set aside from the federal motor fuel tax. City officials should monitor the Georgia Department of Natural Resources' website for announcements regarding the 2016 RTP cycle. Because the RTP is a reimbursement grant, the project must be installed by the grantee before funds are dispersed. Following selection, funding, and construction of an eligible project, the following initial steps are required to obtain potential RTP program funds: (1) Secure a local government project sponsor or co-sponsor; (2) Taylor Brown, Program Coordinator and monitor the DNR's website regularly for updates on the 2016 grant cycle; (3) Complete the RTP application.



**For More Information:** <http://gastateparks.org/grants/rtp>

**K. ROADSIDE ENHANCEMENT AND BEAUTIFICATION COUNCIL [REBC] GRANT PROGRAM :**

**Summary:** Formerly known as the GATEway Grant Program, the mission of the REBC Grant Program is to provide funding for roadside enhancement and beautification projects along Georgia's roadsides. The funds may be used only for landscape plant material and its installation to encourage roadside enhancement and beautification projects along state routes in Georgia. Any organization, local government, or state agency may apply for grants for landscape enhancement of the state right-of-way that involves the local community, displays the right-of-way in an attractive fashion and promotes pride in Georgia. Grant recipients are not required to provide matching funds and the maximum amount of grants is capped at \$50,000. Applicable landscape enhancements must comply with GDOT's 6755-9 policy landscape standards.

**Actions Required:** Because the REBC is a reimbursement grant, the project must be installed by the grantee before funds are dispersed. Following installation of an eligible roadside beautification project, the following initial steps are required to obtain potential REBC program funds: (1) if grantee is a private partner, secure a local government project sponsor or co-sponsor; (2) check compliance of landscape with GDOT standards; (3) check GDOT's website regularly for more information.

**For More Information:** <http://www.dot.ga.gov/IS/Funding/REBC>