

St. Marys Work Plan

The 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[®]. 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 look to address issues and opportunities in each of the components, 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. Those who live in a place know more than anyone what is needed and what is wanted. The buy-in and support of the community are essential so that we can address issues and seize opportunities. A community must, first and foremost, meet the needs of its 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 its residents that addresses the following components:

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.
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 restructuring”): 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 and 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.

These four points work together, each supporting and assisting the others, to improve the social, political, physical, and economic vitality of downtown.

Work Plan

Four Point Approach

Organization

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.

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 the Navy and honor local veterans while promoting downtown as a destination.

Restaurant Week: Voices throughout the community view restaurant and dining options as a major downtown attraction. Many also feel that downtown would benefit from greater variety in dining options. Building on existing popular festivals and events, a “foodie”-centric event that targets locals and visitors could create a popular draw downtown. Working with St. Marys Main Street and the Downtown Merchants Association, the city could develop a Restaurant Week Festival to boost activity downtown and promote the city as a dining destination. Local restaurants could set up booths, and food trucks could be encouraged to do business along the waterfront. The city could temporarily rescind the open container ordinance to allow festival goers to sip wine while sampling food from around the city.

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 important 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.

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 support creating a space for locals to purchase fresh eggs, meats, produce, or even local arts and crafts. Participants in the public input process widely support 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 to enhancing the market. Underutilized parking lots make a great space for pop-up farmers' markets and could help bring activity to overlooked downtown spaces.

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 for 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, 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.

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.

Sunset Dinner Cruise: 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.

Riverboat Tours: Many within the community envision a future St. Marys as a bustling maritime destination. Building on the city's status as the gateway to Cumberland Island, the city could work with local ferry operators to extend ferry service to Fernandina Beach. If such an extension proves successful, the city could consider constituting an MOU to allow for riverboat tours along the St. Marys River, a popular attraction in other coastal cities.

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.

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.

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.

Create a First Friday Event: First Fridays are a way to reintroduce residents to their downtown with family-friendly activities: shops hold extended hours, and 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.

Art and Wine Walk: Throughout focus group sessions, in interviews, and on the community survey, many people discussed supporting the local artists in and around St. Marys. Creating an art walk event could support the artists and boost local downtown businesses. 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 can 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 businesses 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.

Movie Night in the Park: As a site for festivals, events, concerts, and more, citizens from all over the area treasure the riverfront and waterfront park 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 DDA, 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.

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 Park Service.

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 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.

Golf Cart Rentals and 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. Particularly to 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.

Car Charging Station: Because many environmentally conscious visitors are enticed to Cumberland Island, installing an electric vehicle charging station downtown could supplement golf cart rentals while increasing the city's attraction as an ecotourism destination.

Food Truck Park: Public input results reveal 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.

Live Music at Events: The community strongly favors attracting 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.

Promotion

Marketing Downtown St Marys: Throughout the public engagement process the idea that St. Marys just needs to market itself has come up countless times. Ultimately the community would like downtown St. Marys to be a destination for the local community and for tourists. The public input

shows that St. Marys is a unique waterfront community that people both local residents and tourists don't know about. There is a demand to develop marketing plans to capture both locals and tourists.

Ecotourism Package: The 35,000–45,000 annual visitors to Cumberland Island are a major source of commerce in 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.

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.

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 community, 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 be 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 a blank slate 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 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.

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 on 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.

Snowbird Marketing: St. Mary's 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.

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.

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.

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 St. Marys' citizens.

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 historical 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.

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 historical 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 historical 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 enactors, are another possible option to capitalize on St. Marys' special heritage.

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. In historic 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.

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.

Wedding Destination: St. Marys' historic charm, waterfront location, and easy accessibility help make the city an ideal wedding destination. The city, DDA, 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 & 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.

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 its renovation and eventually generate revenue for the city.

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 DDA 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.

Outdoor Destination: The community sees the plethora of 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 assets. 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.

Yoga in the Park: Local citizens habitually coming downtown 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 near the ferry—a frequent request during public input sessions.

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.

Prom Photos and 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 ambience 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 to helping students build a relationship with downtown, which would increase activity and the long-term health of the area.

Waterfront Recycling: Several community members mentioned the lack of access to recycling bins as an issue downtown. As a community that takes pride in the city's environmentally friendly message, St. Marys should have recycling bins throughout downtown. These bins should be used to advertise the city's position as an ecotourism hub and should reflect its character and sense of place.

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.

Fun Photo Cutouts for Families: Created fun marine animal photo opportunities. St. Marys is known for rock shrimp and manatees. Create artistic stands that represents these marine animals for family photographs.

Design

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.

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 and 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. Downtown property owners could also be incentivized to plant new trees during an Arbor Day or Founder's Day event.

- **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.
- **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.
- **Parklets:** Throughout St. Marys, community members envisioned replicating the lively street experiences of cities like Charleston, Beaufort, or Fernandina. Lively 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 activities outward at sidewalk level to the width of the adjacent parking space.

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 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 street scape plan. This will create areas designed to hold water where it currently puddles in the street.
- **Make Use of Greenspaces:** Connect the bioswales and other stormwater drainage to grassed areas where water has a chance to flow across the ground before reaching the river. This increases evaporation and infiltration, reducing the volume of stormwater, and it will allow water to spread out and move across the landscape rather than collect in the streets.
- **Redirect Water from Rooftops:** Disconnect building downspouts from the street drainage. Direct the downspouts 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 provides a wide range of benefits such as providing shade and lowering temperatures, but trees also intercept rain fall on their leaves and their roots absorb a great deal of it. Street trees can significantly reduce the amount of water that may cause street flooding.
- **Use permeable paver techniques for parking areas.** This reduced the volume of water that may cause flooding by providing more storage and infiltrating more of it into the ground.
- **Protect undeveloped areas to allow space for tidal flooding flow.**

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.

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.

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.

Marsh Walk: The community loves that St. Marys is a walkable, bikeable, and golf cart-friendly city. These values help to 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.

Downtown ATM: Several community members mentioned that downtown lacks a convenient ATM. Particularly with events like the waterfront farmers market, patrons need quick and convenient access to cash. As a temporary solution, local officials could consider contacting a private company to provide temporary ATM service downtown prior to large events and festivals. In the long term, the DDA and downtown merchants could consider working with local banks to bring an ATM downtown.

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.

Economic Development

Downtown Hotel Succession Plan: While development of the Gateway property remains a DDA 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 DDA 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.

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.

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 downtown 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.

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 U.S. 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 U.S. Fish and 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.

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 set 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.

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.

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 DDA could create an incubator space. Incubators help downtowns in several ways. By filling empty commercial space, 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.

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 Dahlonaga 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 DDA'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 DDA could partner with clubs within the community to host an "Upstairs Downtown Tour" of current apartments or staged prospective spaces.

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*.

Recruit Downtown Restaurants: There is overwhelming public desire for more restaurants, fine dining options, and a convenient places for tourists to get lunch and coffee downtown. The community also desires options that stay open later in the evening and spots that might be attractive to Navy personnel from King's 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 bringing new restaurants downtown. Incentives they offer 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 renovation and \$7,000 for internal renovation.

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's 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.

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 downtown. 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.

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 members of the next generation 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.

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.

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.

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.

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