



Community Development Annual Report – CY2020

The Community Development Department is proud to present its Annual Report which covers activity within the department from January through December 2020.

Permitting Activity

Overall permitting activity in 2020 was up by ten per cent (10%) while new home permits were up by over 47% with 97 new home permits being issued by the city in 2020. This also caused a spike in overall permit valuation going up by over 54%. Permit valuation is based on the cost of construction and does not reflect the overall change in taxable value or market value for new construction which both are normally higher than permit valuation.

	2020	2019	% Change
Total Permits	330	300	10.0%
New Homes	97	66	47.0%
Permit Valuation	\$ 40,195,757.47	\$ 26,059,194.18	54.2%
Fees	\$ 232,493.29	\$ 213,788.40	8.7%

Planning Commission

The Planning Commission heard 45 cases over the course of 2020. Many of the cases were related to subdivisions and reverse subdivisions (15 cases). Ten (10) cases involved a rezoning.

Historic Preservation Commission

The Historic Preservation Commission considered thirteen (13) Certificate of Appropriateness applications in 2020.

Business Licenses

Occupational Tax Registration Certificates (more commonly referred to as Business Licenses) are issued by the Community Development Department. The tax is based on the number of full-time equivalent employees a business employs. Taxes are paid for the calendar year and payment is due at the beginning of the year with a grace period that lasts until the end of March. Because of the public health emergency, that grace period was extended to the fall of 2020 when reminder notices were sent out with the required penalty (10%) and interest (1% per month late) added.

In November 2020, the City mailed renewal notices to all active tax certificate holders. The department moved the process online in 2020 allowing those with active licenses to submit their renewal paperwork online. At the end of the process, registrants were provided with a customer satisfaction survey in order to determine what future changes should be made to the registration process. Overall satisfaction with the new process is high with the process garnering 4.56 out of 5 stars on average.

Code Compliance

Code Compliance responds to a wide variety of complaints and conducts regular drive-throughs of neighborhoods to ensure that issues are promptly resolved. In support of this mission, Code Compliance conducted over 1,300 inspections of properties. Most issues are resolved by working with property owners and tenants to address concerns.



Accomplishments

Cumberland Inlet Planned Development Ordinance Amendment

The Cumberland Inlet Planned Development Ordinance was amended to provide improved consistency with the proposed development located at the former Mill site. The ordinance amended the uses allowed and reorganized the standards for clarity.

Zoning Ordinance Amendments

The Zoning Ordinance was amended to allow recreational vehicle (RV) and boat storage in the C-2 district.

Sidewalk Café Ordinance

A permit was created to allow restaurants to have sidewalk cafés along wide sidewalks.

Food Truck Ordinance Amendments

Two amendments were passed by the City Council to provide flexibility for food trucks in the city. The first amendment added land owned by Homeowners Associations to the permitted places for food trucks. The second change allows food truck parks and expanded the zones where food trucks and mobile vendors can be set up.

CY2021 Goals

Permitting and Licensing Process Improvements (PLPI)

The department is planning to bring most applications and petitions for permits, licenses, and hearings online in 2021. Digitizing the office will provide better customer service and enhanced record keeping.

Golf Cart Ordinance Revision and Education Campaign

Golf Carts are important part of the identity of life in St. Marys. The City will revise the ordinance governing golf carts and provide an education campaign to share with residents and visitors how to safely get around town in a golf cart.

Alcohol Licensing Ordinance Revision

The current alcohol licensing ordinance does not align with state law and make administration of the ordinance difficult. The planned ordinance amendment will streamline the licensing requirements and bring the ordinance to be at least as restrictive as state law.

Zoning Ordinance Revisions

The Planning Commission will prepare and consider Zoning Ordinance amendments that modernize the ordinance and enable responsible development.

Sea Level Sensors

Through the Coastal Incentive Grant from the Coastal Resources Division of the Department of Natural Resources, the City has applied for funding to establish a Flood Warning and Environmental Sensor System for the City. This project will expand the work of Georgia Tech in Chatham County and provide important data after hurricanes and high water events.