

MARCH 5, 2018

**CALL TO ORDER**

The scheduled Council Workshop of the City of Saint Marys was called to order by Mayor Louis Radkowski on Monday, March 5, 2018 at 7:00 p.m. The meeting was held in the Council Room of City Hall, 11 LaFayette Street. Notice of this meeting was sent to Council on March 1, 2018, posted at City Hall and published in the Daily Press.

**PLEDGE TO THE FLAG****ROLL CALL**

Present: Mayor Louis Radkowski, Deputy Mayor Gregory Gebauer, Chris Pletcher, Andrew Mohny, Margie Brown, Bob Mohr, Manager Timothy Pearson, Solicitor Tom Wagner and Recording Secretary Lorrie Levenduski. Nedward Jacob was excused.

Also present: Anne Pistner Gabler, Chamber of Commerce

City Staff: Tom Nicklas, Tim Brennan and Tina Gradizzi

**VISITORS**

Visitors included: Monica Radkowski, Susan Goetz, Mr. and Mrs. Jim Smith, Jim Wolf, Cheryl Ruffner, Don Ruffner, Richard Sadley, Lance Mohny, Amy Cherry, Ben Samick and Warren Stewart.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

February 19, 2018

Motion Passed

Chris Pletcher made a motion to approve the minutes of February 19, 2018, seconded by Andrew Mohny and all were in favor.

**TOPIC FOR DISCUSSION:**

Downtown Economic  
Development

Mayor Radkowski explained tonight's workshop was to focus on Downtown Economic Development and to explore what was important to citizens and businesses. He had a presentation prepared to guide the discussion. The agenda was as follows:

Discuss overall ideas for our downtown  
Brainstorm other inputs for success  
Review examples from other communities  
Wrap up and next steps

Mayor Radkowski began by asking Council members what they believed the downtown and St. Marys to be.

Margie Brown stated she believed eating at a variety of different restaurants, recreational aspects and shopping were important along with seeing places busy with people.

Mayor Radkowski clarified seeing people having fun would inspire others to have more fun.

Councilwoman Brown also liked the idea of bringing the snowmobilers closer to the downtown thru a trail system.

Andrew Mohny stated he wanted the downtown to be walkable, livable and historic. He noted this would benefit the entire community but we need to help ourselves and the county. He believed the City already has livable buildings to work with. He also believed there was a market for those who do not want to purchase a home and would prefer to rent in the downtown area if it was provided for them.

Mayor Radkowski asked for examples of how to benefit the entire community and Andrew Mohny responded he would like to see Center Street to Bruxelles Street be walkable so

MARCH 5, 2018

that downtown businesses could work together with a connection of commerce all within a reasonable walking distance.

Mayor Radkowski stated his concern with the major pedestrian crossings from Center Street to Bruxelles Street.

Gregory Gebauer stated he wanted a vibrant downtown but believed we should focus on the whole City. He wanted to bring citizens to the downtown along with those outside into the community which benefits the stores, hotels, restaurants and gas stations. He believed the biggest frustration was parking. It needed to be user friendly and no one wants to pay a meter. He wanted the City to flourish thru development in any area of the City since that is a positive note that would increase the tax base and provide jobs.

Gregory Gebauer noted there were more businesses and restaurants downtown now than when he started on Council and believed that was a good thing.

Bob Mohr stated he would like to see the results of the traffic study which would show the flow of traffic and show how to arrange for the flow of traffic and parking. He believed that information should be considered first.

Mayor Radkowski clarified that meant seeing what PennDOT would allow the City to do first and Bob Mohr agreed.

Mayor Radkowski further clarified the City has participated in a Multi-modal study involving the City, PennDOT, North Central Regional Planning Commission, Elk County Planning Commission.

Bob Mohr commented the study would suggest large projects that would take years to implement.

Manager Pearson explained the study reviewed all traffic including; pedestrian, bike, car, truck and bus traffic. North Central wanted the study updated and hoped to get the City on PennDOT's "TIP" program. Council could then review the information and endorse one or some of the projects suggested.

Mayor Radkowski noted the study results would have significant input on how the City can move forward and Bob Mohr and the Manager agreed.

Chris Pletcher stated for the record and in honor of tonight's meeting he decided to walk to tonight's meeting. He believed the key question that Council was trying to address was what the purpose of the downtown was. Council needed to agree on the purpose since it will impact all of the other decisions they would make. For example, where to put parking spaces, how much to charge, what kind of grants the City should be pursuing and how the City should utilize the space in the downtown. He believed first and foremost the downtown was a place for community gatherings to celebrate culture and display the City's pride. The City has a rich heritage, a great history, and long standing residents. He believed the downtown is the beacon of the community. As was discussed in the "Strong Towns" presentation last year there is a difference between streets and roads. Roads were for going from point A to point B and streets were for gathering and

MARCH 5, 2018

participating in retail district. The physical structure impacts the community and a courtyard theory is the essence of the downtown. He described the original "wagon wheel" layout of the town which led to less than ideal structure but now it was necessary to figure out how to get the most out of current layout. In 2017 he was part of the Leadership Elk County (LEC) program which addressed these same issues. Their research concluded that people wanted a walkable and aesthetically pleasing area for the downtown. This led them to look at the railroad tracks and the current rocks that line them and other natural barriers that evolved over time. The group determined there was a virtuous cycle they wanted to start and take advantage of which was to hold community events that would attract residents and outside visitors to participate and could lead to an increase in retail spending, retail development, and tax base which in the end provides more funds for the City to reinvest in the downtown and the community. He believed this would attract others to come and move to the community and hoped Council could agree on the purpose of the downtown.

Ann Pistner Gabler, Managing Director of the Chamber of Commerce, stated she is a big fan of the parks and believed the proposed amphitheater would help draw people to the downtown. She also believed cooperation from the property owners within the downtown was important and they have to be able to afford to fix up their buildings. She asked if they do not fix them how do you force them to make necessary repairs? She then stated that she loves St. Marys because it is an easy place to live just the way it is. It would be wonderful if the downtown could go back the way it was when she was a child with lots of businesses and stores, but she believed it was easy to get around compared to a big city. Low crime and being able to walk to numerous places was already an asset and there were lots of jobs for those who wanted them. She believed a good job was already done and we all should feel lucky with what we have.

Gregory Gebauer stated the downtown park project is a huge first step and if it includes an amphitheater the functions at the park would draw people to the downtown.

Solicitor Wagner stated when you have been involved in recreational development one of the senses you get about St. Marys and Elk County is that we are on the cusp of significant opportunities in the area of bringing in visitors and vacationers. He believed we sometimes don't appreciate what we have here and really don't promote what we have here in a meaningful way. The discussion revolves around the German heritage and culture but it seems all that gets done is talk about it. He believed a wonderful way to promote the town is if everyone is on the same page of what they want in the downtown area. He stated the City needs a theme to attract visitors and that theme needs translated into action. "You can't make owners go along with the theme but need to encourage them or make an offer to bring them into the fold." A façade improvement program would help spruce up the downtown and provide a common theme which will show a unified streetscape. A former Pastor Father Frank had a plan of how to change the entire downtown to a Bavarian theme. He described a previous trip thru the Rails to Trails in Virginia that made he and his wife realize everything they were doing was already in St. Marys. He believed City Council should

MARCH 5, 2018

lead and the Chamber should be the "cheerleader" for the downtown improvements but first City government should "step up".

Bob Mohr stated the City already has a façade program and Solicitor Wagner responded the programs need to be funded with dollars and not nickels.

Gregory Gebauer stated he has always said you need to spend money to make money.

Margie Brown suggested partnering with the County for funding sources.

Mayor Radkowski asked for public comment from the audience.

Susan Goetz representative of the St. Marys Heritage Preservation Group described the group's previous projects to beautify the downtown with flowers, benches and trash cans and they intend to acquire additional funding to expand the areas with those items. She commented that Ridgway had a façade program and a heritage council and has a unified theme for their downtown that started thru their Main Street Program. She stated parking in our downtown during lunchtime can be scarce and traffic needs to slow down. Façade and signage should be specific to the downtown area. The downtown has a historic district that should be looked at again.

Mayor Radkowski asked Chief of Police Tom Nicklas if the City could control the speed of the downtown traffic by a reduction to less than 25 mph and Chief Nicklas responded the lowest speed is 25 mph.

Tim Brennan, Public Works Director, also responded the 15 mph is normally reserved for school or parks only.

Monica Radkowski, President of the St. Marys Heritage Preservation Group, explained the group wants to enhance what already exists and soften the corners. She believed the Diamond and City Hall is the gathering town center and first impression of our community will be made in that area. She described the importance of businesses working together and other factors that were the building blocks of a strong community. She also described a user friendly Diamond that welcomed visitors with access paths and benches. She believed if everyone worked together with a positive attitude this could all be accomplished.

Lance Mohny, taxpayer and downtown property owner, concurs with what was talked about tonight and agreed with the walkable theory for the downtown, the LEC's proposed plan for the railroad tracks and the idea of a theme for the downtown. He agreed that the Diamond and City Hall would be visitor's first impression and not a downtown park on Depot Street. He believed the owners of the already Bavarian themed historic buildings should be contacted and to work with them to restore the buildings. He suggested to not rely on tourism and also believed there was nothing to do in St. Marys. In order to attract professionals to move here there has to be something for the wives and children to do. He described the downtown in the 60's and 70's as a bustling area.

**MARCH 5, 2018**

Margie Brown believed people would come here as they traveled along Rt. 219, but it was necessary for them to come on Rt. 255 to St. Marys.

Andrew Mohny agreed and also would like to see how the City could link with the Elk Country Visitor's Center to the south.

Ben Samick, taxpayer and business owner, questioned what benefits or offers the City had for a business to come to the downtown or in St. Marys and Mayor Radkowski responded with an explanation of the numerous tax incentives/programs for businesses.

Tina Gradizzi clarified the current façade program and KOZ for industrial businesses.

Ben Samick suggested an event center would bring visitors to St. Marys.

Chris Pletcher described the benefits to Mr. Samick if his business was in the downtown.

Mr. Samick described his business and did not think it was a good fit for the downtown due to the volume of traffic he receives. He described the activities in other Cities that he attends. He stated local people and businesses need to invest in St. Marys and not other Cities.

Andrew Mohny described a smaller venue for theater and a kid zone type of entertainment in DuBois and Kane that could attract visitors year-round.

Ben Samick explained his concerns with the permits, fees and zoning rules and regulations for starting a business in St. Marys and suggested waiving some of those fees and Manager Pearson responded the intent of zoning rules and regulations was to protect the residents. If a business would want to operate outside of the recommended zoning area they would need to go before the zoning hearing board which would require additional expenses. He offered to discuss the matter further with Mr. Samick.

Mayor Radkowski reviewed the discussion and asked how to now come up with goals and objectives to move forward. He suggested gathering documentation for the process for starting a new business and Manager Pearson responded City staff was currently compiling a check list for starting a new business to help simplify the process.

Mayor Radkowski asked for suggested strategies and Margie Brown responded traffic flow around the Diamond was difficult for visitors and residents. She further stated an increase in visitors and population was needed for businesses to come into the City and to maintain the manufacturing that already exists.

Mayor Radkowski and Bob Mohr both agreed the multi modal study results would be very beneficial.

Andrew Mohny stated he believed it was time to provide people with the proper steps to start a business for those that may not know that they have a viable business to start. He

MARCH 5, 2018

explained the Chamber could assist with possibly a template and was exploring the possibility of providing funds for new businesses to assist new startups and would be looking also at fundraising for that purpose.

Mayor Radkowski stated Andrew's comments tie into the question of where do we build the public/private partnerships and make them successful. The City can only do so much and it is important for private citizens with private investments to initiate growth in the city, but the City is willing to work together.

Chris Pletcher stated community engagement was very important but believed the City could lead the way.

Jim Wolf, resident, stated marketing of what the City has to offer and a calendar of events was important and Mayor Radkowski agreed.

Chris Pletcher suggested the City be promoted thru the PA Wilds website which it is currently not listed on.

Don Ruffner from the audience also agreed with the importance of marketing.

Susan Goetz mentioned an Artisan Trail and Tina Gradizzi mentioned the scheduled Elk County Footlighters production was being held in St. Marys this year.

Bob Mohr mentioned the monthly calendar of events in the Daily Press and Amy Cherry believed it was for nonprofits.

Andrew Mohny and Ann Pistner Gabler explained the Chamber calendar of events and Facebook options.

Mayor Radkowski commented someone need to own the calendar of events and everyone needs to accept it.

Sandy Buerk, owner of St. Marys Auto Body, explained their continuing commitment to the community by sponsoring concerts, but the community needs to support these types of events. She agreed with the importance of working together.

A review of slides of a variety of other downtowns was reviewed by Council and the audience with all offering their likes and dislikes.

Warren Stewart commented previous studies were not implemented and Mayor Radkowski responded the traffic study was required to be updated with current numbers.

Margie Brown responded studies provide advice and can be used as a guide. She stated sometimes financial constraints prohibit implementing all of the recommendations or suggestions.

Lance Mohny commented the more people involved in this process the better.

Mayor Radkowski thanked everyone for their inputs.

MARCH 5, 2018

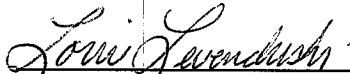
**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

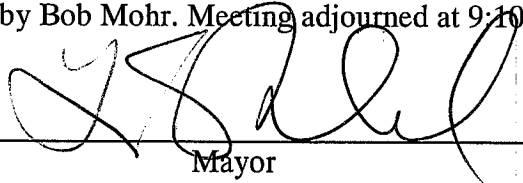
Mayor Radkowski made the following announcements:

- Council's next regular meeting will be held on Monday, March 19, 2018, at 7:00 p.m. at City Hall.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Chris Pletcher made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Bob Mohr. Meeting adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Recording Secretary

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Mayor

