

Meeting Report: June 24, 2008

St. Augustine Historic District Strategic Plan Steering Committee

1:30 PM – 3:30 PM

The St. Augustine Record, The Center Conference Room
One News Place, St. Augustine, FL 32086

Attendance:

Members present: Glen Hastings John Regan Kathy Deagan
 Michael Gannon Roy Graham Ed Poppell
 Chris Silver Tracy Upchurch Gordon Wilson
 Roy Hunt

Members absent: none

Others present: Linda Dixon Miles Albertson Dr. Susan Turner
Steve Martin Jess Childre Maureen Ortugus Bill McRea
Martin Gold B. J. Kalaidi Jill Ziebell Jock Ochiltree
Wiley Deck Michelle Barth Hal Holton Jeff Damus
Gladys Humphreys Dean Quigley Dwight Hines Greg Tranous
Maury Keiser George Gardner Peter Roman Susan Parker
Toni Wallace Gale Burnick Eric Johnson Peter Rumpel
Michelle Vijgen Leslee Keys Bill Leary Mark Schmitt

- I. **Welcome and Introductions** – Vice President Poppell welcomed attendees, and members introduced themselves.

- II. **Review Meeting Report, May 20, 2008** – The meeting report was distributed for review.

- III. **Project Status Report** -
 - a. Vice President Poppell reported that the project funding is in the final State Budget.
 - b. Linda Dixon reported that the consultant selection process is underway with submittals due on Friday, June 27th. The project has generated a good amount of interest from potential consultants.
 - c. Linda Dixon reported on the UF Technical Work Group Meeting that was held June 3rd in Gainesville, and was primarily attended by UF faculty and staff.

- d. Other Studies Updates: Glen Hastings provided a status report on the Destination Master Plan. The County is still reviewing the proposals and then will enter into the contract negotiation phase. Everyone agreed that the Strategic Plan consultants should be retained, and the consultant teams for the two projects should be brought together to clarify roles and collaboration. John Regan reported on the AIA Pedestrian Crossing Study that was presented to the City Commission on June 23, 2008.

IV. **Discuss a Vision for Historic St. Augustine** – Linda Dixon facilitated a discussion about visioning framed around three conversation questions. Every committee member was asked to respond to the questions. A detailed summary of this discussion is attached. During the conversation, the group also discussed the role of the University of Florida, physical planning, and plan coordination.

Ed Poppell commented that the University did not want to “get in the way” of local efforts. John Regan suggested that the group could develop community acceptance of performance indicators, for example, the City has reviewed the mission statement of the Spanish Quarter. Tracy Upchurch commented that the City has been struggling with these issues since the Carnegie studies in the 1930’s. Kathy Deagan noted that UF’s proper role is as a partner with the community; while Roy Graham cited UF’s potential as a catalyst for change.

A member of the audience asked Tracy Upchurch to respond to whether Flagler College could be the venue for the DSO since it has a local presence and track record. Mr. Upchurch responded that the directive from the state legislature is to UF. He said that the University and Flagler College will build on their existing partnership and institutional strengths and expertise. He noted that Flagler College is a teaching institution and does not have research graduate programs. Ed Poppell commented that the DSO is a framework for receiving gifts and is written into the law. This is the framework used at University of West Florida for managing the historic village properties in Pensacola. Leslee Keys mentioned a recent survey that found one reason students attend Flagler is because their parents are impressed with the college’s stewardship of the historic buildings. She also noted that most of their benefactors are from the Northeast Florida region.

In a brief discussion of physical planning for the historic area, members agreed that accessibility, walkability and circulation were key concerns. Members noted that the 450th Celebration Task Force will be recommending physical improvements to be made in advance of the celebration. John Regan is on the Task Force and will be a liaison for the Steering Committee. Mr. Regan also noted that the city budget includes projects such as street re-bricking that he can report to the committee. He offered site visits for the committee to conduct fact-finding if needed.

V. **Discuss Public Participation Process and First Public Workshop** – Linda Dixon described the first public meeting that will be held later the same day at City Hall. Attendees at the steering committee meeting were encouraged to attend the evening meeting for more input opportunities. The public was then invited to comment, and the following input was received:

- First impressions are lasting ones: Guide the tourists; Typically tourists start at the parking garage and visitor's center; New tourists typically take the trolley and decide where to go from that experience; Need to tie tourism planning into the trolley services.
- This is a port city – do not forget to include the maritime history and resources.
- Link the fort to the Spanish Quarter with better pedestrian crossings.
- Expand on trades and apprenticeships: this links education and industry; use the historic buildings to teach these trades.
- Experience heritage tourism as recreation: tie this to eco-tourism trends; reach different markets including children, scholars and international travelers.
- Tie the 450th Anniversary celebration to getting the deferred maintenance money for the state-owned buildings.
- Consider appropriate roles for UF: Is UF getting into the heritage tourism business? What are the implications of that?
- Be careful that the planning does not focus on heritage tourism at the expense of cultural tourism, eco-tourism, etc.
- Use UF's multidisciplinary expertise to solve local problems and properly celebrate the 450th Anniversary.
- The experience needs to better engage tourists in living history. St. George Street (HP3) needs to be more than a "front".
- Williamsburg model may not work in a living city.

- UF can provide process mapping: funding (Federal, grants, etc.); identify a lead agency and UF grant writing capability; tie to eco-tourism; ensure consistency of message to the heritage tourist (e.g. tour guide certification).
- There is great donor support potential: UF has a proven product; these historic properties tie to the educational mission; St. Augustine community has experience in historic building preservation and fundraising (e.g. Flagler College).
- Stewardship of the state-owned buildings will benefit all historic entities.

VI. **Next Steps** – Members agreed to meet again on July 14, 2008. Agenda items will include a report on the consultant selection process, and outcomes of the visioning work-to-date.

VII. **Other Business** – There was no other business to discuss.

VIII. **Closing Comments and Adjourn** – Vice President Poppell closed the meeting by thanking the participants.

St. Augustine Historic District Strategic Plan Steering Committee Visioning Session: June 24, 2008

What should the heritage tourism experience be in the St. Augustine of the future? What would a tourist in historic St. Augustine see and do and learn?

- Organized and Comprehensible: The pieces of history should be tied together into an organized experience with comprehensible content.
- Authentic: The public/visitor is generally better educated about American history (i.e. cable television-History Channel, Discovery Channel, internet, etc); the experience must be authentic to compete with other historic locales.
- Immersive: The experience should not be static.
- Engaging and Captivating: Utilize technology and new ways of engaging visitors. There are financial implications of doing this right - tourists will come back for more.
- Preserve the Physical assets: structures and gardens; these are branding elements; the eclectic mix is a defining feature of St. Augustine.
- Understand this is a living city. Do not interrupt the quality of life for residents.
- St. Augustine has a continuum of history including civil rights, fine arts, etc.
- St. Augustine should be experienced on foot.
- Ensure the authenticity of tour guide scripts.
- The experience must be organized physically and simplified from what it is today: where to start and stop; where to park; where to go/what to see; not haphazard; visitor should come away with an understanding of St. Augustine's historic significance.
- People want to come back if they understand the significance and the depth/breadth of historic resources in St. Augustine (i.e. you can't see it all in one afternoon).
- The 2016 NPS Anniversary and St. Augustine's 450th Anniversary are an opportunity to "put St. Augustine on the map."
- Understand St. Augustine as unique, eclectic and multicultural.
- Heritage tourism needs a shopping experience too, but it must also be authentically tied to the area's history.
- The experience must also appeal to the short-term visitor including local/regional "day-trippers."
- Understand St. Augustine as a destination; part of American history.
- Capture the multiple layers of history in St. Augustine. This will appeal to a broad audience and diverse tourist markets.
- Link the past to the present: there should be a storyline such that the present can learn something *relevant* from the past.
- The search for authenticity leads to the need for more research. Education and interpretation are always evolving.

Is there a single, most important action that the University could undertake or facilitate to “hit the home run” and make a positive impact in historic St. Augustine? If so, what is it?

- Create a single place to get information and orientation linked to the Fort.
- Focus on visioning and marketing.
- Leverage state, local and federal resources
- Provide leadership, credibility and a long-term presence
- Provide unification, credibility and technical expertise: This manifests physically with faculty and students in office and lab environments (e.g. Whitney labs in Marineland), and with an administrative office with an executive director, staff, mission statement, job descriptions, etc. One result of this presence will be a combined and more effective lobbying effort.
- Save the state-owned buildings and add education/interpretation to them.
- Focus on the Spanish Quarter. It has the potential to rise to an international attraction stature.
- Organize the DSO as an umbrella organization with an executive director, board, staff, etc.
- Bring multidisciplinary education programs including graduate programs in collaboration with the City and Flagler College.

If the University had \$5 million dollars to spend in the St. Augustine historic downtown area, how should it be spent?

- Develop the first phase of a central orientation facility that includes both civil and military history. (NOTE: two members cited this priority)
- Crystallize the vision and market it via consultant support.
- Complete the deferred maintenance and capital upgrades on the state-owned buildings perhaps starting with Government House, but recognize that this requires a commitment for recurring maintenance funding. (NOTE: two members cited this priority)
- Organize the operational/administrative entity as a DSO with an executive director, staff, etc.
- Develop pilot projects with seed money for local initiatives supported by UF (e.g. linking the history of the Fort).

What is the appropriate role for the University of Florida in St. Augustine?

Members recapped discussion points related to the University’s.

- Leadership and Unification:
 - The UF DSO as an umbrella organization for multiple historic resource entities.
 - UF as a key financial partner: facilitate a combined lobbying effort; leverage state, local and federal resources; grant writing and donor support.
- Credibility and Technical Expertise:
 - UF as aid in the search for authenticity
 - UF as collaborator with Flagler College, the City, NPS, and other partners in multidisciplinary education for varied audiences.