

# Space

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The board originally budgeted \$105,000 for the spaceport project, which treasurer Gary Willis called “a drop in the bucket” compared to the effort’s overall costs.

“This project is too big for us,” McDill said. “This is the risk and reward discussion that’s going to have to take place. But this has grown bigger than us.”

Moving forward, McDill said a lot more work must be done — the second phase of environmental studies, engineering plans and bids, finalized agreements with landowners and companies and lastly the closure, devel-

opment and leasing of the property.

One application to be completed for the 4,000-acre site will go to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Brownfields program. According to its website, the program focuses on expansion, redevelopment or re-use of property that may be marked by hazardous substances, pollutants or contaminants.

“Cleaning up and re-investing in these properties protects the environment, reduces blight and takes development pressures off green spaces and working lands,” the website states.

McDill explained that the JDA will now serve in a supporting role but must use its funds to promote economic development across the en-

We’ll support the county in any way we can. But we can’t pay for it.

— John McDill  
chairman, Joint Development Authority

tire county, not one specific project.

“We’ll support the county in any way we can,” McDill said. “But we can’t pay for it.”

The board of commissioners voted at its April 23 meeting to apply for \$500,000 in equity funds from the OneGeorgia Authority to go toward an environmental impact statement. The statement would cost a total of \$760,808, with \$260,808 coming from

county coffers.

The OneGeorgia Authority uses one-third of Georgia’s share of the Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement to boost the state’s economically challenged areas, according to its website. The authority’s goal is to offer financial partnerships with rural communities to “create strong economies in all business sectors, allowing new and existing industries, both large and small, to flourish,” the website states.

McDill said the county’s elected leaders have already shown initiative with regard to the spaceport and should fully take over, but he anticipates that they also won’t be able to accomplish the project alone and may need to ask for help from the state. “What if we spend all this

money and it doesn’t happen?” McDill asked the authority. “This project can change the complexion of this county, but it could not happen for a number of reasons.”

The rest of the board agreed that the creation of jobs and tax revenues from a spaceport would drastically improve the county’s economy and seemed to remain confident in what southeast Georgia has to offer over the other sites being considered.

“I think it’s ours to lose,” board member Jimmy McCollum said.

The board also:   
• received an update on the Joint Land Use Study progress from Lee Walton, project manager and stakeholder coordinator Inga Kennedy. The first public

meeting for the study was held May 13, followed by a Camden Partnership luncheon on May 14. Walton said both meetings had good discussion, answered questions and gave feedback for consideration. Walton added that Kennedy will be at the St. Marys 4th of July festival to let the general public know about the study in a less formal setting.

• discussed a proposed easement for the City of Kingsland to install water and sewer utilities near the county’s industrial park and an entrance previously constructed for a satellite campus of Altamaha Technical College. Once finalized, executive director David Keating said, the agreement would come back to the board for approval.

# Wage

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ranges with a spread of 42 percent and a higher minimum. A spread is the difference between the lowest amount on the salary range and the highest.

• City staff estimate raising the city’s minimum salary and bringing those paid below that amount to the new level will cost \$116,205. The consultant’s anticipated \$156,116.

• Moving employees to the nearest dollar amount on the new range is projected to cost \$10,973.

• And giving a 3 percent raise to all employees, which will cost approximately \$104,040.

Those three actions could cost the city about \$231,218. The 2014 budget includes \$219,700 for salary increases, Crowell said.

“We got to do what we got to do,” council member Sidney Howell said. “We’ve got people who’ve been working a while without anything.”

As part of the discussion, Crowell noted that the council has agreed to fund only three of the six positions that had been paid through a federal Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response.

“You added back three positions on that, which means an equivalent of three goes away,” he said. “... So here you are essentially laying some employees off and doing an increase.”

Council can phase in whichever option or options they select, Crowell added.

“There’s no right, ‘you’ve got to do it this way’ answer and if you don’t these things are going to happen,” Crowell said. “It’s a combination. You certainly look at total compensation.”

The consultant compared

St. Marys to 15 governments of similar population size and geographic location, including Camden County, Kingsland, Woodbine, Fort Walton Beach, Fla., Warner Robins, Lynn Haven, Fla., Waycross, Hinesville, Panama City, Fla., Jacksonville Beach, Fla., Glynn County, Brunswick, Jesup, Valdosta and Fernandina Beach, Fla.

“From my perspective, the most important comparative city is Kingsland,” Crowell wrote in a May 14 memo to council and the mayor.

The consultant did not compare St. Marys to Jacksonville, Fla., Kings Bay Naval Submarine Base and private sector companies.

“The consultant indicates that inclusion of this information would increase the salary recommendations provided by the consultant in their analysis,” Crowell wrote.

Earlier this year, the Tribune & Georgian compared St. Marys’ salaries with those of similarly sized cities in Georgia — Americus, Milledgeville, Tifton, Snellville, Suwanee, Villa Rica, Commerce and Calhoun — and found that St. Marys’ compensation was mostly on par.

The following positions in St. Marys were found to pay 10.6 percent to 43.6 percent below market: public works supervisor, economic development director, librarian, bookkeeper, fire captain, water plant operator, systems analyst, senior center coordinator, equipment operator and police sergeant.

Thirty-five of the 47 job classifications examined were found to pay below the market midpoint, according to the study.

The pay range maximums for court administrator and assistant fire chief were 13.5 percent and 12.4 percent, respectively, above market.

# Turn in worn flags by June 7 for retirement

Woodmen of the World Camden County Lodge 1523 will hold a flag retirement ceremony on Flag Day, Friday, June 14.

Flags that are tattered and worn should be retired and replaced, and the lodge is collecting flags that need to be properly retired.

Any organization or individual with flags can drop them off at the Kingsland Welcome Center, located at 1190 East Boone Ave. in Kingsland; Woodbine City Hall, located at 310 Bedell Ave. in Woodbine; or the Tribune & Georgian, located

at 206 Osborne St. in St. Marys.

Woodmen of the World members share a commitment to family, community and country. Through a commitment to family values, they become more dedicated family members. Through volunteerism, members strive to be better friends and neighbors. Through a patriotic allegiance, members pledge to be better citizens.

Flags will be collected through Friday, June 7.

For more information, email Denese Proctor at dproctor@tds.net.

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