



Envisioning The Future of St. George Island

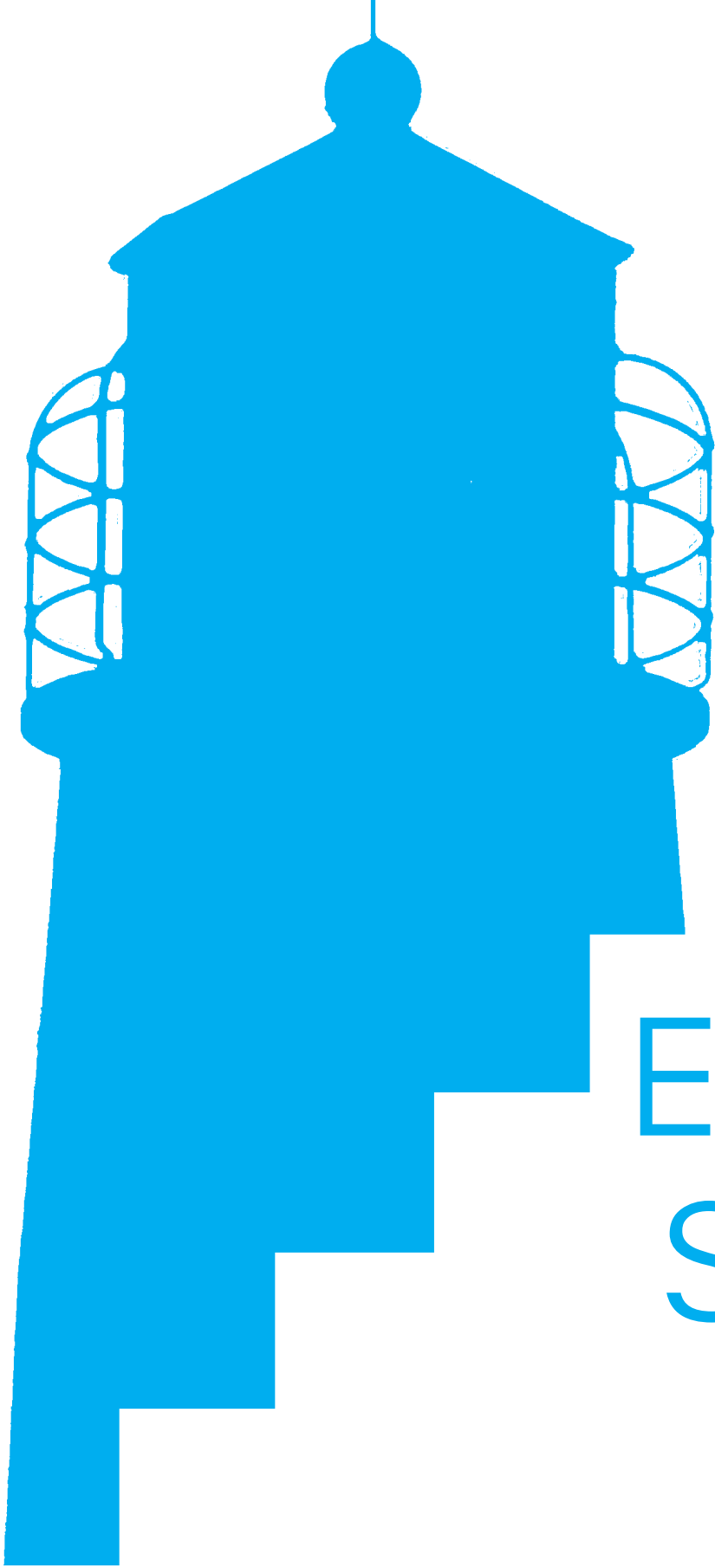
**Community Visioning Session
After-Action Report**

February 10, 2021

FINAL DRAFT



Report prepared for the St. George Island Citizen Working Group by the Florida State University Department of Urban and Regional Planning 2021 Spring Studio Capstone Team



Executive Summary

Executive Summary

St. George Island lies approximately three miles off the coast of Franklin County in Florida's panhandle. While the region has been populated by successive groups of people dating back 12,000 years to indigenous native American settlers, St. George Island – due to its location nearly three miles off the coast of the Gulf of Mexico – has until the 1950's remained relatively undeveloped. Home to 863 permanent residents, the Island, which is an unincorporated part of Franklin County, has experienced a recent uptick in growth and a growing demand for services. These growth pressures and concerns about the effectiveness of the provision of government services led a local citizen group to explore options for alternate forms of governance that would allow Island residents to have more local control.

In early 2020, the St. George Island Citizens Working Group contacted the Mark & Marianne Barnebey Planning and Development Lab (BPD) at Florida State University's Department of Urban and Regional Planning. The BPD, charged with providing planning technical assistance to organizations and governments, agreed to support the community in crafting, implementing and reporting back on a series of community visioning sessions. The first session, documented in this after-action report, was conducted at 10:00 am and 6:30 pm on February 10, 2021. While hosted via Zoom, an in-person meeting was hosted at the St. George Island Volunteer Fire Department. Over 150 people attended the meeting, participating in three exercises designed to understand what residents like the most about St. George Island, what they would like to see changed, and the criteria they would use for determining what future governance options would best preserve the identified treasures while resolving their concerns.

The top three positive characteristics or treasures that the meeting participants valued included:

- **Low density** – Unlike almost any other barrier island in Florida, St. George Island's built environment is predominantly single family homes on quarter acre lots, with few to no structures over 3 stories.
- **Natural beauty** – With the eastern section of the Island a state park, the pristine beaches of the Island have repeatedly been ranked in the nation's top 10 beaches by Dr. Steve Leatherman (aka Dr. Beach) in his annual assessment.
- **Peace** – the low density residential nature of the Island offers the tranquility of a beach community from a forgotten age – even at high season.

The top three areas of concerns were:

- **Drainage** – Even with light rain many parts of the Island retain water, especially the roads of the commercial district which hurts local business.
- **Road maintenance** – The paved roads are full of potholes and in need of repair while many unpaved roads receive no maintenance at all.
- **Zoning** – The commercial district is being slowly converted to residential units thanks to a lack of enforcement of zoning codes from the county.

While the meeting was well attended and the discussion of potentially contentious issues remained positive, it was clear that there were concerns that needed to be considered in any future discussions about governance structures or arrangements, including: the payment of both county and municipal taxes if the Island incorporates, how much would be invested in infrastructure improvements, and whether or not there would be adequate preparation for coastal risks. It is hoped that the meeting and this after action report will set the stage for a subsequent meeting, and a question and answer session planned for March 10 and March 31 respectively.

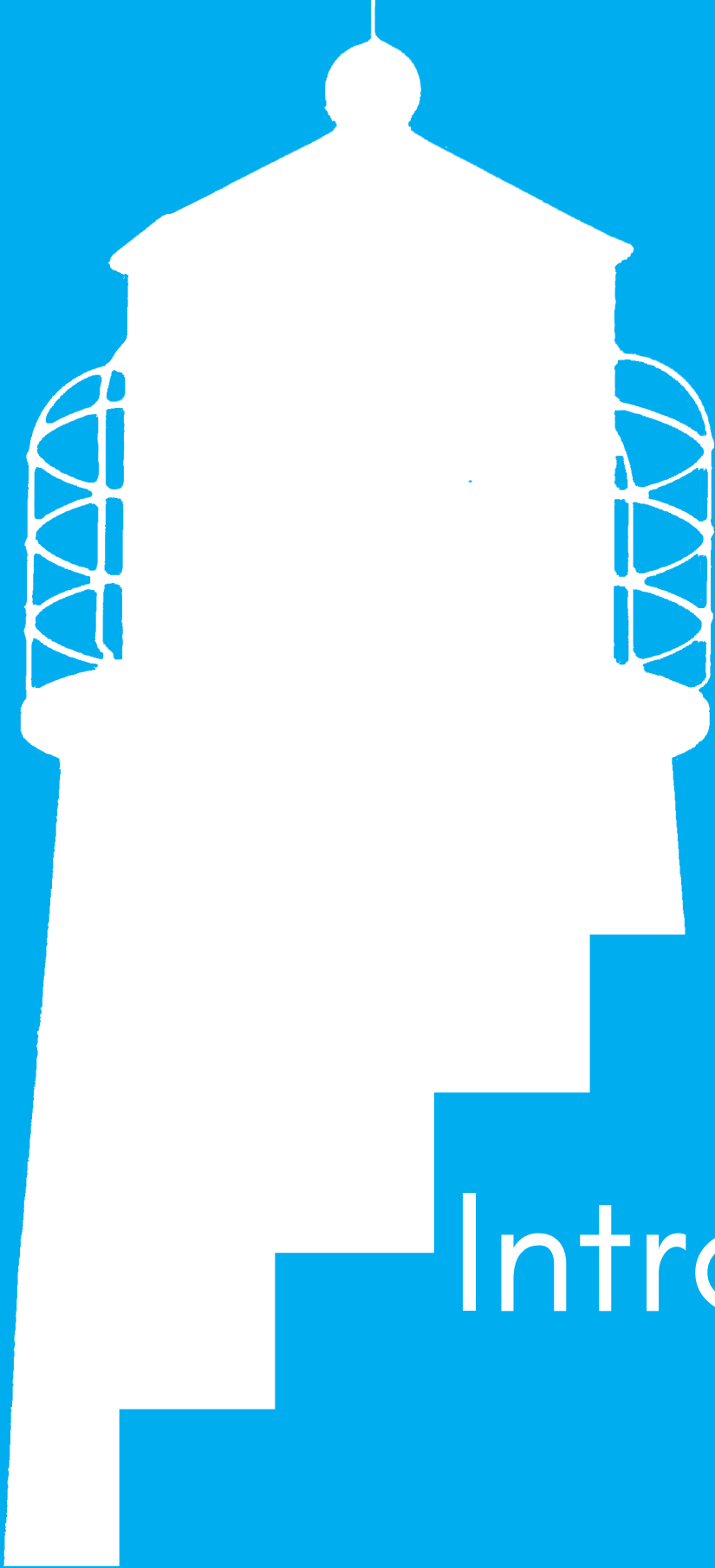
This report documents the process of planning and preparing for these meetings, the insights and opinions of the residents, and key considerations for governance. It also sets the stage for next steps in this process. Supporting appendices include a property map of the island as well as the survey instrument used to collect input for the visioning session.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| 1) Introduction | 6 |
| 2) Process | 8 |
| Research | 9 |
| Outreach | 11 |
| Preparation | 12 |
| Facilitation | 12 |
| Documentation | 13 |
| 3) Results | 14 |
| Pre-Meeting Survey | 15 |
| February 10 Meeting Polling Results | 17 |
| 4) Findings | 18 |
| St. George Island Community Treasures | 19 |
| St. George Island Community Desires | 20 |
| Considerations for the Form of Governance | 22 |
| Appendix 1: Figure A.1 - Franklin County Property Values/Acre Map | 24 |
| Appendix 2: Pre-Meeting Survey | 25 |
| Appendix 3: Resources | 29 |

Figures

| | |
|---|----|
| Figure 1.1 St. George Island Location Map | 7 |
| Figure 2.1 Research Process | 9 |
| Figure 2.2 SGI Demographics | 10 |
| Figure 2.3 Studio Team Meets With Blue Parrot Manager George Joanos | 11 |
| Figure 2.4 St. George Island Lighthouse Aerial | 13 |
| Figure 3.1 Pre-Meeting Survey Results | 15 |
| Figure 3.2 Sharing Live Polling Results At Night Session | 16 |
| Figure 3.3 Live Polling Results | 17 |
| Figure 4.1 Top 4 Treasures | 19 |
| Figure 4.2 Our Treasures Meeting Graphic | 19 |
| Figure 4.3 Top 4 Desires | 20 |
| Figure 4.4 Our Desires Meeting Graphic | 21 |
| Figure 4.5 Forms of Government Table | 22 |
| Figure A.1 Franklin County Property Value/Acre Map | 24 |



Introduction

1

Introduction

St. George Island is an unincorporated barrier island in Franklin County, FL. The Island is home to more than 800 permanent residents, local business, and a state park. The St. George Island Citizens Working Group contacted the Florida State Department of Urban and Regional Planning to help facilitate conversations among stakeholders on the Island about possible future paths for them to explore in the interest of protecting what they love and what they want to improve in their community. The purpose of this after-action report is to explain the process that the Studio Team took to prepare for the first community meeting on February 10, 2021, in addition to documenting the results and findings of the meeting.



Figure 1.1 St. George Island Location Map

Process

The Studio Team completed a series of steps preparing for the meeting which included: conducting initial research, visiting St. George Island, engaging with community members, recruiting and training volunteers, rehearsing the meeting agenda, and facilitating the community meeting. By taking these steps, the Studio Team was able to ensure the initial community meeting satisfied the community.

Results

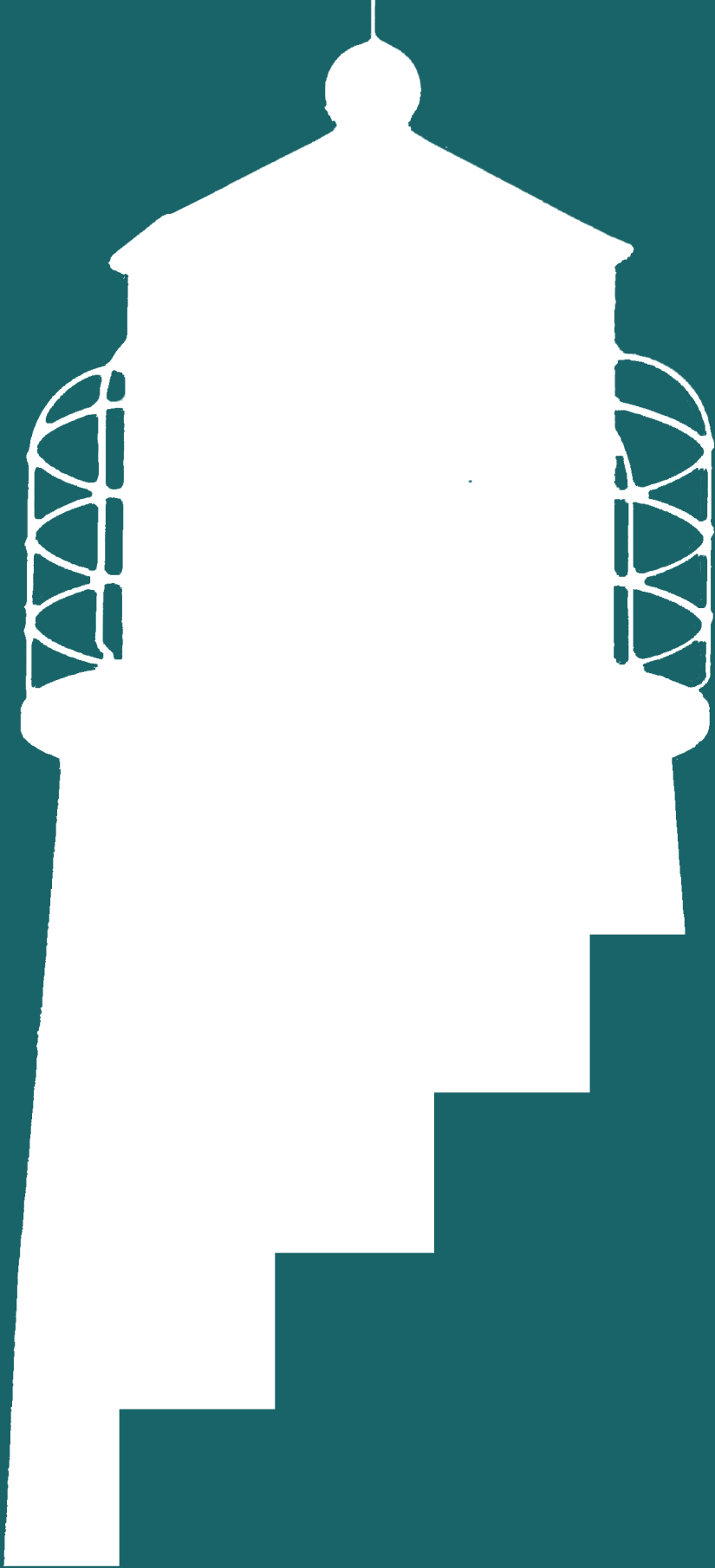
The first meeting was conducted on Zoom as a “visioning” session to allow community residents to express what they treasure most about St. George Island and what improvements could be made. Community members completed a survey while registering for the meeting, which allowed the Studio Team to provide a preliminary list of treasures and desired changes to begin the conversation that would take place at the meeting. The treasures collected were: peace and solitude, a laid-back atmosphere, small town “old-Florida feel,” no city taxes, commercial district, natural environment, and community. The desired improvements included: road maintenance, water costs, zoning, commercial district, infrastructure, lack of services, and tax increases. Following the discussions of each of these topics in small breakout groups, the Studio Team conducted live polls to measure the support of each initial treasure and desired improvement.

Findings

The summaries presented of discussion for each treasure and desire provides qualitative backing to what the survey and poll numbers tell us. The meeting concluded with an open floor session to find out what considerations community members would find useful for selecting forms of governance available to the Island. These questions will help the Studio Team research and prepare for the next community meeting on March 10.

Appendices

The appendices provided include a property values map of Franklin County, materials used as part of the meeting process, and resources that proved invaluable throughout our work.



Process

2

Process

This section of the after-action describes the process used to prepare for and implement the first of three scheduled community meetings, which was held on February 10, 2021.

The five-step process included:

1. **Research** – Targeted research on: the history and development status of the Island, alternate forms of governance, and methods of community engagement.
2. **Outreach** – Weekly Zoom meetings and a site visit to coordinate with key community members, and meeting notification and solicitation of input from the community via the Town of SGI webpage (www.townofsgi.com).
3. **Preparation** – Participatory agenda development, training of facilitation volunteers, ensuring connectivity and access.
4. **Facilitation** – Hosting two, three part Zoom sessions.
5. **Documentation** – Preparing an after-action report.

By taking these steps, the Studio Team was able to ensure the initial visioning session satisfied the needs of the community.

1. Research

St. George Island Historical Background

The Studio Team completed a comprehensive literature review of St. George Island, which allowed the team members to become familiar with the area and its development over time. The literature review identified the early history of the region from the Pre-Columbian Era, through the rise of Apalachicola as one of our nation's top ports during the antebellum period, to the county's gradual economic decline in the 20th century. The Franklin County we know today, is a sleepy coastal region that has been beset by the decline in fishing and oystering communities and relies heavily on tourism. St. George Island's history, by contrast, essentially started in 1956 when the Bryant Patton Memorial Bridge finally spanned the 3 miles of bay separating the Island from the Town of Eastpoint. Since the mid-1980's St. George Island has experienced a fairly rapid increase in residential development and commercialization. In the face of growth pressures and to implement local development standards to maintain their desired quality of life, the western portion of St. George Island, known as St. George Island Plantation, formed a neighborhood association in 1977. To augment the historical and geographic understanding of St. George Island, the Studio Team worked to build rapport with and better understand the motivations of the St. George Island Citizens Working Group and to become familiar with the significant research they had previously undertaken.



Figure 2.1 Research Process

Geographic Setting

The geographic analysis provides a sense of how SGI compares to Franklin County. Understanding the existing and proposed land uses on St. George Island revealed how zoning and building densities influence the sense of place in various parts of the Island. Geographic analysis also allowed the team members to identify differences between what has been envisioned and planned versus what has actually been permitted in the commercial and residential districts of the Island.

Parcel Data Collection

Geographic analysis was used to compile a series of maps to depict the impending encroachment of residential buildings (i.e. single-family homes) into the commercial district. These maps confirmed some of the residents' concerns about the lack of enforcement of zoning regulation on St. George Island, and its implications on the future of the Island. Demographic research showed average property values on St. George Island in relation to surrounding population centers in Franklin County (Alligator Point, Apalachicola, Carrabelle, and Eastpoint) [Appendix 1]. This analysis is important because it shows that the highest property values in the county are on St. George Island, with the Island contributing a significant share of tax revenue to Franklin County, relative to other areas.

Demographics and Existing Conditions

The Studio Team then documented existing conditions of St. George Island. Figure 1.2 shows the Island's demographic elements which include population counts on St. George Island in comparison to surrounding areas (Apalachicola, Carrabelle, and Eastpoint), age distributions on St. George Island, housing occupancy, and homeownership. These data provide a snapshot into the socio-economic status of community residents, providing a clearer understanding of who is on the Island. It also underscores the unique economic sensitivities

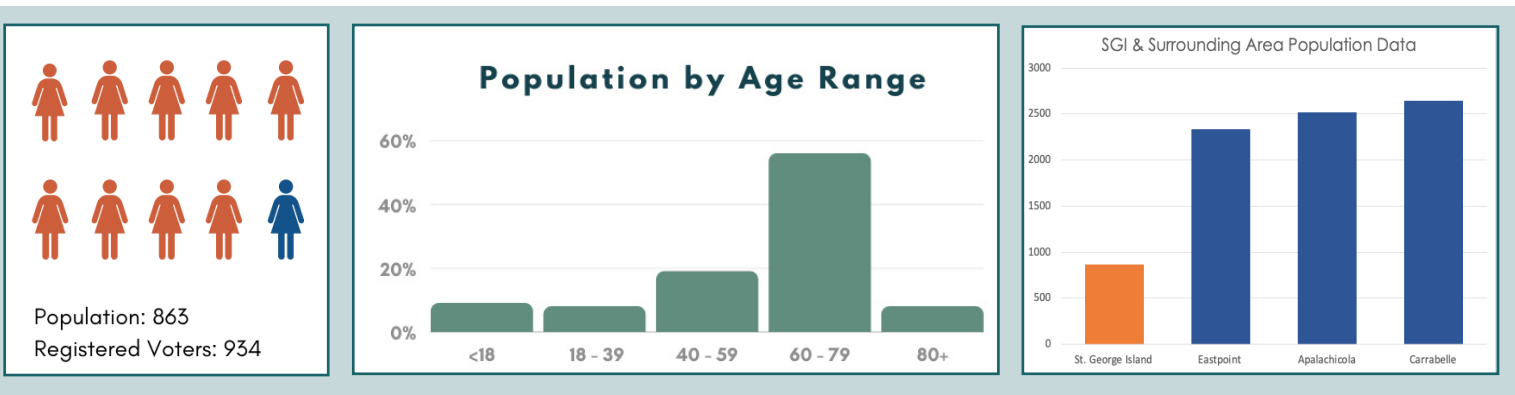


Figure 2.2 SGI Demographics

of a community with a tourism-based economy.

Hazards Assessment

To support the conditions assessment, a brief review of hazard mitigation and risk assessment issues and concerns was undertaken. While St. George Island is subject to nuisance flooding and moderate wildfire risk, the primary peril the island faces is the prospect of direct impact from a Hurricane or major coastal storm. Florida is at the center of hurricane alley and experiences hurricane impacts on an annual basis. The state is also extremely susceptible to sea level rise. These current and future flood risks are heightened on barrier islands like St. George Island that shield the mainland from the brunt of coastal storms. Hazard mitigation can take the form of influencing where and how a community develops, as well as how it accesses and uses resources to enhance natural features and retrofitting the built environment to reduce the potential for loss. As an unincorporated area, these planning and resource management decisions reside at the county level.

Field Assessment

On February 1, 2021, the Studio Team visited St. George Island. The team met with members of the St. George Island Citizens Working Group, as well as other members of the community. The purpose of the visit was for the Studio Team to reconcile lessons from the literature and background research with what is physically present on the Island. Based on the field assessment, the

Studio Team recorded the following areas of concern:

- Deteriorated roadways
- Drainage and flooding issues
- Dilapidated and abandoned houses and buildings
- Unmaintained beach access points
- Lack of adequate signage
- Areas of potential wildfire risk
- Evidence of a lack of meeting the spirit, if not the letter, of county zoning regulations.

In addition to these observations, interviews with a selection of community leaders provided a greater understanding of the challenges the St. George Island community wants to address.



Figure 2.3 Studio Team Meets With Blue Parrot Manager George Joanos (Dennis Smith, 2021)

Field Interview Subjects

- Paul and Gail Riegelmayr - residential concerns
- George Joanos - restaurateur
- Mason Bean - volunteer fire department / real estate
- John Cadriel - restaurateur
- Kimberly Crossen - natural resources / environmental protection
- Chuck Lombardo - historical resources
- Shannon Bothwell - residential concerns
- Julie Krantz - tourist excursion industry

2. Outreach

Moving from the background research to planning the community visioning session required significant outreach to two groups: St. George Island community members to participate in the community conversation, and student volunteers from Florida State University to serve as facilitators and recorders for the Zoom sessions.

To inform the community of the planned meeting and invite them to attend, the following steps were taken:

- Designing a flyer to advertise the February 10 community meeting, posted on the website two weeks in advance (January 27, 2021).
- Developing a survey in Qualtrics to collect demographic information and community feedback on the future of St. George Island (January 27, 2021). This provided a reliable estimate of potential attendees so we could estimate the number of sessions we needed (two) and the total number of staff needed (16).
- Creating a weblink to encourage community members to submit photos of their favorite aspects of the Island to the Studio Team (January 28, 2021).

To solicit student involvement, concurrent with our outreach to community members, the team took the following steps:

- Contacted key faculty in the FSU Department of Urban and Regional Planning and requested that they announce our need for volunteers in their classes.
- Created a blast email to send on the Department's listserv of the current graduate students' body (over 40 students) describing the project and requesting volunteers.
- Created a comprehensive list of students and their availability for support of one or both sessions and the roles they would play (facilitator v. recorder).

3. Preparation

To effectively facilitate the first community meeting, the Studio Team recognized the need to train volunteers.

The following steps were taken to accomplish this:

- Consulted with Dr. Tom Taylor, an expert in community engagement at Florida State University, for assistance with identifying appropriate training material.
- Reviewed and assembled training materials on best practices in community engagement, including how to best present information, how to elicit community input, and how to manage participants.
- Established a training date on (February 7, 2021) to provide (three) days between the training and the session.
- Trained nine volunteers on the preparatory material, how to work in pairs (facilitator and recorder), and how to complete their assignment on-site at FSU's DURP or via Zoom.

In addition to the volunteer training, the team spent a considerable amount of time on logistics and technology testing. Because of the number of planned breakout rooms for each session, the team reserved seven classroom spaces for the volunteer pairs to work from. The team also ran through a mock session on the Monday prior to the Wednesday session to test the Zoom functionality, the polling tools, and other technical considerations.

4. Facilitation

Tom Taylor, Ph.D., Dennis J. Smith, AICP, and the student Project Manager, Kailon Thompson served as the lead facilitators of the community visioning session.

The session was comprised of four main components:

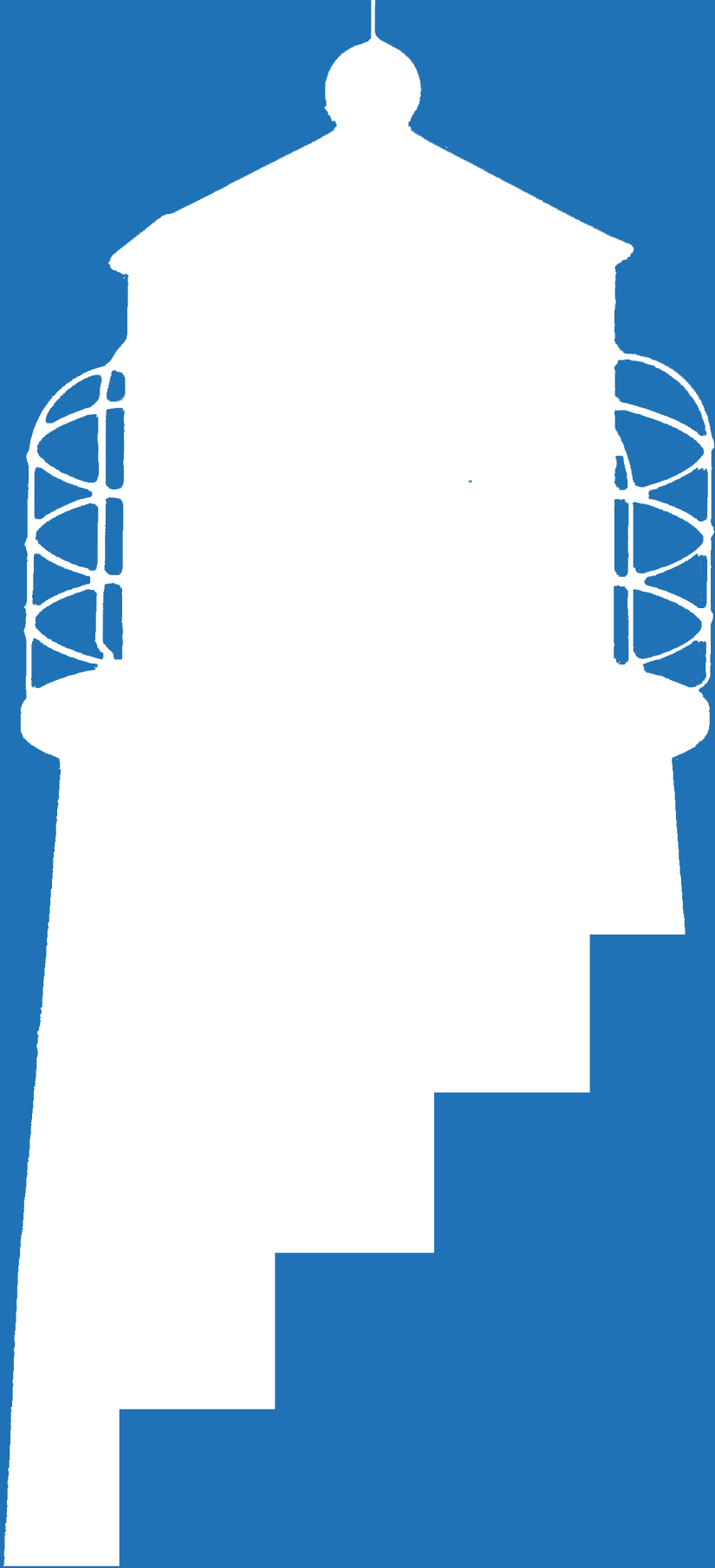
- An introduction to the project and establishment of ground rules.
- Two small group discussions on community treasures and desires followed by reporting to the large group.
- A discussion on necessary government functions and the criteria for governance.
- A discussion of next steps.

A copy of the meeting agenda is included in Appendix 2

As noted, the team used research-based best practices in developing the workshop agenda, coupled with input from the SGI Citizens Working Group. Starting and ending the workshop with a large group session ensured that everyone was on the same page, that ground rules were articulated and that participants understood what the FSU team and the SGI Citizens Working Group would be working on after the meeting. Utilizing breakout



Figure 2.4 St. George Island Lighthouse Aerial



Results

3

Results

Pre-Meeting Survey

On (January 27, 2021), in advance of the February 10, 2021 community meeting, the Studio Team distributed a survey to record demographic data, interest in the meeting, and social ties to St. George Island [The complete survey questionnaire is included in Appendix 2]. The survey received 117 responses in two weeks. The survey helped the team anticipate the total number of attendees, understand a bit about the demographics of the respondents, and document community concerns for St. George Island. It also helped the team address general planning considerations.

Numbers

One-hundred and seventeen people responded to the survey. Seventy respondents selected the morning session while 47 registered in advance for the afternoon session. To accommodate as many community residents as possible, two community meetings were held; a morning session at 10 a.m. and an evening session at 6:30 p.m. Space was set aside at the SGI Volunteer Fire Station to accommodate those individuals without computer connectivity or who otherwise preferred an in-person setting.

Demographics

The survey revealed:

- 56% of respondents were permanent home-owners and 11% were investment property owners.
- 9% were business owners and 17% owned a rental property.
- 59% were registered to vote on St. George Island.

These responses are presented in Figure 3.1. It should be clear that these data represent the characteristics of the 117 survey respondents, not the complete demographics of the Island (which was previously presented in Figure 2.2). These data, since they were tied to the meeting registration, were valuable in providing the organizers a snapshot into who might potentially attend the community visioning session.

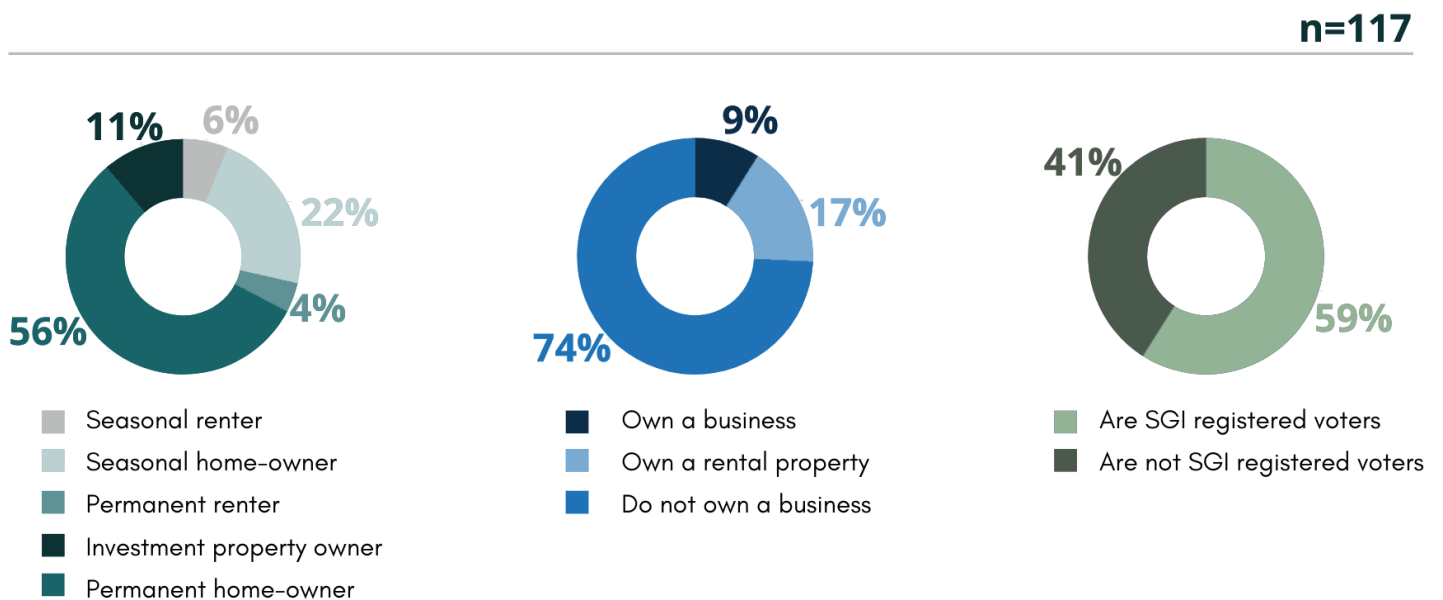


Figure 3.1 Pre-Meeting Survey Results

Perceptions

The survey included two questions related to likes and dislikes. This provided workshop organizers with an insight into key issues before the first session and helped jump start a dialogue on community concerns regarding the Island.

Based on the survey, the most reported likes (treasures) included.

- The Island's peacefulness
- Laid-back feel, natural beauty
- Non-commercialized status
- Low-density
- Height-restrictions
- Seclusion
- Simplicity
- "Old-Florida feel"
- Sense of community

The most reported dislikes, or desired improvements included:

- Road maintenance
- Lowering water costs
- Need for zoning
- Infrastructure
- Drainage issues
- Decreased taxes
- Increased commercial business and restaurants
- More traffic enforcement

These results guided the group discussion and informed the live polls conducted during the February 10 community meeting.

Planning Considerations

The survey, which provided the number of potential attendees for each session, was essential in helping the team recruit and secure an appropriate number of facilitators and recorders for the meetings. Team members and volunteers were then able to be trained and assigned to their roles based on their levels of expertise. The survey also let the team know how large a space was needed to host the in-person group that was integrated into the Zoom, a need that was met through the use of the St. George Island Fire House.

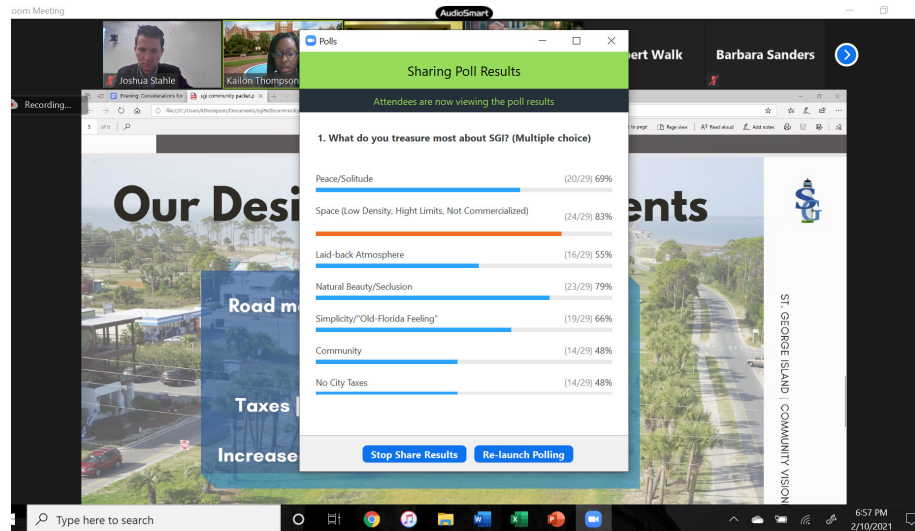


Figure 3.2 Sharing Live Polling Results At Night Session



Results

February 10 Meeting

Approximately 150 participants attended the two sessions. While the pre-meeting survey alerted the team to 117 potential participants, the meeting link was widely shared on the Town of SGI website and people who had not registered were allowed to attend. It was also noted that many registrants actually had more than one person in a home location participating through a single Zoom link, including friends and family members.

Meeting Format / Flow

The meeting consisted of a large group introduction to the meeting hosts and the agenda, then smaller breakout rooms commenced to facilitate more intimate discussions of the agenda topics, which were followed by a large group discussion and a live poll to reinforce the two primary topics. This process was repeated twice to cover the two primary topics of discussion being: 1) the treasures of SGI and 2) the desired improvements needed in SGI according to meeting participants. The full meeting agenda is included in Appendix 2.

As stated earlier in this report, the pre-meeting survey helped formulate these discussion topics. At the end of the meeting, the community was provided with an open forum to raise questions that would be addressed in the subsequent March 10 meeting. All questions posed by residents were recorded on Zoom to support the preparation of this report and the future meeting sessions.

Live Polling Results

After discussing the treasures and desired improvements in the small breakout rooms, participants reconvened in the large group to participate in a live poll conducted using the standard features of Zoom. The poll listed the primary treasures and desired improvements informed by the pre-meeting survey. As participants were being given an opportunity to respond, the polling results were aggregated in real-time revealing the percentages for each choice. The most reported treasures included the Island's low-density (82%), the natural beauty (72%), and the peacefulness (69%). The most reported desired improvements included drainage issues (88%), road maintenance (69%), and zoning (62%).

The participants reacted favorably to the live polling exercise. It reinforced that the issues – both the good and the bad – captured in the pre-meeting poll were valid and widely recognized by all community members. While certain issues rose to the top, there was no significant or vocal dissent about the findings.

POLLING RESULTS

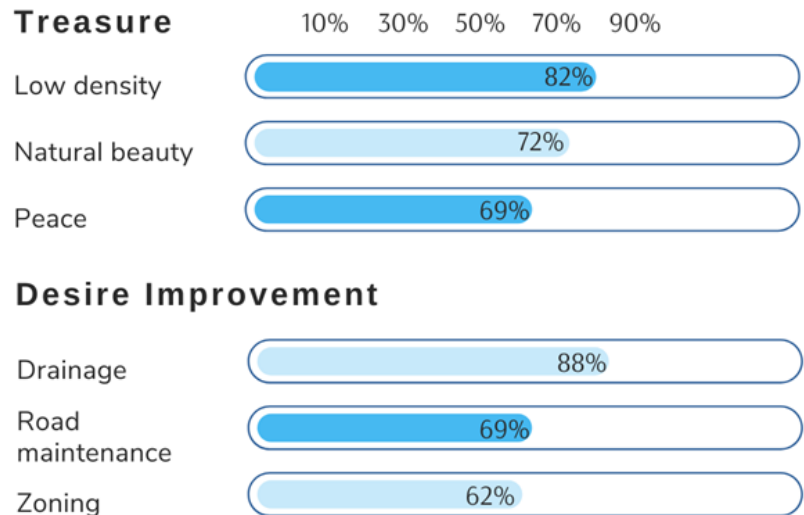
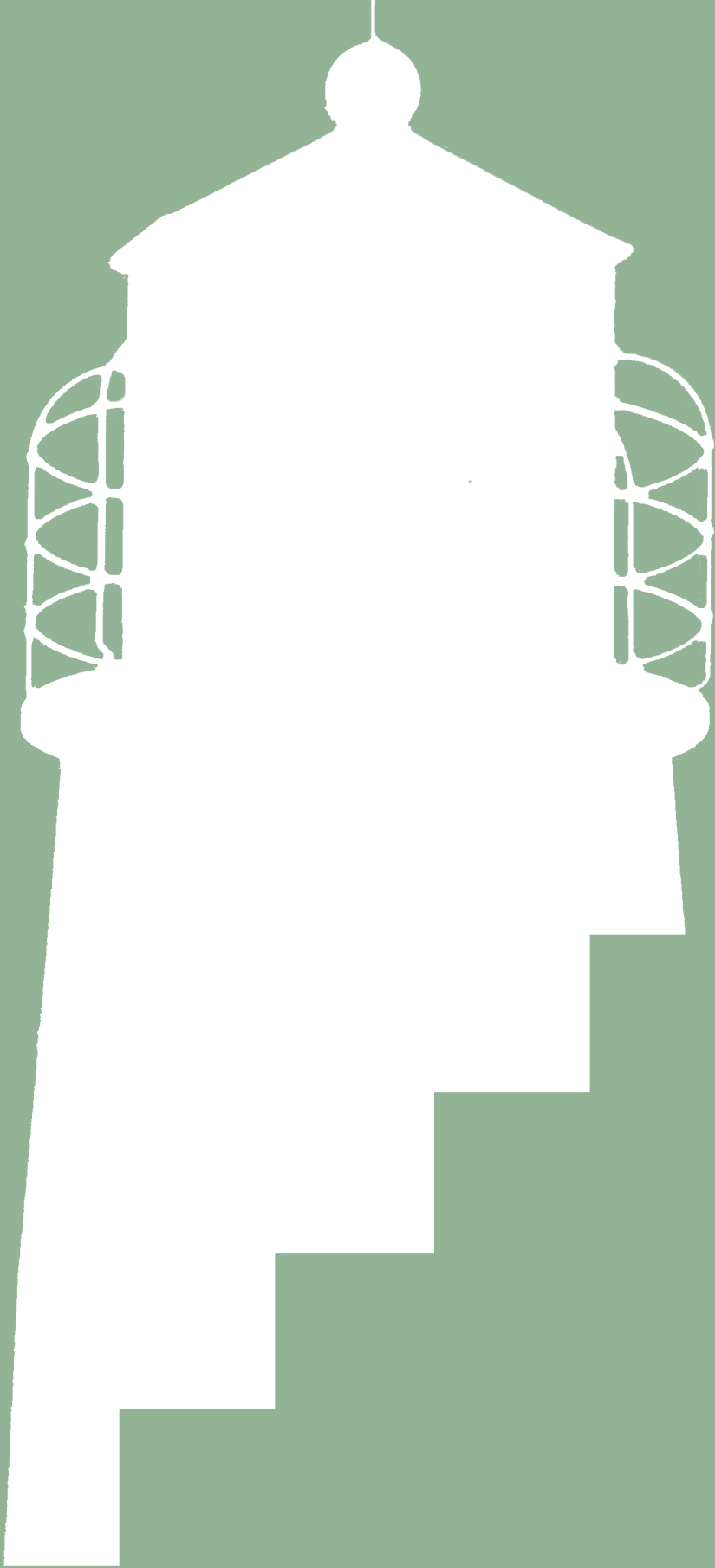


Figure 3.3 Live Polling Results



Findings

4

Findings

St. George Island Community Treasures



Figure 4.1 Top 4 Treasures

sense of peace and solitude has made it a haven for many of its residents. Residents hope that through these discussions they are able to find a form of governance that works to protect what they love.

Laid-back Atmosphere

St. George Island offers residents and visitors alike a taste of the sweet island life. Many residents said the laid-back atmosphere is the reason they stay. This is another characteristic residents said is very hard to find outside of the Island. As one resident put it, there is an unspoken rule to “Live and let live.” Some residents feel this is further reflected in the lack of oversight and bureaucracy.

“Old-Florida Feel”

Residents of St. George Island also treasure the unique sense of space and the infrastructure of the Island that creates an “Old-Florida feel.” Residents appreciate the low density that St. George Island has managed to maintain. Unlike many other Florida beach towns, it is free of high rises and is not overrun with franchises and big-box businesses. Residents said the one franchise, Subway, is more than enough. Part of what makes the Island unique are its small businesses and local restaurants. Residents made it clear they want to create an environment that fosters and encourages small businesses. Additionally, residents believe that the sand roads give the Island character. They also appreciate the space for walking and biking. Preserving the “Old-Florida feel” is a priority for many residents.

During the first community meeting, residents were placed into breakout groups to participate in a community visioning exercise. In the morning session, there were a total of seven breakout groups and in the evening session there were a total of five breakout groups. During the first breakout session, residents discussed what they treasured about St. George Island. This section expands upon these characteristics.

Peace & Solitude

As many of the residents put it, St. George Island is a peaceful oasis that serves as an escape from the hustle and bustle of other cities, like Atlanta. Others love St. George Island because it is far less developed than other beach towns such as Destin and Panama City Beach. St. George Island’s

sense of peace and solitude has made it a haven for many of its residents. Residents hope that through these discussions they are able to find a form of governance that works to protect what they love.

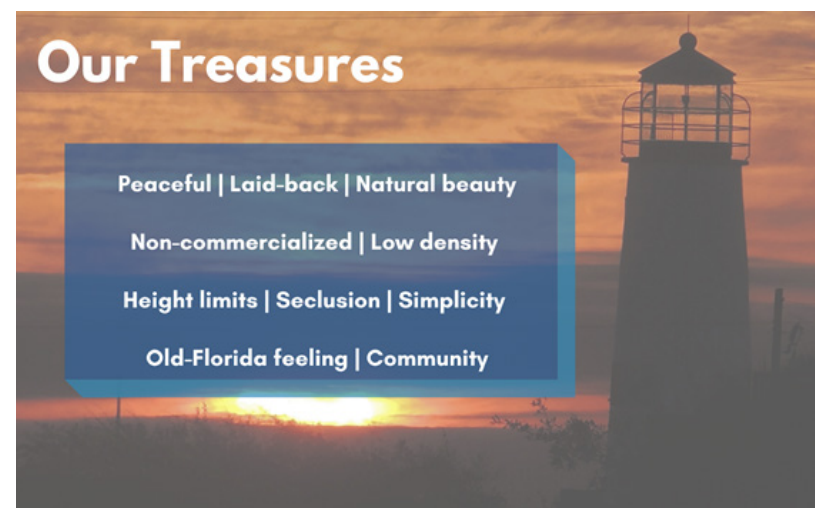


Figure 4.2 Treasures Meeting

Commercial District

St. George Island has a quaint but small downtown. The Island features art galleries, boutiques, and charming shops selling beachwear, handmade treasures, jewelry, and unique gifts; however, they are limited in nature. Residents also have access to a limited number of local restaurants. A few local favorites mentioned include the Beach Pit, Mango Mike’s, and the Blue Parrot. The identification of this as a treasure relates to the potential of this district, if allowed to develop without residential encroachment.

Natural Environment

St. George Island is much more than beaches, fishing, and boating. It is home to a very unique natural ecosystem. On the Island, there is a nine mile stretch of undeveloped beach and dunes in St. George Island State Park. From May 1 to October 31 the beach is crawling with sea turtles. The Island’s pristine shoreline and warm waters serve as the perfect nesting spot for the threatened loggerhead turtle, the greenback turtle, and the leatherback turtles. Franklin County has a marine turtle protection ordinance to protect turtle hatchlings from artificial light, while preserving clear dark skies perfect for stargazing.

Community

St. George Island is truly special thanks to its people. Residents of St. George Island would argue they have the friendliest neighbors. On the Island people take care of each other, creating a safe and welcoming environment. One resident said the Island is a place where their children can be children, a place where there is no judgment. The community is fueled by volunteerism and cooperation. The SGI Volunteer Fire Department and Sheriff Department are highly treasured and according to residents, do a phenomenal job. The community often comes together for events such as the Art Walk and the Chili Festival. Residents hope to foster and build upon the great community they’ve established.

St. George Island Community Desired Improvements

In the second breakout group envisioning activity, residents discussed their desired improvements for St. George Island. The pre-meeting survey identified a few preliminary ideas.

Road Maintenance

Residents of the Island were greatly concerned about road maintenance. They stated that the few paved roads are often in poor condition. They also said the unpaved roads need grading. The biggest concern across the board was drainage. With even an inch of rain the roadways flood, making them difficult to use and people must drive off the road. Although water costs were a shared concern, residents recognize that this issue is outside of their control.

Zoning

Many residents expressed their discontent with the spot zoning used by Franklin County. Specifically, concerns about changing C2 zones to C4. This change allows residential development in the commercial district. Residents feel this is hurting their commercial downtown and that action is required in order to protect commercial lots. Residents want to keep space for welcoming new small businesses and restaurants to the Island. They hope for an increase in the rate of retail and fine dining options through multi-use development in the commercial district. Many



Figure 4.3 Top 4 Desires

residents feel their voices are not heard by the Franklin County Commission with the zoning decisions being made. Other forms of governance would allow them to take more control over their zoning and design standards.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure concerns fall into three main categories, including: transportation, stormwater management, and water provision. Concerns regarding transportation included wanting enhanced safety and walkability. The bike path needs maintenance and access roads are needed for golf carts to avoid driving on the bike path. Some residents mentioned the boat ramps could use improvement and others would like to see the creation of a marina. Designated walkways for beach access were also a concern as the current lack of walkways has led to the damage of the dunes.



Figure 4.4 Desires Meeting Slide

Constant nuisance flooding, especially in the commercial district, is a noted concern. Even after a minor rain, roads stay partially submerged for days in key commercial and residential locations. A private company currently provides water to SGI residents. Not only are there concerns about the security of this essential service, but also its cost. In addition to these considerations, some residents would like to see more options for high-speed internet and expansion of cellular service. It was noted that these improvements would help make it easier for home-based businesses to thrive and expand.

Lack of Services

Residents identified services they would like to improve, including: traffic enforcement, code enforcement, animal control, garbage disposal, and emergency responders. Many residents said they would like to see traffic enforcement and in general a greater presence of law enforcement. Residents specifically mentioned there are speeding issues on West Pine. There is a large code enforcement issue and there is currently no code enforcement done by the County. Residents feel damaged homes hurt the beauty of their island. There is also the issue that the marine turtle protection ordinance and the no trace ordinance are not being enforced as people leave their lights on and their belongings on the beach. These cause harm to the sea turtles if not enforced. Another threat to the turtles are coyotes. Some residents would like to see animal control to help protect the sea turtles. Residents would also like the authority to create more ordinances to protect their natural resources. Residents would like to see designated trash pick up for heavy garbage, palm fronds, and more than once every month. Residents also brought up the need for emergency responders and water rescue training as there are several deaths as a result of the riptides. More control and autonomy could help to effectively manage these concerns.

Tax Increases

The final and greatest concern was tax increases. Despite their articulation of real and pressing issues and concerns, residents were vocal about their aversion to tax increases. Residents want to ensure that any tax increases will be minimal. They hope to explore options that can allow for little or no increase in their taxes.

Considerations for the Form of Governance

In the final large group discussion residents detailed the considerations they have in selecting a form of governance. To support this conversation, the participants were provided with a table that outlined governance options, as presented in Figure 4.5.

| | Franklin County | Property Owners Association | Independent Special District | Municipality |
|----------------|---|--|--|---|
| Description | Status Quo: remain unincorporated | Private organization of owners | Special purpose unit of local government | City |
| Example | - | Plantation | Dog Island, Eastpoint Water & Sewer District | Apalachicola, Carrabelle |
| Functions | All public functions not handled by state/other agencies | Assess properties within POA to fund services & amenities; has rights granted in governing document to regulate property use | Charge taxes & fees to provide infrastructure or services identified in charter (ltd scope); does not control zoning | All public powers not reserved to the state ("Home Rule") |
| Control | 5 member BOCC, of which 1 member represents SGI and Eastpoint | Board of Directors elected by property owners | Property owners within the district elect board members | Registered voters within city select city council members |
| Implementation | Do nothing | Owner of every individual property executes an instrument recorded in public records to make their property subject to POA | Legislature passes a special law establishing charter, and majority of property owners in district approve in referendum | Legislature passes a special law establishing charter, and majority of voters in city approve in referendum |

Figure 4.5 Forms of Government Table

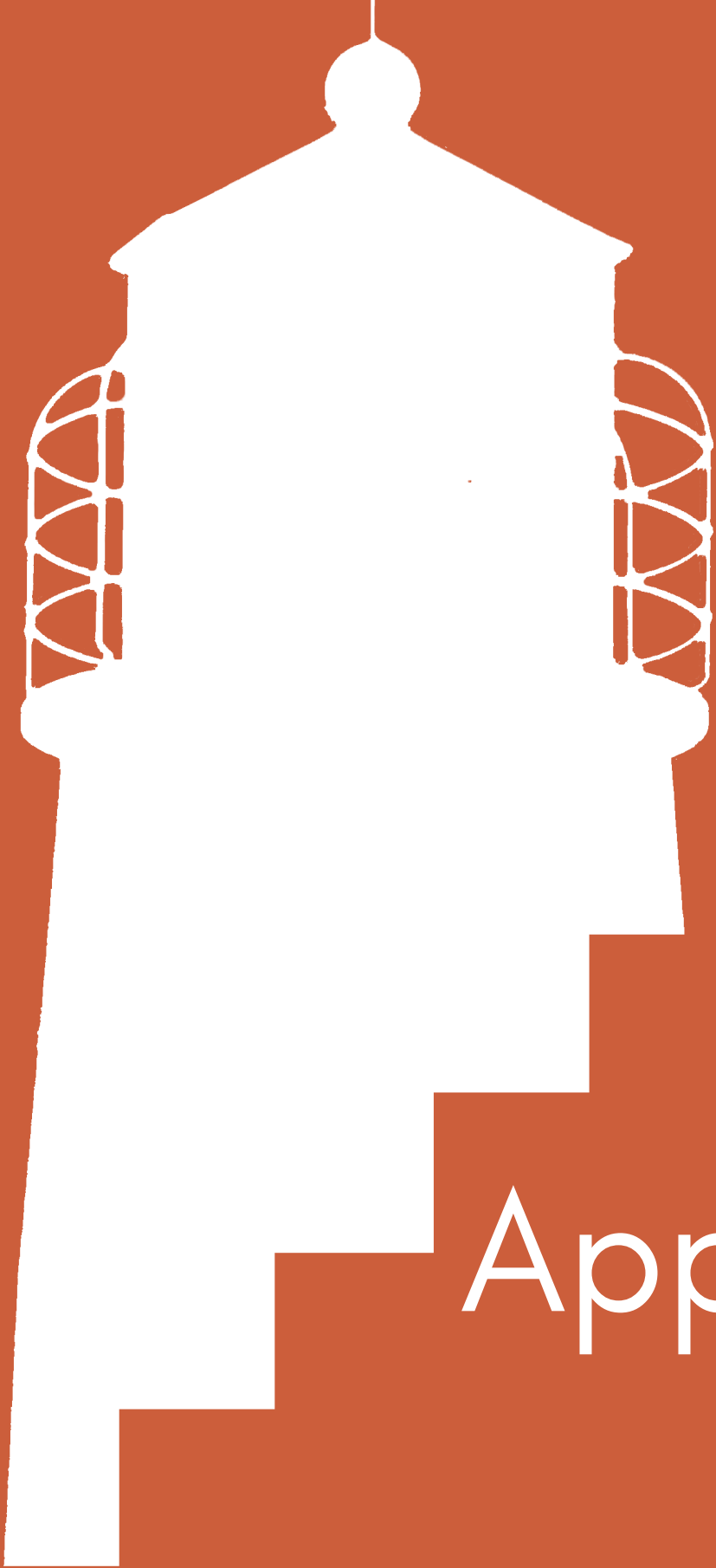
Some key questions posed were:

1. Who decides whether or not to invest and how much to invest in infrastructure improvements on the Island?
2. If SGI incorporates, would residents be required to pay both county and municipal taxes?
3. Can the Island apply for and receive grants for programs and projects?
4. Is it possible to recruit quality council members and staff to operate a city?
5. Will there be adequate preparation for coastal risks (sea level rise, hurricanes, erosion, etc.)?

In addition to the overarching sensitivity of tax increases, the group discussion identified several considerations or areas of concern for follow-up research and future discussion, including:

- Distribution of responsibilities - Questions arose around what a future distribution of services and the resulting cost sharing might look like between St. George Island and Franklin County. Specifics included questions about managing contracts for outsourced services and whether there would be a need or imperative for paid municipal staff, including a city manager.
- Enforcement of policies - Residents also voiced concerns over the enforcement of existing plans and policies, specifically citing County control over zoning and zoning enforcement. Some residents wonder if there may be alternate methods to boost their representation within existing decision-making processes, as well as whether outcomes would be different under local control.
- Comparative research - Residents would like to compare the current format for governance and its relation to the County in the County's incorporated cities, Apalachicola and Carrabelle, and how St. George Island might mimic and/or differ from them.
- Enacting change - Some participants expressed concerns about who would be able to decide on incorporation. They want clarification whether a deciding body includes full-time residents or all registered voters.
- The St. George Island Citizens Working Group recognizes that citizen input is integral in deciding the future governance of the Island. The residents that participated in the first community meeting recognized that this is not a static discussion and that conversations will need to continue in future community meetings.
- Next steps consist of a second community meeting on March 10 to further flesh out the strengths and limitations of various forms of governance and a third meeting on March 31 to serve as a community-wide question and answer session. These meetings will allow for ongoing discussion on the available options for governance and the criteria and supporting data community members will need to make a decision. Additional discussion, information, and possible future public meetings will follow the third scheduled meeting.

Findings

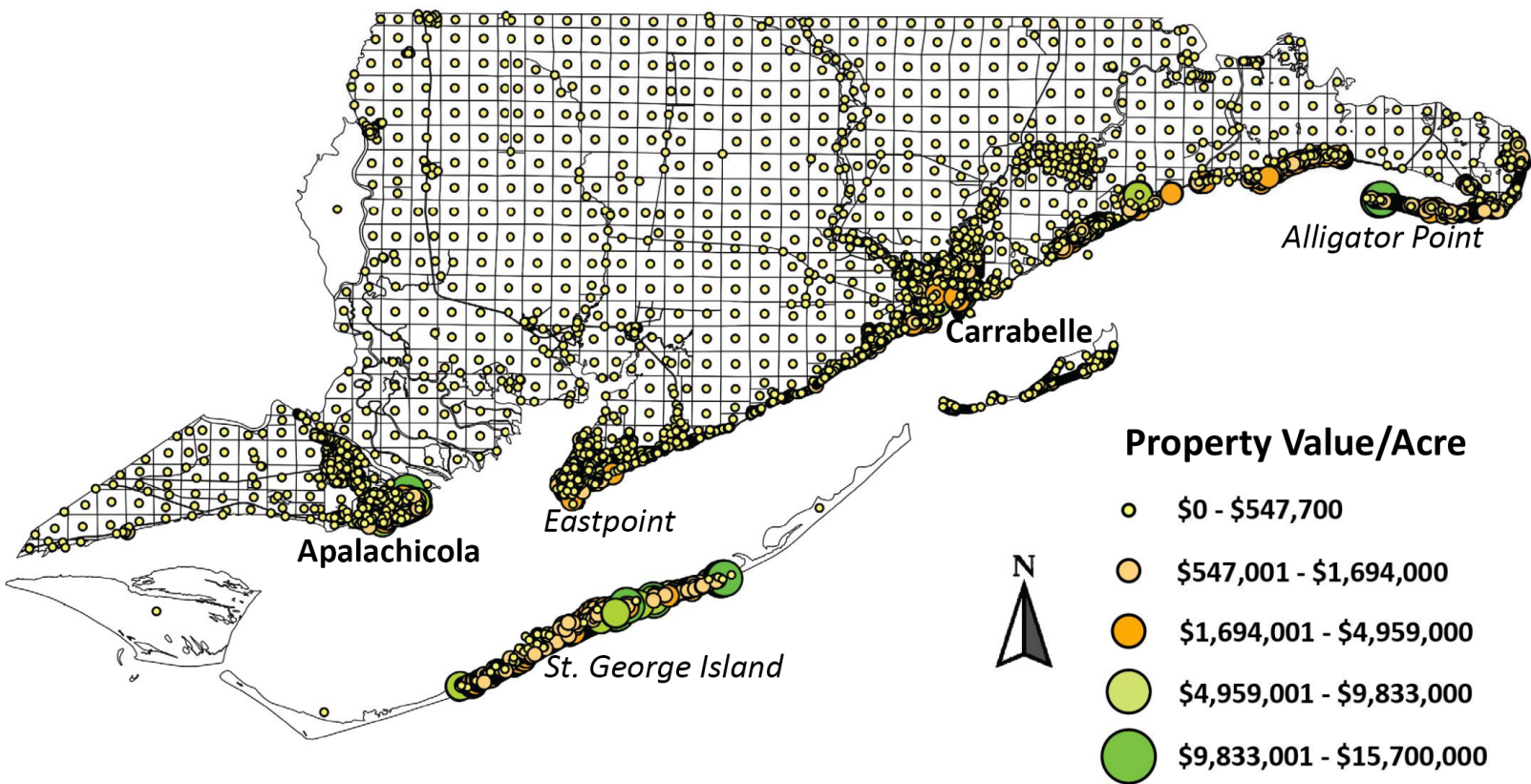


Appendices

Appendix 1: Figure A.1

Franklin County Property Values/Acre Map

This map shows the property values/acre across Franklin County. St. George Island has the largest concentration of high-valued property in the county which provides Franklin County with a considerable amount of its tax revenue base. This disparity in property values/acre is evident between the County and the Island on this map. Many residents feel they should get more investment from the county since they account for such a large portion of the available funds.



Appendix 2

Pre-Meeting Survey & Flyer

The following attachment illustrates the pre-meeting survey generated by the FSU Studio Team and advertised by the St. George Island Citizens Working Group. It consists of 10 questions used as a tool to gather demographic data, an approximate headcount for meeting turnout, and to gain insights to resident's interests and concerns of the Island's current status. The February 10 meeting discussion topics were informed by the results of the following survey questions.

St. George Island Community Meetings, February 10, 2021 - Participant Form

Thank you for your interest in the St. George Island (SGI) Visioning Project. Members of your community reached out to FSU to support a series of community meetings. To help us better prepare for these important sessions, we ask that you complete this brief questionnaire and register for the Zoom-based session that you plan to attend. Should you have any questions about this questionnaire or the planned meetings, please do not hesitate to contact Julie Krontz at TownofSGI@gmail.com.

Q1 Personal Information:

- Name: (1) _____
 - Email: (2) _____
 - Phone: (3) _____
 - Street Address: (4) _____
-

Q2 Gender:

- Male (1)
 - Female (2)
 - Other (3)
-

Q3 Age:

- 18-24 (1)
 - 25-34 (2)
 - 35-44 (3)
 - 45-54 (4)
 - 55-65 (5)
 - 65+ (6)
-

Q4 Indicate your ability to attend via Zoom, and/or if you wish to be contacted about alternative arrangements.

- I cannot attend via Zoom, and require alternative arrangements. (1)
 - I can attend via Zoom, and do not require alternative arrangements. (4)
-

Q5 Which community meeting do you plan to attend?

- 10AM (1)
 - 6:30PM (2)
-

Q6 Tell us about your residency status.

- I am a permanent resident and I own my home. (1)
 - I am a permanent resident and I rent my home. (2)
 - I am a seasonal resident but I own my home. (3)
 - I am a seasonal resident and I rent my home. (4)
 - I own an investment property on SGI, but I am not a permanent or seasonal resident. (5)
 - None of the above. (6)
-

Q7 Do you own a business on St. George Island? (Check all that apply.)

- No, I do not own a business. (1)
 - I own a traditional brick and mortar business located in SGI. (2)
 - I operate a home-based business from my residence. (3)
 - I operate an online business from my residence. (4)
 - I receive rental income from a property I own in SGI. (5)
-

Q8 Are you registered to vote in Franklin County based on a home address in SGI?

- Yes (1)
 - No (2)
-

Q9 What is your favorite thing about St. George Island?

Q10 If one thing could be changed about St. George Island what would it be?

Fostering the Future

A Zoom-based Visioning Session

February 10, 10am & 6:30pm



**Tell us about
your ideal
community!**

DISCUSSION TOPIC

Understanding the community we love to better plan for its future. Join us to discuss the treasures of SGI, areas for improvement, and strategies to achieve these goals.

Please note: both meeting times follow the same agenda.

HOW TO JOIN THE MEETING:

Click the following zoom link during the session of your choice or scan the QR code:

https://fsu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_ebORLJPr6W10X1c



Moderated by FSU Dept. of Urban and Regional Planning

Appendices

Appendix 3

Resources

- Department of Natural Resources. (1992). Apalachicola Bay Aquatic Preserve Management Plan. Retrieved March 03, 2021, from <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CZIC-qh90-75-f6-a63-1992/html/CZIC-qh90-75-f6-a63-1992.htm>
- Federal Emergency Management Agency. (1994). Mitigation of Flood and Erosion Damage to Residential Buildings in Coastal Areas. Retrieved March 03, 2021, from <https://www.franklincountyflorida.com/uploads/floodinfo/Mitgation-Flood-Erosion-Damage-Residential-Buildings-Coastal-Areas-FEMA257.pdf>
- Franklin County. (2009). Franklin County Local Mitigation Strategy. Retrieved March 03, 2021, from <http://www.franklinemergencymanagement.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/FranklinCounty-LMS-Section-04.pdf>
- Gaither, C. J., & Worthen, H. D. (2010). The influence of Race and Cass on Resident Response to Economic Restructuring in Franklin County, Florida, USA. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 11(5), 451-474. doi:10.1080/14649365.2010.488748
- Office of Environmental Services. (1987). Resource Inventory of the Apalachicola River and Bay Drainage Basin. Retrieved March 03, 2021, from <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CZIC-qh105-f6-e36-1987/html/CZIC-qh105-f6-e36-1987.htm>
- Town of SGI Website. <http://townofsgi.com/>