

In Summary

A CLEAR COORDINATED VISION

Message received! St Georgians want a clear vision for the future and a coordinated approach to achieving that vision. What is apparent is that there is an element of scepticism and 'fatigue' given several previous attempts at planning for the Town. It's also very clear that coordination is desperately needed between all the various groups trying to spearhead efforts in the Town. Without agreement amongst these various groups to come together to work towards a unified approach, any efforts to take this current initiative forwards will only falter. Nobody wants another plan that sits on a shelf!

Emergent Themes

Several themes emerged from the results of this initial community engagement.

1. VIBRANT ECONOMY

Whilst some in the community are concerned that economic development may be at odds with preserving the heritage of the Town, most people expressed a strong need for St George to develop a vibrant economy, revolving around local business and local products built upon the Town's local character and heritage. It is widely accepted that the overall health of any community is contingent upon a healthy economy and foot traffic is key! Retail, especially boutique retail, arts, entertainment, cultural events, business, entrepreneurship, and non-profits are all considered central to the future economic health of St George.

2. SENSE OF PLACE

St George is unique, with a character and sense of place that sets it aside from the rest of Bermuda. St Georgians are proud of their community. For many it is an multigenerational community with families having lived there for generations. People tend to know each other, and the town's shops, restaurants, bars, clubs, and places of worship provide venues for residents to

repeatedly interact and bond and this creates a sense of community that comes from living together in a small town. Many of its people will tell you that St George is God's country and that they would not want to live elsewhere. It is evident that this sense of place is central to the future vision for the town, but to be true to its roots, St George needs to embrace an increasingly diverse population (both resident and transient), that has a stake in its mutual success.

3. HISTORIC, ENVIRONMENTAL & CULTURAL STEWARDSHIP

St Georgians have a very strong sense of stewardship for the historic architecture and buildings of the Town, the local "old world charm" framed through these buildings and the narrow, winding streets, the nearby fortifications, the harbourside views and quiet public parks, and the cultural history. The character of the Town and authenticity as an historic town has stood the test of time, by respecting these assets, but there is concern that the desire to protect this heritage often overshadows the fact that St George isn't just an historic town, but a living town that needs to find a way to provide for the needs of the community in a modern world. This can be accomplished by recognising that there is a huge potential to capitalise (sensitively) on these historic assets and the UNESCO World Heritage Site designation as part of the future vision. It is also clear that the sense of calm and quiet offered in St George through the scenic views, and small, reflective park spaces dotted around are important to the wellbeing of the locals and need to be protected, but also need to be accessible otherwise their value is lost. Going forward, new opportunities need to be created for people to work, live and play, whilst embracing this stewardship, rather than being stifled by it.

4. HOUSING & SOCIAL OPTIONS

St George is unique, with a significant proportion of the housing stock that is old, small, and serviced by narrow streets. Many of the buildings are listed historic structures which are constructed and maintained with traditional materials. Although the purchase prices of

many of these materials are not particularly high, the maintenance of these buildings is labour intensive and hence expensive. Some respondents noted that rents are high, and the rental stock is worn. The extent to which labour-intensive maintenance affects the quality and prices of rental units and the presence of derelict buildings is an issue worthy of study.

St. George is a desirable place to live and work. Although people outside St. George were not polled, anecdotal information suggests that there is a demand by younger people and retirees for housing in St. George. If this is true, this may provide opportunity.

Accessibility for the physically challenged is poor in much of the old town. Coupled with an aging population this can create significant challenges in the community. Providing accessible, modern housing, including assisted-living options in the town is an option that may allow long-term residents to remain within the town and encourage retirees to relocate to the town. This may also free up some of the historic housing stock for younger, more agile people to move into, or potentially to be repurposed for Airbnb or similar use. Increasing the number of younger residents and tourists within the town is likely to improve the sustainability of businesses in the town.

5. TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS

An improved transportation network including buses, mini buses, taxis, and ferry service is deemed critical by many, for the future development of the Town, if footfall is to increase. This would improve access for both residents and visitors.

The waterside location of the town and protected inshore waters also provides opportunity for a more local ferry service. Regular ferry or water taxi service to St. David's and as far west as Grotto Bay might enable increased visitation to the town and drive increased business in the town.

6. CREATIVITY AND INNOVATIVE

In recent years there has been an influx of artists and jewellers to St. George. The architecture, natural beauty and people of the town and surrounding area creates a setting in which subjects for artistic interpretation are in abundance.

The creation of art is usually a peaceful activity of interest to the observer. It is the type of activity that

fits well within a visitor-oriented and historic environment such as St. George. Building on the work of those who have already moved to the town, the promotion of the town as a venue for artists to visit and work is an apparent opportunity worthy of exploring.