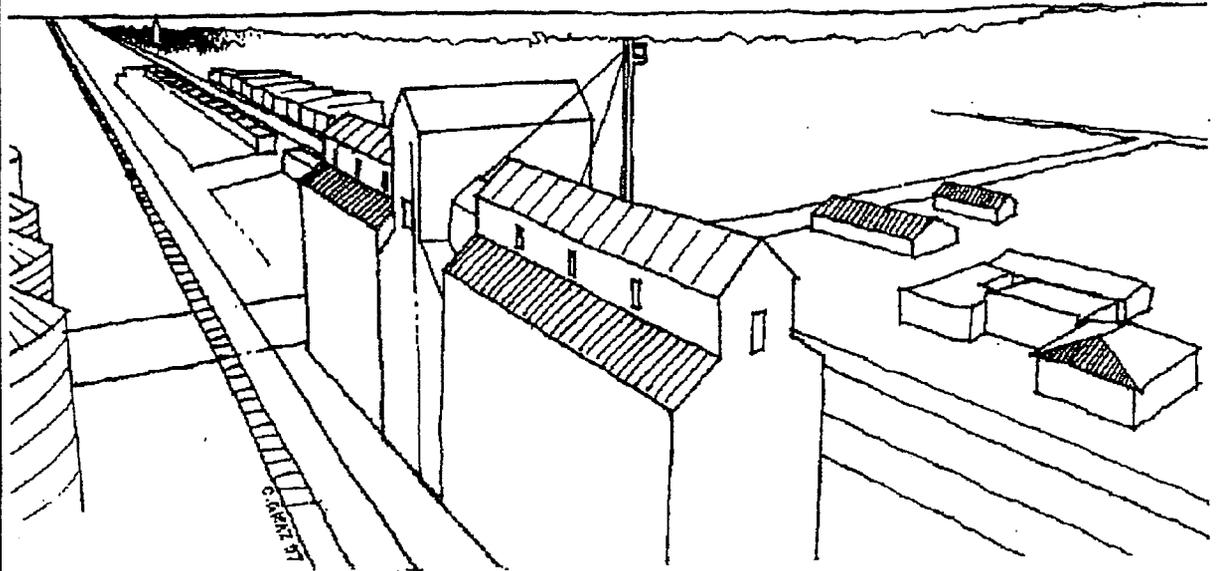




“The future is not someplace we are going to, but a place we are creating. The paths to it are not found, they are made.”

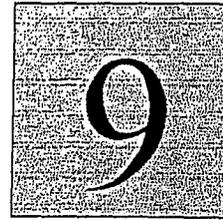
- Jane Garvey,
Deputy Administrator, FHA

The Path



Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths and Weaknesses



INTRODUCTION

The process of identifying a community's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats often is referred to as SWOT analysis. This process provides valuable information for planning the community's future, as it focuses attention on preserving strengths, overcoming weaknesses, taking advantage of opportunities, and minimizing threats. The effective utilization of information generated by a SWOT analysis results in policies that make the community more viable and prosperous.

METHODOLOGY

Information collected during focus-group meetings, as well as information generated by the studies discussed in this plan, forms the basis of the SWOT analysis. Understanding the functions of a particular community largely depends on understanding the different perspectives of its citizens. Therefore, interacting with residents and listening to what they have to say is important.

Once information derived from both the focus-group sessions and the studies is categorized into SWOT classifications, the basis is provided for making recommendations to the city. Those recommendations, including a list of what is believed to be the top five issues facing the City of St. Marys, are summarized in the final chapter of this plan.

Because much of the information was gathered as part of independent studies and, thus, independent inventories, some duplication is evident in this chapter. However, it is important to note that some issues may be viewed as both potentially beneficial and detrimental to the community, the determining factor being the action taken.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths

Two questions generate discussion that leads to the determination of a community's strengths:

Chapter Sections:

- *Introduction*
- *Methodology*
- *SWOT Analysis*
 - *Strengths*
 - *Weaknesses*
 - *Opportunities*
 - *Threats*

Understanding the functions of a particular community largely depends on understanding the different perspectives of its citizens.

Strengths:

What are the advantages of the community?

What does the community do well?

- What are the advantages of the community?
- What does the community do well?

The following items summarize the strengths of St. Marys.

Community Pride. The pride that the City of St. Marys has is seen not only by its citizens but also by those who pass through the community. The cleanliness of the city and the appearances of residential structures provide evidence of this pride.

Friendly Environment. The size of the city allows most residents to know one another by name. In addition, many residents have family ties to the city and have remained in the area to be close to family members. Others, however, have moved to the community because they believe that St. Marys provides a good environment in which to start a family or raise children.

Location. St. Marys is a community that still has a small-town atmosphere, yet the larger communities of Manhattan and Topeka are easily accessible and provide employment and shopping opportunities for residents of St. Marys. The city's location allows residents to live in a city with "small-town charm" but still have access to the amenities of urban areas.

Diverse Employers. The city has a strong and diverse core of major employers, such as Bayer Stone, Custom Wood Products, Farmer's Union CO-OP, St. Mary's Academy, St. Marys Health Center, Telecommunications Research Associates, and Unified School District 321. This diversity provides a solid foundation on which to build a promising economic future.

Agriculture. As the city continues to grow, agriculture may play a smaller role in the economy, but the region currently maintains a strong agricultural base. Part of this base is rich agricultural land and access to profitable agricultural services.

Education. Education is an important element of the community. The city not only has quality public-school facilities, but it also is served by a private institution, St. Mary's Academy. Both the public and private systems are widely supported by residents of the city.

Recreation and the Arts. The facilities available to residents for recreation activities--such as the swimming pool, the miniature and municipal golf courses, the baseball diamonds, and the city playgrounds--all contribute to a quality recreation system. In addition, the city recently has implemented a summer recreation program for children of elementary- and middle-school ages.

St. Marys is a community that still has a small-town atmosphere, where most residents know one another by name.

Both the public and private education systems are widely supported by residents of the city.

THE PATH

The city also benefits from the museum located at the Indian Pay Station and from monuments such as the Vietnam War Memorial and the World War I Memorial Arch. In addition, the city offers several local events, such as the Independence Day celebration, arts and crafts festivals, summer sports activities, and Oregon Trail Days.

Medical Care. St. Marys offers a variety of regular and home health care services for its residents. Included among these services is the extensive operation provided by St. Marys Health Center.

Safety. Citizens of St. Marys comment about the safety of their city, a feature that contributes to a positive sense of community.

Weaknesses

The following questions are asked of citizens to determine the weaknesses of their community:

- What about the community could be improved?
- What is done poorly in the community?

The answers to these questions are discussed below.

Employment. A major concern of the residents of St. Marys is related to job opportunities. With a growing population, citizens fear that not enough jobs are available within the community. While the future of a municipality depends upon many things, one of the most important is the creation of jobs. In order for St. Marys to become amore attractive area for employment, community officials need to market the available spaces in the city's industrial park and make a commitment to support established businesses and industries.

Shopping Habits. St. Marys' proximity to Hypermart and Westridge Mall in Topeka and to Manhattan Town Center makes shopping opportunities outside of St. Marys easily accessible. The availability of goods and services in nearby cities results in "leakage" that robs the community of much of its potential revenue. To keep residents shopping in St. Marys, local businesses could work together by utilizing cooperative marketing strategies and promotions, and the Chamber of Commerce could be strengthened to enhance business activities within the city.

Traffic and Parking. The City of St. Marys experiences heavy traffic on its main business corridor, U.S. Highway 24. While this highway may act as a magnet to bring people to the community, it also acts as a safety hazard for those who shop in the downtown area.

St. Marys offers a variety of regular and home health care services for its residents.

Weaknesses:

What about the community could be improved?

What is done poorly in the community?

With a growing population, citizens fear that not enough jobs are available within the community.

In order to alleviate this safety concern, the visibility of pedestrian crossings along U.S. 24 should be improved and speed limits should be enforced by local law enforcement officers. Parking also is a problem identified by many individuals within the community. Therefore, existing parking regulations (two-hour time limit) should be enforced.

Housing. Due to the lack of available vacant lots zoned for residential property, home prices in the St. Marys community are relatively high when compared to the rest of the area. Therefore, there is a need for quality, affordable rental housing. Also, new areas for housing development should be identified in the city and the ETZ to alleviate congestion in older areas of town and to provide persons with more housing choices.

Youth Concerns. Citizens are concerned about the availability of activities for the youth of the community. This issue requires attention because a large portion of the city's population consists of school-age children. Community officials may wish to consider the establishment of a community center as a place for the youth to congregate.

A community center would provide a place for the youth to congregate.

Opportunities:

What are the most promising opportunities for the community?

What interesting trends do you notice in the city?

Opportunities

The opportunities available to a community may be identified by asking the following questions:

- What are the most promising opportunities for the community?
- What interesting trends do you notice in the city?

The following discussion summarizes St. Marys' opportunities.

Good Location. The city can use its location between Topeka and Manhattan to its advantage when attracting businesses to the area. In addition, St. Marys is easily accessible via U.S. Highway 24, Kansas Highway 63, and the Union Pacific Railroad, and it is just minutes from Interstate 70.

Business Park. The city has an industrial park with vacant lots on which to build. This provides St. Marys with an opportunity to attract new businesses and, therefore, new jobs to the community.

Housing Demand. The market for housing in St. Marys is strong, as indicated by high turnover rates for residential structures. Projections indicate a need for additional housing because the city will have a deficit after the year 2000. Therefore, all vacant residential lots should be utilized to their potential, as should all existing infill sites.

Golf Course. A public golf course in a community the size of St. Marys is relatively unique and provides another feature to attract people to the city. Due to the fact that another golf course is located in Wamego, the City of St. Marys should ensure that the condition of its course is comparable and that its fees are competitive.

Community Festivals and Celebrations. Festivals and celebrations attract visitors to St. Marys and provide local residents with opportunities to become involved in their community. These events could be expanded or otherwise enhanced to generate additional attention and revenue for the community.

Threats

The following questions generate discussion about threats to the community:

- What are the obstacles encountered by the city?
- How well does the city compete with nearby communities?
- Is changing technology threatening the city?

Threats to St. Marys are listed below.

Business Environment. Businesses in cities such as Topeka, Manhattan, and Wamego provide competition for businesses in St. Marys, so it is important that local businesses try to offer their products at competitive prices. It also is important that the City of St. Marys attract additional industrial and commercial businesses to the community. The community should encourage businesses in under-represented sectors, and it should attempt to expand in the areas of communications, manufacturing, and wholesale trade in order to increase the tax base while adding spin-off and other compatible businesses to the city.

Annexation. In regard to expansion, the City of St. Marys is somewhat limited by geographic features and political boundaries. However, given the fact that its population is projected to increase, it is likely that the city will find it necessary to annex additional land. Expansion of the city should be done in a manner that promotes compact development and discourages sprawl. In other words, efforts should be made to keep the city a "walking" community in which all points are reachable by foot. Compact development not only creates the likelihood of a cohesive community, but it also minimizes infrastructure costs.

The condition of the golf course should be comparable to, and fees must be competitive with, the course in Wamego.

Threats:

What are the obstacles encountered by the city?

How well does the city compete with nearby communities?

Is changing technology threatening the city?

Golf Course. If the golf course is not used by a sufficient number of golfers, it may prove to be difficult to maintain and may drain the city of needed funds.

Safety likely will be an important issue as the population continues to grow.

Safety. As the population of the city increases, safety is likely to become a more important issue. The city should be pro-active in regard to this issue by ensuring adequate levels of police and fire protection. In addition, it may be necessary to implement neighborhood watch groups to keep crime to a minimum.