

6. What Next for MSG?

6.1 Will MSG Persevere?

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The MSG process has come to hinge on several tenets: ongoing education of members, elevation of the general level of future land use discussion, an attempt (not always successful) to focus on issues and ideas rather than personalities and perceived agendas, and a commitment to recording progress and sharing it. Because these hallmarks of the process bring their own rewards, MSG has persisted.

Some outside observers are surprised that the effort has persisted as long as it has. Nevertheless, along the way MSG members have had their share of frustration, and a number of members have either dropped out or reduced their participation. There are several factors which will affect the future success of MSG and help answer the question: Will MSG persevere? And, if so, how will it be different?

6.1.1 *Reasons for Skepticism*

Since its inception MSG has endured a small but dedicated group of naysayers and skeptics—people who, for one reason or another, believed or hoped MSG would stumble and fail. Despite the delivery of this interim report, a major volunteer effort by any measure, they will find more grist for their mills, no doubt citing the following debilitating factors:

Summer — Summer is always a challenging time as vacations and heat-induced lethargy take their toll on continuity and effectiveness

Burnout — The lengthy period of regular meetings has already taken its toll, as MSG has experienced reduced participation. Many who might have hoped that a finite series of meetings might quickly lead to a new plug-and-play blueprint for east of I-75 have come to realize the difficulties in forging community consensus. The energy and commitment required for long term problem solving is significant.

Competing Opportunities — There are inevitable choices participants will need to make between MSG meetings and other meetings such as Comprehensive Plan Amendment meetings. For many, disposable times for meetings are fixed and these members will be forced to choose between meetings they must attend and those they would like to attend. The realities of time allocation, coupled with the legal significance of official participation at hearings may work against MSG.

Funding — The originally allocated funding has been expended and at least one commissioner has expressed a commitment to not allocate any more for an ongoing process. Without professional facilitation the group's progress is at risk. Replacement funding has not been identified.

6.1.2 *Reasons for Optimism*

In response to these realities, MSG may decide to reduce the pace of meetings-taking a break of sorts. But despite these auspicious signs, there are several good reasons to believe MSG will continue:

Intrinsic Rewards — The guest presentations (even those that aggravate us) are enlightening and educational, and despite the fact that not everyone likes each other and that some moments of genuine enmity occasionally erupt, there is also some crazy, exciting energy involved working on these problems and (dare we say it) moments of actual fun and self-deprecating humor. We don't discuss it, but subtle examples of networking have been facilitated by the existence of the MSG. For example, people who would not ordinarily connect have gotten together on topics, sometimes unrelated to MSG's efforts.

Momentum — Despite the slow pace (even if the group met 4 hours a night every two weeks- that's equivalent to only a week's worth of work every five months) this interim report is a major contribution to future land use planning in the county, providing a solid foundation for additional work. At this moment we are most aware of the shortcomings of the report, but if allowed to age a short while its utility and relevance will appear to increase. Although it may be hard to detect, we are on a roll of sorts.

The Alternative — While the public hearing process may be unavoidable, few if any look forward to it. Whenever we stare across the table at each other we need only remember waiting five hours to give five minutes of testimony to appreciate the potentials of the joint problem-solving approach the MSG affords.

6.2 *Other Continuing Activities*

The following ideas are possibilities for MSG consideration:

Public Review

Soliciting Public Comment — MSG has talked of collaborating with the Planning Department to get our findings out to the public in a series of meetings. There is also the possibility of returning to the Sarasota Herald-Tribune for a special feature, not on the process- but the actual content of our work.

