

9/4/2003

Firm researching plans for city marina

*By Jennifer Thomas
The Palatka Daily News*

PALATKA - Plans for a downtown marina could be available for city officials in 90 days, Rob Semmes, a senior scientist with Applied Technology and Management Inc. of Gainesville, said Wednesday.

Semmes and Applied Technology are researching the marina idea.

The firm is a subcontractor for EDSA of Fort Lauderdale, another firm that the city commission will be asked by city Main Street Manager Cathy Nagengast to contract with next week to design a downtown redevelopment master plan.

Applied Technology's work will also involve receiving public input at workshops over a 2-day period, which Nagengast said should begin late this month.

City officials have viewed the marina as an integral part of the plan.

The city commission would use \$150,000 from a \$90,000 federal Economic Development Administration grant and 60,000 in matching city funds to pay for the project.

Semmes, who spoke to the Main Street board of directors at the Putnam County Chamber of Commerce in Palatka Wednesday, said he and Kirby Marshall, also of Applied Technology, plan to take a look at the site this weekend from a boat on the St. Johns River.

Their research involves determining boats that would use the area, how many boats slips they can place there and services boaters need, Semmes said.

He said he envisions the marina as having shared power, water, telephone and cable service and fuel, including diesel.

Other amenities would include shopping, showers, a business center and boutiques that would connect the visitors to the Main Street district, he said. Those are especially significant for boaters with, 35-40-foot cabin cruisers that cost \$250,000 and higher.

The Main Street area includes North and South historic districts, downtown to the railroad tracks on St. Johns Avenue and the old Florida Furniture Industries Inc. plant on River Street.

Semmes said the city would likely need partners to help raise the money to build the marina. "You

know, it doesn't get any cheaper than \$2 or \$3 million," he said about the cost for such a project.

He said if the city leases the space, it would retain some oversight of what occurs at the marina.

Applied Technology will also work with the city to secure a permit for the project—something that kept the city and a developer, Zirkelbach of Palmetto, from moving forward in 2000 with the marina idea.

Nagengast said pursuing a permit for such projects is a lengthy, involved process.

Semmes said, "Developers are afraid of permits."

But he said he thinks his firm has encouraged the city to acquire the marina permits before hiring a developer to carry out the project.

On Wednesday, some Main Street board members brought up other ideas for developing the marina.

Board Promotions Chairman Chip Laibl said diesel fuel is unavailable, especially for larger yachts coming to the area.

Board Vice President Larry Pritchett asked if Semmes had considered a walkway that the state Department of Transportation plans to build under Memorial Bridget in its own plan.

And Pritchett said development of the 43-acre Wilson property, which is up for sale along with the Florida Furniture Inc. plant on River Street, could have a big impact on downtown development.

Semmes said he had not heard of the walkway, adding, "But we just did that in Charleston."

He said the firm is concentrating its plans on the 100 block and the area of the Frank George Apartments.

Semmes said Applied Technology projects include the Ashley Marina at the Ashley River Bridge and the City Marina, both in Charleston.

Applied Technology has offices in Florida, Georgia, South Carolina and Rhode Island.