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VIPA, Royal Caribbean, Announce Transformation of Crown Bay Into World Class Tourism Attraction With \$250 Million Development

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Wonder of the Seas, the world's largest ship with a capacity of 7,000, docked at the Austin "Babe" Monsanto Marine Terminal in Crown Bay on Wednesday, Oct. 18, 2023. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM

CROWN BAY, ST. THOMAS — With the world's largest cruise ship as the backdrop, the V.I. Port Authority, led by audacious Executive Director Carlton Dowe, along with partner Royal Caribbean Group and investor Cruise Terminals International (CTI), on Wednesday announced a \$250 million plan to transform Crown Bay into a world class tourism destination that features several attractions aimed at growing the territory's profile as one of the best places to visit.

The quarter of a billion dollars price tag, following intense negotiations between Mr. Dowe, RCG and CTI, resulted in one of the most favorable deals for the U.S. Virgin Islands, as the Port Authority, whose investment will equate to roughly 20 percent of the total sum, (\$50 million), will see 100 percent of its commitment being funded through a capital recovery charge that Royal Caribbean will be charging guests, according to Joshua Carroll, vice president of Destination Development and Deployment at RCG.

The RCG and CTI executives traveled to St. Thomas to mark the occasion, a nod to its significance and transformative nature. According to Mr. Carroll, the redevelopment — which spans a vast portion of Crown Bay — has already started, with recognizable work picking up pace in 2025, and some portions of the plan coming online no later than 2028. It will include a day resort with a capacity of about 1,000, among other attractions, a new shore excursion dock, more space and ground transportation considerations, as well as equal placement for local vendors, which Mr. Carroll said will be a fixture of the redeveloped Crown Bay. Mr. Carroll also stated that RCG will make the process of engaging with the development company easy for interested local businesses.

Though the work will be done with current operations in mind so as to minimize disruption, current vendors at some point will be temporarily relocated to nearby property that VIPA purchased a while back as part of its vision to accommodate the redevelopment of Crown Bay. "That's the vision that we had knowing that at some point, if anything unfolds, that's the property that we would have to look to," Mr. Dowe said. "So we expect that in this relationship there will be some monies that will be set aside very early on so that all those folks can be relocated."

Mr. Dowe, however, emphasized that Crown Bay will not be shut down. "Similarly to the airport, we are going to be doing construction in an active facility; we don't expect to shut it down," he said, using the Cyril E. King Airport where the \$26.8 million Parking and Transportation Center is being built without disruption to normal operations, as an example of what to expect during the Crown Bay redevelopment.

Wednesday's announcement marked yet another milestone for the Port Authority's executive director, who has completed several major projects at both the marine and airport arms of VIPA's sprawling operations. Mr. Dowe has accomplished numerous significant projects since his reappointment as executive director of VIPA in 2019. From the [Gallows Bay Marine Facility](#); a [\\$24 million project](#) which has led to [cargo operations moving from Gallows Bay to the Molasses Pier](#); completion of V.I.P.A.'s [new maintenance building](#) in St. Thomas; [Standard Aviation's new hangar](#) that proponents have praised as a major development that is growing the territory's tourism sector; the Henry E. Rohlsen Airport's [Terminal Expansion and Modernization Project](#) which was [completed months ahead of schedule](#), and the CEKA Parking and Transportation Center which is [well underway](#), among others.

Regarding cruise tourism on St. Croix, a Dowe-brokered agreement with RCG has led to an increase in visitors to the Big Island of more than 100 percent, with visitor arrivals jumping to 150,000 last year from 40,000 the year prior.

"Please give a round of applause for the man whose vision we are really realizing today, our executive director, Mr. Carlton Dowe," stated VIPA board member and Public Works Commissioner Derek Gabriel as Wednesday's event came to a close.

"For us as a governing board, you have to have vision and you have to be able to buy into that vision early on. And I think anybody that knows this gentleman to my right," he added, referring

to Mr. Dowe, "knows that his vision is pretty audacious every single time he brings it up. And we look at him and we're like, 'no way, it can't be done.' But as we go through these exercises and as we meet with our partners, and as we talk to [firms] like Royal Caribbean, CTI; we speak to our partners on the airline side, we realize that the vision is grounded in actual truth and facts.

"And we realize that as we want to continue to be the leaders in our region, we must continue to step out on a ledge and to take those chances. Calculated risks, but always take those chances to continue to grow our tourism product."

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