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Developers Request Land Rezoning for Hotel, Guest House and Outdoor Performance Space on St. Croix

Developers request land rezoning for hotel, guest house, and performance space in St. Croix

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Rendering of a 14-room guest house for long and short-term rentals in Estate Glynn.

Lawmakers during Wednesday's Committee of the Whole meeting expressed overarching support for several zoning requests brought before them. At least two of the requests promised increased economic activity, prompting Senator Javan James to declare "it's a good day for St. Croix."

One rezoning request was Bill 35-0192, which sought to change four plots of land between Prince Street and Hospital Street in Frederiksted from R-4 to R-3. The Prince Street property currently houses a warehouse, while the Hospital Street lots house a long-term rental apartment property.

The owner hopes to transition the buildings into a hotel with accessory uses, as reported by the Department of Planning and Natural Resources. “The property’s conversion into hotel use will be a satellite extension of the Fred Hotel,” explained DPNR’s Jewel Polimis.

Ms. Polimis explained that a Business Central Business District (B1) rezoning would be more appropriate, and noted that it may be of “potential benefit to the community and maybe a stimulus for the rehabilitation and or enhancement of surrounding town properties.” Clarence Brown, speaking on behalf of the property owners, shared that any rehabilitative works would be subject to the Historic Preservation Committee’s review, and indicated that the owners intend to take a phased approach to the rehabilitative work, starting immediately. Senator Javan James expressed excitement over “movement in Frederiksted.”

Legislators also considered Bill 23-0213, a request made on behalf of Positive T.A Nelson. The former senator requested a rezoning of his current residential property in Estate Morning Star to one that could accommodate various uses including social spaces, outdoor concerts, yoga, eco-lodging, and massages among several others at his existing Serenity Nest event location. Neighbors, the senators learned, had initially expressed opposition, citing possible noise pollution, disturbance of the peace, and security concerns. Referencing one family, Mr. Nelson explained “we have since discussed the matter much more in-depth, and she is no longer in opposition.”

Notwithstanding, DPNR suggested a use variance be granted instead, as the property's current zone already allows for most of the requested uses. That variance would come with conditions including a requirement to cease all activity by 2 am, the installation of a buffer of 6 to 7-foot tall trees, and a 25-foot minimum setback from any adjacent properties. Though admitting that the latter consideration would “squeeze me in”, Mr. Nelson told Senator Angel Bolques that he is “grateful for anything we can get.”

Meanwhile, Bill 23-0214 involved a request to rezone a plot of land in Estate Glynn from agricultural use to residential-medium density. However, lawmakers raised several points of contention over a family’s decision to construct a 14-room guest house for long and short-term rentals. Neighbors also raised concerns, including the fact that surrounding land is currently used for agricultural purposes. Senator Alma Francis-Heyliger worried about the “reduction of agricultural land,” and wondered whether the corner of the property where they intend to construct the guest house could be separated into a separate parcel and subsequently rezoned separately.

However, as DPNR’s Territorial Planner Leia LaPlace Matthew explained, the property is already at the smallest possible acreage allowed for the agricultural zoning requirement, making it impossible to “parcel it any smaller.” Instead, DPNR proposed a use variance “to allow for a group development with no prohibition on short-term rental usage.” The variance would allow them to construct structures of up to 5 units, making it necessary to construct 3 separate buildings to achieve their desired 14 units.

Other legislators including Senator Marvin Blyden and Senator Novelle Francis poked holes in the family’s belief (based on contractor estimates) that construction of such magnitude would only cost between \$1 million and \$2.5 million. “Housing community per apartments on St. Thomas and St. Croix [cost] \$750,000,” said Senator Francis. He warned the applicants to be mindful of “increasing [costs] when it comes to construction.”

The final rezoning request of the day came by way of Bill 35-0199, ratifying the governor’s approval of Minor Coastal Zone Permit No. CZX-22-22W issued to Joel Ureta for the use and occupancy of submerged lands seaward of Heathen Cove, Chenay Bay, St. Croix, and for the

installation of a recreational buoy with a mooring. In his testimony, Mr. Ureta shared that he had previously been granted the necessary permissions to establish a mooring at the same site. This re-establishment will come at an annual cost of \$500 paid to the government of the Virgin Islands.

While the Committee of the Whole holds no voting power, the four requests will be considered during the next session of the full body.

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