

Contentious “Serenity’s Nest” Use Variance Request Returns to Senate Floor, Earns Support of Lawmakers

Compromise found in St. Croix venue dispute, legislative support renewed

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Positive Nelson's Serenity's Nest

The ambitions of “Cannabis Czar” Positive T.A. Nelson to establish a social venue at his residential property on St. Croix have been re-ignited after an amended land variance request obtained significant legislative support.

His application, which would allow for the construction of an amphitheater to host outdoor concerts and a host of other activities in Estate Morning Star, was [originally supported](#) in a December Committee of the Whole Meeting. The original decision to grant the variance rested on

reassurances that Mr. Nelson would plant a tree buffer and institute a 2 a.m. end time for all activities. Lawmakers were swayed by Mr. Nelson's reassurances that he held conversations with one neighbor who had been concerned over uncomfortable noise levels. Following those talks, she was "no longer in opposition," he said.

Days later, new information reached the desks of several senators indicating that in fact several neighbors opposed the move, and wished to prioritize the generally quiet atmosphere of the area. Lawmakers then [rescinded their support](#), with Senator Alma Francis Heyliger declaring that issuing the variance would "not be fair," over concerns that loud music would disturb the residential peace. Senators Franklin Johnson and Donna Frett-Gregory similarly revoked their support for the measure.

Three months after dashing Mr. Nelson's hope for a multi-use space for concerts, yoga, eco-lodging and massages at his "Serenity's Nest" venue, lawmakers have once again had a change of heart. Upon being presented with an amendment that did away with the amphitheater plans and changed the stipulated end time for events from 2 a.m. to 1 a.m., 10 of the 11 lawmakers present voted in favor of the bill. Senator Carla Joseph abstained from the voting process.

According to Senator Angel Bolques Jr., the amendments "resolve the concerns raised from the prior hearing of this bill." The changes were implemented after Mr. Bolques heeded his colleagues' advice and returned the bill to its committee of jurisdiction to be revoked. Senator Novelle Francis, acting in his capacity as chair of the Committee of the Whole, reportedly played a crucial role in resolving the neighbor's concerns.

During Monday's legislative session, Sen. Johnson, who previously voiced outright opposition to the bill, noted that he was "so pleased that the two neighbors could come to an understanding". He, like some of his other colleagues, shared that they visited the site for a better understanding of the conflict. Addressing Mr. Nelson, Senator Javan James Sr. assured him that the legislature simply wanted to ensure that "residents living within that area can be able to enjoy the area."

For Bolques, the bill is a "promising measure in the sense of being able to lay down the groundwork for a dynamic gathering place for people to celebrate culture, vitality, and of course bring unity to the community."