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Senators Express Support For Hotel Expansion and New Pharmacy on St. Croix to Propel Economic Growth

Local lawmakers endorse rezoning for hotel expansion and new pharmaceutical services

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Sand Castle on the Beach logo. The hotel is located in Frederiksted, St. Croix.

Two rezoning requests breezed through the Committee of the Whole on Monday as the territory's lawmakers touted their potential for bolstering economic development.

The first, Bill 35-0244 was a request by Roncan Inc, doing business as Sand Castle on the Beach. Roncan seeks to rezone several plots of land in Estate Two Brothers, Smithfield and Hesselberg,

West End Quarter, St. Croix from W-1 (waterfront pleasure) to R-3 (residential medium density). The rezoning would bring the hotel into conformity with the existing structures on the property and allow for future expansion in 2-5 years.

“The properties do not meet the W-1 zoning requirements for lot area, lot width, or setbacks,” Territorial Planner Leia LaPlace-Matthew explained. She told the committee that the Department of Planning and Natural Resources finds it “appropriate to place them under the zoning technique designation they do comply with.”

President of Roncan Inc, Chris Richardson informed committee members that the current W-1 zoning presents several limitations to the company's ability to optimize the space. “These unusable areas become dysfunctional spaces that affect the curb appeal of the hotel and its circulation and flow,” he said. With two undeveloped plots, Sand Castle on the Beach hopes to eventually increase its room stock to 78 rooms and possibly employ 30 more people. Fearful of being “premature,” the hotel’s owners indicated that they would wait for the rezoning to be finalized before announcing concrete expansion plans.

Lawmakers, particularly those representing the St. Croix district, were thrilled at the prospect of added growth for the island. Notwithstanding, Senator Kenneth Gittens expressed concern about public access to the shoreline of the beachfront property, while Senator Diane Capehart wondered what environmental considerations would be taken into account ahead of possible expansion. Those fears, however, were quickly allayed by the developers.

Senators also offered robust support for Bill 35-0260, a request by Hubert Watty to rezone his property in Estate Clifton Hill, Kings Quarter, St. Croix from R-2 (Residential-Low Density-One and Two Family) to B-3 (Business Scattered). Dr. Watty currently operates a medical clinic on the property. He told lawmakers that the rezoning would allow him to lease office space that already exists on the property, and establish a new pharmacy.

The current rezoning, he said, is limiting, particularly with the amount of investment he has poured into it. The pharmacy would create “better access to pharmaceutical care,” Dr. Watty explained, referencing the closure of a nearby pharmacy in 2023. “If that rezoning is granted, that would also increase employment abilities and help me to hire more people,” he told lawmakers.

While the Committee of the Whole does not vote on proposed legislation, members pledged support for both bills when they come to the appropriate committee. Senator Marise James expressed “it's clear to me that we need responsible development on St. Croix,” and joined Senator Ray Fonseca in describing both projects as “worthy.”