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"A Lot Slips Through the Cracks" on St. Croix: Sidewalk Bar Proposal Sparks Debate at Historical Preservation Meeting

Concerns raised over design and parking requirements for new Cruz Bay sidewalk bar

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The St. Thomas-St. John Historical Preservation Society met on Tuesday to review several applications, including a proposal to develop a sidewalk bar at Meada's Plaza in Cruz Bay. During the meeting, a discussion arose regarding the provision of public parking and the often convoluted permitting process for construction in historic districts.

Construction for the proposed sidewalk amenity would entail demolition of the existing slab and replacement with a new finish. A screening wall and unobtrusive lighting would be added to the

set up, and the seating area opposite the bar would consist of movable furniture.

Sean Krigger, director of the State Historical Preservation Office, expressed concerns over the plans for the herringbone design on the perimeter wall. Although Cruz Bay “does have a little bit more of a modern vocabulary with its architecture,” he said that the proposed design pushed the envelope a bit too far. “So on the flooring it's fine, but at a wall surface, especially for the exposed streetscape, it does step outside of that architectural language.” Instead, he recommended that the use of stone be investigated, as that is already in use on similar walls along Vester Gade. Additionally, Kurt Marsh, the committee member who resides on St. John, suggested that the separation between street and bar could be maintained with a “continuation of the wrought iron details that exist on the property.”

As it did in a [recent meeting of the St. Croix Historic Preservation Committee](#), the issue of parking came up. Committee member Enrique Rodriguez noted that the space being proposed for the sidewalk amenity was originally permitted for parking. Under the property's current zoning, the HPC does not have the authority to waive the parking requirements, Mr. Krigger noted. However, Mr. Marsh observed that the property owners have a “large parking lot area” close by, that they were hoping to use as off-site parking for the complex. He warned that absent the requisite approvals or waivers from the territorial planning office and related agencies on the parking issue, the time spent seeking approval from the HPC could be for naught.

A suggestion that the committee could approve the proposal before them contingent on the developers subsequently seeking the necessary permits was strongly discouraged by Mr. Krigger. “The committee should not be approving something unless it adheres to the zoning and building laws,” he argued.

After a lengthy discussion about the requirements for parking, architect Clarence Brown expressed some frustration with the permitting process. “One of the issues we deal with as well...everyone we go to says you should have gone there first,” he said in response to suggestions that clearance for the proposed parking arrangements should be sought and received before HPC can approve the proposal before them.

“When we go to DPNR they say well, you should have gone to HPC first, and when we come here you say well, you should have resolved that at DPNR,” Mr. Brown lamented. He expressed surprise that HPC was insisting on having all parking permitting cleared prior to consideration of the proposal or even conditional approval, claiming that this was not the case in the past. “I am not used to HPC enforcing this,” he complained.

However, Mr. Marsh, chair of the territorial Historic Preservation Commission, was unapologetic about the stringent nature by which HPC St. Thomas/St. John operates, as contrasted with St. Croix. “The two committees don't function the same,” he noted, saying that “there's a lot that slips through the cracks” on the Big Island. However, he ultimately moved to have the committee provide conditional approval to the proposal, pending “a confirmation from the planning office regarding the supplemental parking spaces,” as well as the suggested adjustments to the wall and roof designs. Despite Mr. Krigger's disapproval of the move, all committee members voted in favor of granting the proposed conditional approval of application HPC-17-2024 for 6B Vester Gade in Cruz Bay, St. John.