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## Massive Mega Yacht Marina Project on St. John Advances After Years of Delays and Adjustments

Despite EPA concerns about seagrass loss and environmental risks, Summer's End Group moves forward with a scaled-down marina plan expected to boost local employment, enhance public safety, and improve infrastructure in Coral Bay

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Aerial view of the proposed Summer's End Marina, showcasing extensive yacht docking set against St. John's scenic Coral Bay. By. SUMMER'S END

On Wednesday, members of the Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture participated in an abbreviated discussion on the progress of the marina development on St. John, an investment initiated by the Summer's End Group, LLC in 2008. The \$55 million extensive

marina development is part of a seven-phase vision to transform Coral Bay with amenities ranging from a mega-yacht facility to a boutique resort.

A slew of court proceedings filed against the group, concerns over the massive project's environmental impact, land disputes, and permitting delays have created considerable project delays. Nonetheless, Summers End Group, led by Chaliiese Summers, says they remain committed to seeing the project through.

Testifying on Monday, Ms. Summers told lawmakers that the group has received approvals for several permits including a submerged lands lease and major coastal zone management land and water permits. The group also received approval from the United States Coast Guard and has completed consultations with the Historic Preservation Committee. Summer's End has accepted permit conditions instituted by the National Marine Fisheries Office and has consulted with the Army Corps of Engineers on the Endangered Species Act.

"Based on the analysis above, we have determined that the proposed project is not likely to adversely affect any listed species or critical habitat under National Marine Fisheries jurisdiction," said Ms. Summers, as concerns linger over the project's footprint. Those concerns are, in part, why Summers End has reduced the total dock area from 91,573 square feet to 67,832 square feet. Once complete, the marina will be able to hold 127 vessels, shared Ms. Summers.

The downsizing is an attempt to reduce the environmental impact of the project. A further reduction in impact should come from the fact that the new plans will not include dredging in Coral Bay, nor will they involve the relocation of seagrass beds in the project footprint as previously intended. The number of steel piles needed to complete the project has also been reduced to 867, down from 1,333.

With these changes, and with settlements and resolutions in place with most disputing landowners, Summers End Group, LLC told lawmakers that they anticipate breaking ground on the project in short order. "After almost a decade... we are finally ready to build. With any luck at all, we should be able to break ground very soon," said Jeff Boyd, a Summers End Group partner. The build-out could take ten to twelve months.

The Summers End Group, eager to begin work once all approvals are granted, outlined the expected benefits of the project, including a major boost in employment opportunities, a "clean and organized harbor," restaurants and retail spaces, improved sidewalks and other infrastructure, and increased public safety. Ms. Summers also touted the increased ability to receive support vessels in the event of an emergency in St. John.

Noting concerns from the Environmental Protection Agency, Summers End expressed their intent to participate in several mitigation exercises, including annual harbor cleanups, planting and maintaining mangroves, donating to turtle protection and working on land to reduce the runoff of heavy sediment into Coral Bay. However, an [August 2024 letter](#) from the EPA to the Army Corps of Engineers revealed that the agency still harbors significant concerns over the potential destruction of seagrass in the project site.

Despite planning to use grated decking to allow sunlight to penetrate through to the water, the EPA fears that the marina will have devastating impacts on seagrass. "The combination of shading from the docks and the increased water turbidity due to marina construction, prop wash, and marina operations may result in the loss of approximately 0.70 acres of seagrass," read the letter. "At maximum capacity, vessels in the marina would cast shadows over 1.219 acres of seagrass,

seagrass which may be completely lost due to the secondary effects of decreased light exposure.”

“Spudding events” during construction could result in an “estimated loss of between 864 and 984 square feet of seagrass,” wrote the EPA. Further, the EPA’s letter to the Army Corps of Engineers noted that while Summers End Group has pledged to implement “strict sediment and siltation controls and monitoring”, “SEG's consultant (Bioimpact Inc.) assumes that an additional 10% of seagrass loss may occur due to secondary effects.” Additionally, “prop wash impacts from marina operations over time may account for an estimated total loss of 2.454 acres of seagrass,” wrote the EPA.

“EPA is concerned that the proposed project does not comply with the Guidelines and will result in unacceptable adverse impacts to ARNIs [aquatic resources of natural importance] at Coral Bay,” the letter concluded.

While Ms. Summers never referenced the letter in her testimony, legislators became aware of its existence, and pressed the developer for clarity. “The Army Corps has been working with EPA to satisfy their concerns,” she told Senator Novelle Francis. “The final area with EPA that they're addressing is an objection letter the EPA filed back in 2014 in the very beginning before all of these reductions that we've made to the project.”

Summers End Group is planning to meet with the Army Corps of Engineers on Friday. “Everyone is actively trying to resolve this... We've addressed the concerns of this letter,” Ms. Summers noted. The Corps, she said, is “working through the process with EPA to get them to pull their objection letter.”

“This gives me lots of pause now,” admitted Senator Donna Frett-Gregory. “I supported this measure, but I'm going to be very honest, I am becoming very concerned about this because this project has not moved,” she said. “I don't like what I'm seeing, hearing and reviewing in the documentation that's in front of me,” she said, referencing the EPA’s letter.

However, Boyd Sprehn, an attorney for Summers End Group, clarified that “the EPA has voiced an opinion. It does not have a veto on the project.” His comments suggest that the Army Corps of Engineers can proceed with the project without EPA approval. “We have addressed their concerns to a very large extent. The Army Corps would like their concurrence. It does not require their concurrence.”

Frett-Gregory has advised committee chair Javan James that he again request the presence of the Department of Planning and Natural Resources, which declined to attend Wednesday's hearing. Frett-Gregory wanted to ensure that four-year-old DPNR permits were still valid given that no actual construction work has begun pending final Army Corps of Engineer permissions. Wednesday’s Committee of Economic Development and Agriculture meeting now stands in recess until the DPNR attends and provides additional clarity on the status of this contentious project.