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Public Works Praised By CZM for “Overdue” New Maintenance Facility in Cruz Bay

CZM commissioners back plans to replace hurricane-damaged buildings with a new maintenance facility in Cruz Bay, with construction expected to begin next year and take up to 24 months

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The news that the Department of Public Works was seeking a federal consistency determination for a project in Cruz Bay was welcomed by members of the St. John Coastal Zone Management Committee during their meeting last Thursday.

“The Department is currently working on this disaster recovery project for the Public Works maintenance building,” said DPW District Engineer Jermaine McClean. He identified the location as parcel number 6 Estate Susannaberg, which currently houses the maintenance building, the DPW main office building, the Vitran bus depot, and a recycling facility.

The project focuses on the DPW buildings, however. “These existing structures are heavily damaged,” said Jeffrey Boschulte, the consultant for the project. “They will be completely demolished.” In their place will rise a one-story maintenance building, with lobby, office, restroom and shower facilities, as well as a mechanical room, pump room, and vehicle bays. A mezzanine floor will be used as a general-purpose workspace.

The project will have no impact on the coastal waters of St. John, given its location well inland. No wetlands exist in the project location to be concerned about, said Mr. Boschulte, and no endangered species will be impacted by the construction as none live in the area. Any negative impact to air quality caused by the presence of heavy construction equipment working on site will dissipate once the project is complete, he said.

Once a federal consistency determination is granted, Mr. Boschulte said, the project would move into the permitting process from the Department of Planning and Natural Resources, “and then probably simultaneously with that, procurement and bidding.” Once construction begins, he estimates that the project will take 18 to 24 months to complete. “The new facility will allow Department of Public Works to be more effective in administering public infrastructure projects and programs on St. John,” Mr. Boschulte anticipates. Mr. McLean expects the project to be advertised starting early next year.

CZM commissioners were pleased to see the project finally getting underway. “Seven years is long overdue,” said Ralph Boulon. “I’m very happy to hear this is finally happening.” Kurt Marsh noted that the buildings had been damaged long before hurricanes Irma and Maria. “Actually, since Hugo and Marilyn,” he clarified. “So yeah, long overdue.”

St. John CZM chair Andrew Penn concurred with Mr. Marsh's calculations and himself welcomed the “well overdue” project. He offered commendation to the staff of DPW stationed on St. John, because “the conditions have been deplorable, and these guys just come to work and get no recognition and do what they have to do.”

Mr. Penn welcomed the attention finally being paid to improving the working conditions of those employees, but wondered about whether the new structure would be built to modern standards. “We have to look into all the efficient ways to save power and cost, so I would like to see some solar going in on the roofs to help with all the pressure we have on our power system.”

With the presentation now lodged before CZM, the public has until the end of this week to submit comments on the proposed project before the commission returns with a decision at a later date.