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Lawmakers to Act on Rezoning and Coastal Permits for Developments in St. Thomas and St. Croix

The 35th Legislature reviews requests to enable mixed-use, commercial, and public developments, including a FIFA-regulation soccer facility, a restaurant, and a standpipe for water trucks, while coastal permits seek to enhance water supply infrastructure

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The 35th Legislature will act on several rezoning and permitting requests during Wednesday's legislative session. All of the measures were first heard before the Committee of the Whole on Tuesday.

In the St. Thomas district, Bill 35-0401 seeks to rezone Parcel No. 41-51-1 Estate Frydenhoj, No. 3 Red Hook Quarter from R-2 (Residential-Low Density-One and Two Family) to B-4 (Business-

Residential). The Rogers family, which owns the property, plans to demolish the abandoned building located on the parcel and construct a restaurant and office space in its place.

Testifying on the family's behalf, former Senator Clifford Graham of CG Consulting informed lawmakers that the Rogers have previously redeveloped other properties in the area. "The Rogers are very meticulous with their development to ensure that [it] blends harmoniously into the community." Mr. Graham insisted that the family would also be meticulous in the tenant selection process for the restaurant operator "to guarantee the blend of business commercial tenants does not adversely impact the pristine mangrove and environmentally sensitive pond that is situated just south of the properties."



Former Senator Clifford Graham (Credit: V.I. Legislature)

The Rogers family also seeks legislative approval to install a standpipe and office on another portion of land on St. Thomas. Bill 35-0406, if passed on Wednesday, will rezone Parcel No. 3J-1A Estate Mariendahl, No. 4 Red Hook Quarter from R-2 (Residential-Low Density-One and Two Family) to B-2 (Business Secondary/Neighborhood). "If approved, it will then be added to the list of compliance standpipes for water hauling use," said Leia LaPlace-Matthews, territorial planner in the Department of Planning and Natural Resources.

"The site would allow for one truck to be filled while a second is parked waiting for service," Ms. LaPlace Matthew explained. The owners will redevelop the existing family structure on the property to function as an office. Mr. Graham says the development will take "approximately eight months to complete once the work has commenced." It will "provide local water trucks and homeowners with the option to refill the trucks' water buffaloes at a convenient location in the country, with an automotive filling operation," explained Mr. Graham. Responding to Senator Angel Bolques Jr.'s question about operating hours, Mr. Graham indicated that the site will cease operations by 7 pm.

Lawmakers will also vote on Bill 35-35-0407, an act which will rezone Parcel No. N-1-Remainder of Tract 1 Estate Nazareth, No. 1 Red Hook Quarter, St. Thomas, from R-2 (Residential-Low-Density-One and Two Family) to P (Public). This rezoning request is associated with a recently enacted lease between the Government of the Virgin Islands and the USVI Soccer Federation Inc. for the development of a FIFA regulation playing facility in Estate Nazareth. The rezoning is one of several administrative steps that must be completed before construction can begin.

A large swath of Estate Nazareth is earmarked for various sporting facilities. “What I honestly expected to see today was that the government was pushing forward with rezoning the entire area,” remarked Senator Donna Frett-Gregory, who sponsored the legislation granting the lease on behalf of the Soccer Federation. “Why are we approaching this from a piecemeal perspective?” She was not satisfied with the response from DNPR's Assistant Commissioner Vincent Richard that “we are working on a comprehensive package of rezoning.”

The final request was Bill 35-0421, which would rezone Plot No. 13-A Combined Estate Hogensborg, West End Quarter, St. Croix from R-1 (Residential-Low Density) to R-2 (Residential-Low Density-One and Two Family) and Remainder of Parcel No. 4 Combined Estate Hogensborg, West End Quarter be rezoned from R-1 (Residential-Low Density) to B-3 (Business-Scattered) to allow for a mixed-use development.

“The primary intent for the request is to allow the property owners to relocate their existing retail store and maximize the property for residential activity,” explained Ms. LaPlace-Matthew. The owners, Ashwash Enterprises, LLC will install a green space buffer to separate the mixed-use portion from the residential area, where plots are expected to be subdivided for resale. The applicant’s retail store is expected to be the first phase of the development. The site is home to several ruins, requiring a review and approval by the Virgin Islands State Historic Preservation Office. Despite some minor concerns from neighboring property owners, the Department of Planning and Natural Resources recommends the rezoning.

On the seaside, they will consider two additional coastal zone permits in the St. Thomas district.

Bill 35-0404 is an Act ratifying the Minor Coastal Zone Permit No. CZMIW0001-23 issued to Coakley Plantation, LLLP for the installation and the submerged lands occupancy of two 224’ long and 3” ODHDPE pipes in approximately 6’-7’ of water to be used as an intake and brine discharge for a reverse osmosis plant.

The property owner currently uses existing wells for water supply, but the water quality is described as “brackish” and “unreliable.” The planned reverse osmosis system would allow the owner to draw from the existing aquifer, “allowing for better recharge of the area and less saltwater intrusion, but allow the resident to draw as much water as they need.” The owner would be required to pay \$3,420 in advanced annual rent to the Government of the Virgin Islands for the use of the submerged property.

Then, legislators will consider Bill 35-0422, an Act ratifying Minor Coastal Zone Permit No. CZMIW0002-23 issued to 555 Madison Investors V, LLC for the installation of a 408 sq. ft. dock and a four-inch reverse osmosis intake line on and seaward of Plot 7W Estate Nazareth, St. Thomas. The annual rent for the land in question is \$9,000 and the term of the permit is 20 years. The owners plan to use the dock to safeguard their boat while at the residence, and the design reportedly protects existing coral and seagrass with a fiberglass decking.

Lawmakers generally expressed favorable opinions of the requests, and are expected to support them when they reach the Legislative floor on Wednesday.