

## St. Thomas Residents Weigh In on Proposed Farm and Fish Market Development

**During a public meeting, community members voiced support for a market on the east end while debating location options, security measures, and the need for fresh fish accommodations. Officials pledged to consider all input before finalizing plans.**

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A public meeting held on Tuesday to discuss the construction of a farm and fish market on the east end of St. Thomas drew significant community interest, with residents offering suggestions and encouragement to officials from the Department of Agriculture and the office of Senate President Milton Potter.

Agriculture Commissioner Louis Petersen noted that the purpose of the meeting was to gather public input on the proposed market. He stressed the importance of ensuring that the facility aligns with community needs, stating that it must be something residents want, that addresses their specific concerns, and that takes all considerations into account as planning moves forward.

With the majority of St. Thomas's population concentrated on the east end, the loss of vending space for fresh, local food has been a growing concern. A fact-finding team recently visited mainland farmers markets for design inspiration, identifying best practices to incorporate into the proposed market. Discussions included plumbing and electricity connections in booths, separate service doors and unloading areas to minimize customer congestion, and dedicated signage spaces for vendors.

Community members spoke about the need for accommodations for fresh fish sales, as well as publicly accessible restrooms. One attendee suggested that the market structure should be securable when not in use to prevent vandalism or misuse.

Senator Potter, who has been working with the Department of Agriculture and the local food council to secure funding, was urged by a resident to ensure that ongoing management and administration costs are included in the budget once the facility is built.

The question of location sparked considerable debate. Officials expressed a preference for government-owned land, which would streamline the approval process. Private land acquisition, as Mr. Petersen noted, would require purchasing or leasing, but he assured attendees that all options remain under consideration. Farmers and fishers advocated for a central location, which officials promised to take into account.

Discussions also focused on prioritizing local produce and goods, with attendees suggesting ways to achieve this while ensuring product availability at the market.

Recognizing that the project could take years to complete, residents stressed the importance of early strategic planning to ensure that local farmers can meet potential demand once the market is operational.

“In the economic climate that we're in now, this is the perfect time,” one woman remarked. “This gives people a time, a chance to build up their product.” She suggested that a well-planned market development could reignite traditional crafts among local youth. “It might inspire them to also become entrepreneurs,” she added, describing the project as a “practice run” for community building. “It's going to get worse before it gets better, trust me,” she warned.

Some residents questioned whether constructing a new facility was the best approach. Bordeaux Farmers Market, which already has solar power, water, and restrooms, was cited as an existing space that could be further developed. “If we're not going to invest our money back there and the distance is too much, why create a huge facility that we fight to fill?” one woman asked.

She instead proposed several smaller markets closer to residential areas rather than a single large facility. Another attendee echoed this view, suggesting that revitalizing Market Square should also be considered.

Additionally, some attendees questioned whether a general market was needed, or if a dedicated fish market would be more appropriate. Others suggested decentralizing the market with multiple locations across St. Thomas, including Tutu and the currently unused Curriculum Center.

After a lengthy discussion covering various aspects of the project, organizers thanked attendees for their engagement. They assured residents that all feedback and ideas would be taken back to Senator Potter as he prepares to seek legislative support for the initiative.

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