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WICO Board Meeting Avoids Leadership Changes, Clashes with Journalists Over Recording Policy

As WICO prepares for increased cruise traffic, board members sidestepped discussion on reports of Joe Boschulte's appointment as CEO. The meeting saw tensions rise when WICO officials objected to a journalist's recording device, citing internal policies.

Board Meetings / **Published On March 01, 2025 07:44 AM /**

Staff Consortium **March 01, 2025**

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WICO Board Chair Jason Charles told reporters that the board has the authority to set its own recording policies.

Friday's meeting of the West Indian Company board was marked by the pointed absence of discussion of [major personnel changes within company leadership](#), and a disagreement with journalists over how they are allowed to do their jobs.

A brief agenda, circulated after the fact, included the president and CEO's report as the only item for the public session, which was to be followed by a closed-door executive session.

The report was optimistic about WICO's next few years as it pertains to cruise calls, with a return to the million-passenger mark in 2026, said interim CEO Anthony Ottley. "We're looking at somewhere in the neighborhood of 320+ calls," he told board members. "So that's good news for us...2027, it seems to be just as vibrant," he continued.

In addition to setting up contract talks with the usual large cruise lines – Norwegian, Carnival, Disney, MSC – WICO has been "getting a lot more calls of mega yachts with interest," Mr. Ottley said. These calls are routed to Yacht Haven, with the two entities working together to "make sure that we don't lose traffic to the territory."

Current capital projects are proceeding apace, and "we have submitted for grant applications to get some more capital projects done," Mr. Ottley noted.

His report prompted some discussion about WICO's ability to meet the demands of the future of cruising, especially with newer, larger ships on the horizon. "In 2030 can we accommodate one of those ships that will be rolling out during that period," board chair Jason Charles asked. "It all depends on the combination, and the requests, and the ships that they plan on sending," Mr. Ottley replied.

Even with the advent of a new class of mega ship, there will still be a need for berthing for smaller, boutique cruise liners, Mr. Ottley noted. Whatever the angle of consideration, "we definitely need additional berthing," to keep up with demand. "The rest of the Eastern and Western Caribbean is going to be here to eat our lunch if we're not able to accommodate," he warned.

Berthing needs is just one of many considerations to be made as the territory prepares to accommodate these massive ships – and the up to 10,000 passengers they bring on each visit – in the years to come. "There's still challenges that we have downtown with parking, there's still challenges we have with bathroom facilities," Mr. Ottley said. There's still other challenges that we have to work as a community to plan."

Failure to live up to the challenge could see the territory lose business not only to other Caribbean islands, but the private islands cruise companies have been purchasing for the exclusive use of their guests, board members noted.

The day's discussion was interrupted when board members noticed that a reporter attending the meeting had set up a recording device – a standard part of a journalist's information-gathering toolset. WICO officials took exception to being recorded, and asked legal counsel present to cite the organization's statutory authority to prohibit recordings of board meetings "as a matter of policy." WICO's governing legislation which authorizes it to act as a private corporation was referenced as the reason why its board is allowed to set policy which seemingly violates transparency and accountability best practices in this case.

The journalist attempted to point out that online meeting attendees were free to record due to the settings of the streaming platform, but WICO's board chair was unmoved. "If you would like, you can go on the Zoom," Mr. Charles retorted. "You're not going to come in here and dictate to us, and you could say Jason Charles said it," he insisted, calling for security to presumably remove the journalist and/or her recording device from the meeting.

Asked by another reporter why recording is not allowed at meetings open to the public, WICO attorney Greg Ferguson informed that “it's just our policy...we feel that we have the right to have any policy that we would like with regard to that.” Said policy was asked to be provided – in writing – to media houses present.

The incident wrapped up the brief public session of WICO's February board meeting. Members retreated into executive session “to discuss personnel matters and other attorney-client privileged matters,” according to attorney Ferguson.

Following that session, board members emerged, only to Mr. Ferguson to repeat his earlier words. With WICO leadership apparently not ready to confirm or deny reports that former tourism commissioner Joe Boschulte, who currently sits on the board, has been appointed the agency's new CEO, WICO's legal counsel reported only that the board had “talked about some ongoing personnel matters and other attorney-client privileged items.” The Consortium received confirmation the appointment, and Governor Albert Bryan Jr. later addressed the matter, stating that he is already evaluating potential replacements. The governor noted that Mr. Boschulte's departure creates a "hole" in his administration.