

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Rezoning Requests in Estate Smith Bay Gain Senate Support for Housing and Office Developments

Lawmakers backed two rezoning bills aimed at expanding housing and office space in Smith Bay. One project will create a business park, while the other will introduce a mixed-use development with residential units and commercial services

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Rezoning requests for two neighboring properties in Estate Smith Bay received the support of the Committee of the Whole during a session on Monday. Both properties are intended to introduce new housing and office spaces to the eastern end of St. Thomas.

The first, Bill 36-0033, was requested to rezone several parcels from A-2 (Agricultural Zone) to B-3 (Business Scattered) to develop an office. According to territorial planner Leia LaPlace-Matthew, “the requested zoning change aligns with previous rezoning approvals in the area” and is “in line with existing business and commercial activities along Smith Bay Road.”

The applicant, Candice Lindqvist, was represented by Adlah Donastorg, a former senator. He told lawmakers that the office park project “would create an inviting space for conferences, meetings, events and various activities, catering to local business, professionals and visitors alike.” According to Mr. Donastorg, “it is essential to inspire Smith Bay residents and landowners to be enthusiastic about participating in ongoing and future development of the Greater East End community.”

The second request, outlined in Bill 36-0034, involves rezoning one parcel in Estate Smith Bay from R-1 (Residential-Low Density) to B-3 (Business Scattered). Like with bill 36-0033, lawmakers were told that this change would be in line with rezoning trends in the area. Approval of the request would allow Najocki Boyd to construct a mixed-use development that will include housing and business spaces. As explained by Keshoi Samuel of the Department of Planning and Natural Resources, the development “consists of a long and short-term rental and commercial units for general offices, daycare, laundromat, mailbox rental, beauty salon/barbershop and self storage units.”

Jennifer Jones, the applicant's representative, noted that Mr. Boyd is “embarking on this ambitious project to provide reasonably priced, long term residences surrounded by modern conveniences in their community.” Once completed, the six-building, three-story development will feature twenty-eight residential units and nine commercial units.

“The development will help meet the growing demand for residential units in the Smith Bay area,” stated Ms. Jones. The project is also expected to contribute to the local economy by “creating jobs and other valuable services.” Housing units are expected to suit a moderate income budget.

The Boyd family had already begun construction of a two-story building intended for the development, but due to rising costs and the limited availability of construction materials, they have faced delays. Now, they expect each building could take approximately eighteen months to be completed.

The Committee of the Whole largely supported both requests, albeit with the typical concern of diminishing agriculturally-zoned land. Senate President Milton Potter wanted to “[understand] DPNR’s thought process” for approving agricultural rezonings. However, Ms. LaPlace Matthew maintained that “we need to also allow for agriculture in other zones...Technology has advanced agriculture where you don't necessarily have to do it in the soil...If individuals want to do agriculture, it should be in the table of uses for every zone.” Currently, only six of eighteen zones allow agricultural use.

Despite her explanation, Senator Hubert Frederick approached the proposed office park project with cautious optimism. “This makes me salivate when I hear about mixed use development. Yes! I'm also the chair of the Economic and Agriculture committee. So this is beautiful, but then you hit the agricultural side, and then I go, ‘Oh Lord’”, said a torn Mr. Frederick. “With our current situation, we have to be very careful when we start

transforming agricultural land into commercially used land,” he advised.

Other lawmakers, like Senators Alma Francis Heyliger and Milton Potter, were concerned about increased vehicular traffic in the Smith Bay area. “I don’t think there’s going to be a problem in the area,” replied Mr. Donastorg. Mr. Boyd, too, does not anticipate a negative impact on traffic “once the due diligence is in place.”

Adequately satisfied that both developers will be able to secure funding for their respective projects, lawmakers are expected to cast favorable votes on both bills when they are considered during an upcoming legislative session.