

Image not found or type unknown

Taino Leaders Propose Cultural Demonstration Village at Magens Bay Arboretum

Opi'a Taino International has proposed building a Taino demonstration village at or near Magens Bay's arboretum to teach the public about Taino heritage through ceremonial spaces, historic dwellings, and immersive cultural interpretation.

Tourism / **Published On June 29, 2025 06:04 AM /**

Janeke Simon **June 29, 2025**

Image not found or type unknown



Opi'a Taino International, Inc.

On Friday, board members of the Magens Bay Authority considered a proposal from Maekiaphan Phillips, president of Opi'a Taino International, for a Taino demonstration village in or near the Magens Bay arboretum.

“We are asking Magens Bay to allow us to build three Taino huts...that would be tourist oriented,” said Ms. Phillips, kasike of the Guainía Taíno tribe in the Virgin Islands. “We would be able to teach the community more about our heritage, educate the community about the Taino that is supposed to be extinct.” Ms. Phillips called the proposed project “a wonderful learning and teaching platform for the community.”

Emmanuel Phillips, Opi'a Taino International's secretary, said that members of the community had visited Cuba and toured “one of the oldest, still functioning, Taino villages.” After observing village life and speaking with the chief, “we thought that a great place to start would be having a demonstration village here.”

The idea, said Mr. Phillips, was to construct “three different versions of the bukios that the Tainos use so that we could show how it looked.” One model would replicate the kind of structure a chief would live in, for example. A batay – the sacred, plaza-like ringed enclosure where Taino people meet and conduct ceremonies – would also be installed.

Present at the meeting was Múkaro Borrero, kasike of the Guainía Taíno tribe in Puerto Rico. “One thing to stress is that this is not something new,” he told board members. “There are...indigenous interpretation centers in parks and other areas all over the Americas.” He pitched the idea as a way to bring more visitor attention to the arboretum which, as Ms. Phillips pointed out, was “hit very hard” after the 2017 hurricanes.”

The concept is supported by historic preservation officials. Sean Krigger, director of the State Historic Preservation Office in the Virgin Islands, pointed out that “the Magens Bay site is a significant Native American site. There are a number of documented village sites there.” A demonstration village, therefore, would certainly be appropriate for the area.

Board members learned that there is an upcoming meeting of Taino kasikes in the territory early next month and inquired about the possibility of having an additional meeting to discuss the proposed project. Magens Bay chair Barbara Petersen acknowledged that the presentation was just the beginning of what is likely to be a lengthy process. “We have to talk vision. Are you planning on selling tours? Is there money involved?” Ms. Petersen wondered. “There's a whole lot that we have to talk [about]. Lawyers obviously will have to be involved in that conversation,” she continued. Nonetheless, the Authority is “open to having a conversation, 100%.”