

Floating Taco Spot Wins Legislative Backing for St. Thomas Expansion

Legislators approved the permit for a 53-by-16-foot floating taco restaurant in Lindbergh Bay. The operators detailed wastewater safeguards, mooring plans, and eco-friendly toilets, assuring minimal impact while creating local jobs and revenue.

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Lime Out's floating taco restaurant in St. John, an internationally recognized destination blending marine tourism with eco-friendly dining in the Virgin Islands.

A floating taco restaurant will soon be docked in Lindbergh Bay, St. Thomas, as lawmakers have approved a coastal zone permit for the proprietor, Lime Out 2 LLC.

Chelsea Baranowski is a founding member of the company, and provided testimony before the Committee of the Whole on Wednesday. Along with her colleagues, Ms. Baranowski has operated a similar floating taco restaurant in St. John since 2018. She told lawmakers that the team “dreamed of promoting marine tourism in the territory by providing a unique experience.” Since then, Lime Out, as the St. John restaurant is known, has become an “internationally recognized destination that highlights the innovation and appeal of the Virgin Islands.”

The restaurant has been featured in Time Magazine, and Ms. Baranowski says it offers an “efficient and memorable experience, while engaging directly with the natural beauty of the United States Virgin Islands.” She boasted of its contribution to St. John’s economy and tourism product. Now, Lime Out 2 LLC wants to do the same in St. Thomas.

The CZM permit will allow the company to float a restaurant in Lindbergh Bay measuring 53 by 16 feet. It will be solar-powered and include a reverse osmosis system and an environmentally conscious toilet for staff. Grey and black water tanks will be emptied daily. All major food preparation and dishwashing will take place in a prep kitchen onshore, Ms. Baranowski explained. Lime Out 2 intends to install 10 moorings, as the floating taco restaurant will only be accessible by sea.

Gregory Richards, assistant director for the Division of Coastal Zone Management in the Department of Planning and Natural Resources, says that annual rent will cost \$18,000, payable upfront for a period of 20 years.

Lawmakers were largely supportive of Lime Out 2’s plans, with repeated remarks about the diversification of the territory’s tourism offerings. “Anytime we go to one of the Sea Trade conferences, the big thing about St. Thomas is we need to have some additional attractions – something new,” remarked committee chair Senator Milton Potter, buoyed by the idea of a floating restaurant.

“I am so excited about this application,” declared Senator Hubert Frederick. “This is what we call additional revenues to the government without taxing anyone else,” he added. He emphasized the need to “attract as many businesses as we can.” Mr. Frederick also pleaded with the Lime Out 2 team to purchase locally grown produce for the restaurant, “so that our farmers could benefit from the success that you're experiencing.”

Ms. Baranowski anticipates hiring between 25 to 30 individuals at Lime Out 2. Staff receive an hourly rate and also collect generous tips. “We're a very busy restaurant, so it's a sought-after position. I would estimate that the servers make \$100,000 a year,” she told Sen. Potter.

Despite support for the unique restaurant experience, there were some environmental concerns. The Lime Out 2 team offered clarity on wastewater disposal and provided repeated explanations of an eco-friendly toilet that they have procured. According to member Dane Tarr, the toilet includes a substance akin to cat litter, and “puts everything into a small little bag so it can be disposed of” after it is flushed. The hazmat-grade bags are subsequently disposed of. Lime Out 2 has also promised lawmakers that they will offer the same level of due care for the environment that they currently do at their Cruz Bay location.

“While they're in the water cleaning the floats, they're also doing a visual survey of the bottom to see if anything's got lost, and we try and retrieve those,” explained Mr. Baranowski, who referenced his employee’s efforts to maintain the pristine environment.

Lime Out 2 has also clarified that the floating restaurant will be located in an area where it will have minimal environmental impact.

“The team behind this has already proven that they can run a clean, responsible and successful maritime restaurant operation on the island of St. John,” stated Senator Angel Bolques Jr.

Lime Out 2 intends to build partnerships with onshore businesses, including the neighbouring Emerald Beach Resort, where talks are ongoing. Senator Kurt Vialet was concerned about encroachment on the business currently enjoyed by beach vendors. However, Angela Raimondi, another partner, argued that by virtue of their location out in the bay, Lime Out 2 is “not in direct competition with any of the beach vendors since we are inaccessible other than by boat. He ventured that the floating restaurant would provide an extra “attraction to bring people to their area.”

With the permit approved by the Legislature, Lime Out 2 is hoping to become operational by November, in time for the peak cruise season.

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