

Lindquist Beach Camera Proposal Raises Monitoring Benefits — and Questions About Recording Visitors

A plan to install a coastal camera at Lindquist Beach drew interest for its ability to track rip currents, sargassum, and erosion, but board members questioned whether beachgoers must be notified that they may be recorded on the publicly accessible feed.

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Lindquist Beach, St. Thomas USVI.

A proposal to install a coastal-monitoring camera at Lindquist Beach has prompted both interest and questions from the Magens Bay Authority, including whether visitors must be informed that they may be recorded. The discussion unfolded during the board's regular meeting, where members reviewed a federally funded plan intended to track rip currents, sargassum, and other

environmental conditions across the territory.

The presentation came from Roy Watlington, founder of Ocean and Coastal Observing Virgin Islands, who explained that funding for the initiative was secured through the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) via a sub-grant. The funding supports the installation of two cameras in the U.S. Virgin Islands — one in Christiansted, “where the sargassum has been interfering with a reverse osmosis seawater intake,” and another at Lindquist Beach.

While the main focus is to monitor rip currents and sargassum, Mr. Watlington said “a web camera could help with, not only sargassum and rip currents, but also inundations of other kinds – oil spills turtle hatchlings, illegal sand mining...beach erosion.” The effort is funded through NOAA and executed by CARICOOS and SECORA, meaning there would be no cost to local entities. “The installation, the labor, the maintenance, they're all done free of charge,” Watlington said. Images would be “publicly available for any use that you may have, except that it cannot be commercialized, and of course, images cannot be distorted.”

Before the system can be installed, the Magens Bay Authority must approve access. “SECORA will not even send their technicians down until it's clear to them that they have full permission...to install,” Watlington told the board. He said installation would also require consultation with the Authority to determine the most appropriate placement for the equipment. Initial funding is guaranteed for one year, though a longer-term continuation may be possible through CARICOOS’s direct NOAA allocation.

It was during the discussion of public accessibility that board member Cecile De Jongh raised the question of privacy. She asked whether beach users would need to be informed that they may be captured by the camera. “I don't know if CARICOOS, SECORA or NOAA have that requirement,” Mr. Watlington responded, adding, “but I would imagine that locally there may be requirements that it's posted somewhere to assure that people know they're being observed.”

Board Chair Barbara Peterson said the Authority would issue a decision on whether to approve the installation before its next scheduled meeting.