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Frenchtown Marina's 20-Year Permit Nears Ratification Amid Financial Concerns

The Legislature signaled support for ratifying Major Coastal Zone Permit CZT-09-22(W) for Anquet Inc., but several senators raised questions about doubling permit costs and the financial impact of what they called an unfavorable lease arrangement.

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Aerial shot of the Frenchtown Marina in St. Thomas. By. MARINAS.COM

Lawmakers signaled Monday that they intend to ratify the Governor's approval of Major Coastal Zone Permit No. CZT-09-22(W) granted to Anquet, Inc., the operator of Frenchtown Marina on St. Thomas, even as questions remain about the company's ability to meet its escalating annual permit payments and what some senators described as a poorly negotiated lease agreement.

Bill 36-0235 was heard in the Committee of the Whole, where no vote was taken. According to Marlon Hibbert, director of the Division of Coastal Zone Management, the permit authorizes the continued use and occupancy of submerged lands seaward of Parcel No. Plot 68 Estate Honduras, St. Thomas. The area comprises 32,375 square feet and currently includes two fixed piers, two docks and two tee docks.

The permit carries a 20-year term. Under the fee schedule outlined by Mr. Hibbert, Anquet Inc. is required to pay \$9,000 annually for years one through three, \$10,000 in year four, \$11,000 in year five, and \$14,000 annually for years six through ten. Rental fees are to be negotiated “upon the tenth and fifteenth anniversary of the permit,” Mr. Hibbert said.

Adriane Dudley, attorney for Anquet, told lawmakers that the business has been owned and operated by the Quetel family since 1987. The marina, which has operated for decades, has been “contributing to the local economy and marine community of St. Thomas,” she said. Anquet’s marina has “only one main tenant,” Waypoints Yacht Charters USVI.

According to Ms. Dudley, “ratification of this permit is critical. Without it, this historic, family-owned marina cannot continue to operate...”

While lawmakers appeared generally inclined to advance the measure to a Legislative session for ratification, several raised concerns about whether the Quetel family could sustain the higher permit fees. During the first three years of the new schedule, Anquet Inc. must pay \$9,000 annually — double the \$4,500 fee attached to its most recently ratified permit.

Ms. Dudley explained that even with the new permit in place, the lease agreement between Anquet Inc. and Waypoints Yacht Charters remains unchanged. “The lease payment by Waypoint is not sufficient for the Quetels to pay the permit fees and all of the other expenses associated with the operation of the marina,” she told lawmakers.

Patricia Quetel, one of the operators, confirmed to Senator Novelle Francis that the business is currently operating at a loss. She acknowledged the importance of remaining current on permit payments and said the family plans to increase revenue to meet its obligations.

Ms. Quetel noted that the family owns two properties on Plot 62 in Estate Honduras. One is the former Hook, Line, and Sinker restaurant, which has been vacant for some time, though she said there is already some interest in the property. The family also intends to lease office space it owns within the Frenchtown Marina building.

“With that additional revenue, we will be able to cover the cost of the permit,” she assured lawmakers. Anquet Inc. also plans to renegotiate its lease agreement with Waypoints Yacht Charters when the current lease expires in approximately four years.

Several senators weighed in on the existing lease arrangement.

“Hopefully, when that lease is up, you can recoup some of those funds...because charter companies are making a mint right now,” Senator Marvin Blyden said.

Senator Kurt Violet, referencing Waypoints Yacht Charters’ website, observed that “it takes a one-week tour to pay the entire lease agreement.” He argued that the individual who negotiated the current lease did a “horrible job.”

“I hope that you’re able to correct it, and at the end of this lease agreement, that you could really charge them,” he added.

Senator Alma Francis Heyliger encouraged the Quetel family to consider additional options for the vacant restaurant property, including converting it to another type of business if necessary. “I want you to succeed,” she said.

Committee Chair Senator Milton Potter acknowledged that the lease with Waypoints has been “a challenge for your profitability,” but expressed optimism about future prospects. “I think you will be positioned at some point to improve your financial standing,” he said.

The measure now advances toward a full Legislative session, where lawmakers are expected to vote on ratifying the Governor’s approval of the permit.

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