

Gittens Links Beeston Hill Opposition to Wider Resistance to Development on St. Croix

As lawmakers weighed Bill 36-0200, Senator Kenneth Gittens argued that opposition to the Beeston Hill housing proposal reflects a wider pattern of resistance that continues to stall progress and development on St. Croix.

Development / **Published On March 17, 2026 05:51 AM /**

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Senator Kenneth Gittens. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE.

A dispute over a rezoning request tied to a proposed housing development in Estate Beeston Hill has grown beyond a single land-use question, reopening a broader debate over whether projects on St. Croix face a pattern of resistance that some lawmakers and the applicant's team say reflects deeper opposition to development on the island.

According to property owner Atta Misbeh and his representative, Alicia Barnes, the rezoning is needed to move forward with plans to construct 24 housing units in Estate Beeston Hill. Under the proposal, some of the units would be offered for sale, while most would be designated for a mix of short- and long-term rentals.

When Bill 36-0200 came before the Committee of the Whole on Monday, lawmakers heard strong opposition from a resident who objected to the requested rezoning. Several senators also questioned whether the zoning change being sought was necessary.

For Senator Kenneth Gittens, however, the arguments raised by opponents pointed to what he described as a larger problem.

“Every time there's a project proposal for St. Croix, there always seem to be some pushback....This nonsense must stop now,” Senator Gittens declared.

He also questioned how the island can move forward without accepting change. “How do we achieve progress without change?” he asked.

That frustration echoed comments made recently by Senator Kurt Vialet during discussion of Bill 36-0259, a measure that would amend the Hotel Development Act to include incentives specific to development on St. Croix.

“At some point, we must strike a balance. I am really sick and tired of this, because every time it comes to St. Croix, this is what we get: a back and forth, back and forth,” he lamented.

Senator Gittens made a final appeal to his fellow lawmakers to allow the project to move ahead while giving the island room to grow. He urged his colleagues to “give St. Croix a chance to progress, please. That's all I ask. Let's approach this with the same zest, zeal, whatever you want to call it, to see some kind of progress for the island district of St. Croix.”

Senator Gittens and some of his colleagues have agreed to amend the language of Bill 36-0200 in an effort to address public concerns while still allowing the developer to proceed with the housing plan.