

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mandahl Bay Developers 'Downsizing' Marina Because of Community Out Cry

Business / **Published On February 14, 2015 11:03 AM /**

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Mandahl Bay, St. Croix

St. Thomas Sen. Janette Millin-Young earlier this week led members of the Senate Committee on Economic Development, Agriculture and Planning, which she chairs, to the site of the proposed Mandahl Bay Hotel Development Project on St. Thomas. There, committee members met with developers to assess their plans for the development of the site.

When Sen. Jean Forde asked about his understanding of the objections to the project being built, George Dudley, attorney at Dudley and Topper and Feuerzeig, LLP, said, "We are downsizing the marina as a result of the concerns. As we continue to design and analyze the development plan, we are taking into consideration the objections. Right now, all we have is the concept and nothing has been finalized. Therefore, we welcome the input from the community."

Sen. Terrence "Positive" Nelson also questioned the developers about how far into the mangrove drilling would be done.

Theresa Roberts, principal of Springline Architect said that although she is currently unsure, drilling of the mangrove would occur at the "width and not at the depth" of Mandahl Bay.

Sen. Kurt Vialet inquired about the environmental impact the project would have on the area, to which Roberts stated there is a GPS plan to monitor and protect endangered coral reefs, and that there would be frequent reports on the status of the corals throughout the process.

"The fish population will be affected," she said. "Although the fish will die, once developers are finished dredging, the fish will return to Mandahl Bay."

Sen. Almando "Rocky" Liburd also questioned Dudley about what is being done to "secure footing for the local fisherman." In response, Dudley said the existing fisherman will have a space for fishing. Sen. Liburd further inquired if the fisherman will be required to pay a fee and was told that they would not.

"We were able to look at the projects rendering and look at the physical details as they were being explained to us," Sen. Millin-Young said of the trip. She added that opponents of the proposal will have an opportunity to place their comments on the record at a committee meeting in the near future once the proposal is once again before the legislature.

Currently, the mangrove wetlands on St. Thomas at Mandahl Bay Beach, Salt Pond and Lagoon is the proposed location of a luxury yacht marina of up to 110 slips, a three-star Hyatt Regency hotel, multi-story condominium complex, shopping mall, fueling depot, and sewage treatment plant. Mandahl Bay Holdings, Inc., a subsidiary of Trans Continental, Inc. (TCI), is asking the Virgin Islands Government to issue it a 99-year, \$12,000-a-year lease on the 23+ acre wetlands that are publicly owned by the V.I. Government.

In related news, the Friends of Mandahl has partnered with Mission Blue in its efforts to save Mandahl Bay from development.

"We are all very excited about this news," said Friends of Mandahl steering committee member, Karl Callwood. "This partnership signifies that scientists, environmentalists, and 30 million everyday people from around the world are recognizing the critical significance of the Mandahl Bay eco-system."

As a Mission Blue partner, the Friends of Mandahl hopes to focus greater attention on the ecological disruption expected to occur if development of Mandahl Bay is permitted.

Mission Blue is the brainchild of the Sylvia Earle Alliance. Dr. Earle, also known as the "Sturgeon General" or "Her Deepness," is well-acquainted with the territory, as she was the first woman to accomplish the feat of living underwater in the territory's waters. She was an understudy of Jacques Costeau and eventually became chief scientist of the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration. She eventually resigned from that role to pursue leadership in saving the world's oceans through her Mission Blue organization.

"The science is very clear that Mandahl Bay is a nursery habitat for our ocean fisheries and that it is the last such habitat on the Northside of St. Thomas," Callwood added.

He said when Mandahl Bay was being investigated for Mission Blue by photographer Captain Richard A. Gillette, the group took a boat out on the Atlantic Ocean and visually documented "the uniqueness of the location."

Friends of Mandahl Bay say the critical need to have the bay undisturbed "has been bolstered by data from the Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources, U.S. Department of Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the V.I. Coastal Zone Management Commission, and has even been granted protections by the Virgin Islands Legislature."

"Our goal, and that of our partner, Mission Blue, is to educate people that our oceans really are on the brink of extinction and that densely bio-diverse mangrove eco-systems like Mandahl Bay are critical," said Callwood. "This is a tiny island and Mandahl is so small an area that it is difficult for the lay man, and even our local leaders, to recognize how far into the Atlantic Ocean Mandahl's life influence spreads and how irreplaceable those resources are. To ignore protections on the land and allow development will be disastrous."