The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Moving Full Steam With Plans For 'First Class, Full Service Luxury' Resort With Top U.S. Brand For St. Croix

Business / **Published On February 07, 2016 10:18 AM /**

Ernice Gilbert February 07, 2016

ST. CROIX -- Following up on one of the biggest announcements during his State of the Territory address in January, Governor Kenneth Mapp, through a press release Government House issued late Saturday, said he will name the members of a transaction team, made up of public and private sector experts, to put together a deal with a major hotel brand, this week.

Moving at full throttle, Mr. Mapp delivered a bill to the Senate on Friday that identifies funding for the professional services and reports required for the development and financing of what has been dubbed the "St. Croix Brand Hotel Project". According to the release, experts say a first class resort affiliated with an internationally known brand is what's needed to attract the flights and commerce necessary to truly develop the big island's tourism industry.

And the funds the governor is requesting are not new; they are monies that had been allocated to through Act 7730 to fund litigation with the Hess Corporation, and Mr. Mapp is requesting that said monies be reprogrammed to the Public Finance Authority to help pay for expenses related to the development project.

“Fortunately, the government was able to resolve the Hess litigation issues without spending any of these funds,” Mr. Mapp said. According to the release, just as the territory's leader pledged to settle the Hess matter, he has committed to presenting a viable hotel development plan to the public and the Legislature before the end of this year, reiterating what the governor said during his State of the Territory address.

“It is the intent of my administration to pursue a development arrangement with one of the top nationally recognized names in the hotel industry to develop, build and operate a first class, full service luxury resort with a minimum of 250 rooms,” the chief executive wrote in his transmittal letter to Senate President Neville James. “The $1 million I am asking you to reprogram will not build the resort, but it will allow us the resources to upgrade the destination study, create the plans and program strategy, acquire the professional and legal services and generate the necessary business partnership for the project."

He added: "Once this is complete, I hope to forward a package to the legislature to advance such a project. I am convinced that if we are successful, an upscale luxury resort for St. Croix would be in the best interest of the people of the Virgin Islands, and will spur economic recovery on the island. Without a doubt, this project would bring much needed jobs, visitors, additional airlift capacity and new revenues into our economy."

The governor blamed the diminishing of St. Croix's hotel industry on Hurricane Hugo, a storm that ravaged through the island in 1989. He said that the island lost "roughly half of its dated guestroom inventory that was in place prior to the storm." And even before the destructive storm, St. Croix had already experienced "serious decline" in its tourism brand, the governor added.

Mr. Mapp will speak extensively about economic plans on February 11 at the St. Croix Chamber of Commerce annual meeting.