

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Rezoning Requests for Commercial Center and Bowling Alley Conversion Tabled

VIC News / **Published On August 03, 2018 10:43 AM /**

Staff **August 03, 2018**



Attorney Joseph Caines presents testimony on behalf of Jerry Smith, CEO of JRS Holdings, who is petitioning rezoning to accomodate the commercial center he plans to develop in Estate Thomas.

ST. THOMAS -- Senators met to discuss two rezoning requests, including a request that would allow for the development of a new commercial center near the Roy L. Schneider Hospital, during a [Committee of the Whole session](#) this week but did not make a decision on either one.

Rezoning to Develop "Ensemble Commercial Center"

JRS Holdings Chief Executive Officer Jerry Smith asked the Senate to allow Parcel 48, Estate Thomas, to be changed from a residential zone to a business zone via [written testimony](#). He sent word that he was away in Colombia as a volunteer with the V.I. Olympic Committee at the Central American Caribbean (CAC) Games.

Mr. Smith plans to develop a three-story commercial complex on the 1-acre plot of undeveloped land, which is located near the RLS Hospital, Paragon Medical Building, Builders Emporium and Fortress Storage. He hopes the center will be an environment where medical, retail and other professional entities will flourish.

According to Mr. Smith, non-tourism-based business owners currently face the challenge of finding quality spaces in which they can operate at a fair price. He believes that his complex, The Ensemble Commercial Center, will help to change that.

"It is well established that small businesses are the life blood of every community," his written testimony read. "Holding this concept as truth solidifies the need for environments to exist that support the longevity of established small business while allowing small start-up businesses to have an opportunity to get off the ground. The Ensemble Commercial Center seeks to meet the need for high quality commercial space."

Residents living near Estate Road expressed concerns that JRS Holdings may have to gain access to Parcel 48 using that route. Residents Robert Moron and Luz Moron submitted a letter expressing concern that Estate Road was too narrow, nine to 10 feet wide, to accommodate the increased traffic a commercial center may bring. They said

way traffic and has "had an effect on



Submitted Photo Showing Size of

Estate Road

The Morons suggested that the road be widened should JRS have to use it for access to the center.

The Department of Planning and Natural Resources submitted reports recommending the rezoning to support the project. In a [report](#) dated May 9, 2018 and signed by

Commissioner Dawn Henry, DPNR had "no objection to the granting of the zone change" but suggested two requirements.

One of the requirements was that Estate Road be widened and paved to accommodate two-way traffic like the Morons suggested. Another, more ideal option, according to the DPNR report, would be to have Mr. Smith record an easement over another neighboring property to allow nonresidential traffic to pass through that area instead of Estate Road.

Although senators generally supported the project, they also expressed concerns.

Sen. Jean Forde asked if the road project would be completed before the construction of the commercial center, according to a statement released from the Senate after the hearing. Attorney Joseph Caines who represented Mr. Smith said that work on the road would be done either before or during the first phase of development of the center, the release said.

Sen. Novelle Francis expressed concerns about who would be financially responsible for expanding Estate Road. Leah Laplace-Matthew, DPNR's territorial manager for the Division of Comprehensive and Coastal Zone Planning, said it was Mr. Smith's responsibility.

Mr. Francis asked if JRS had all the funding necessary to cover the additional road project to which Mr. Caines said no because it is a multi-million-dollar project. However, he said that Mr. Smith was confident that he'd be able to get the funding, according to the Senate release.

Sen. Janelle Sarauw also expressed concerns about drainage, stating that if it wasn't properly done, it could cause flooding to the neighboring residents, the release said.



Office and Storage Space

V.I.C.M Property in Estate Bolongo

Senators also heard [testimony](#) from Attorney Jennifer Jones who represented V.I. Christian Ministries and presented their request to use the residentially-zoned Parcel No. 105, Estate Bolongo, for office and storage purposes.

VICM owns the property which is currently zoned R-1, allowing for a police station, fire station, electric substation and the like – but not for office and storage use. One of the

three structures on the land is a former bowling alley. Ms. Jones said the bowling alley hadn't been viable for the church ministry as they didn't serve alcohol there.

Using the space for offices instead would be more ideal economically, the attorney said. Ms. Jones noted that there'd been concerns about a retention pond located on the property at previous public hearings. However, converting the bowling alley, which typically brought more people onto the compound, into an office and storage space would have "virtually no environmental impact," according to Ms. Jones's testimony. She also testified that the conversion would require no construction or off-street parking.

According to the Senate release, a DPNR report from Commissioner Henry indicated that the public previously opposed the rezoning request because of the effects of traffic, pollution, sound and a possible increase in flooding. Sen. Tregenza Roach reportedly questioned the validity of those concerns, considering that there wouldn't be any structural changes associated with the conversion.

Ms. Jones testified that some of the concerns had nothing to do with the property or the project, the release said.

Feature Image: Attorney Joseph Caines presents testimony on behalf of Jerry Smith, CEO of JRS Holdings, who is petitioning rezoning to accomodate the commercial center he plans to develop in Estate Thomas.

August 3, 2018

This article was last updated at 11:46 a.m.