

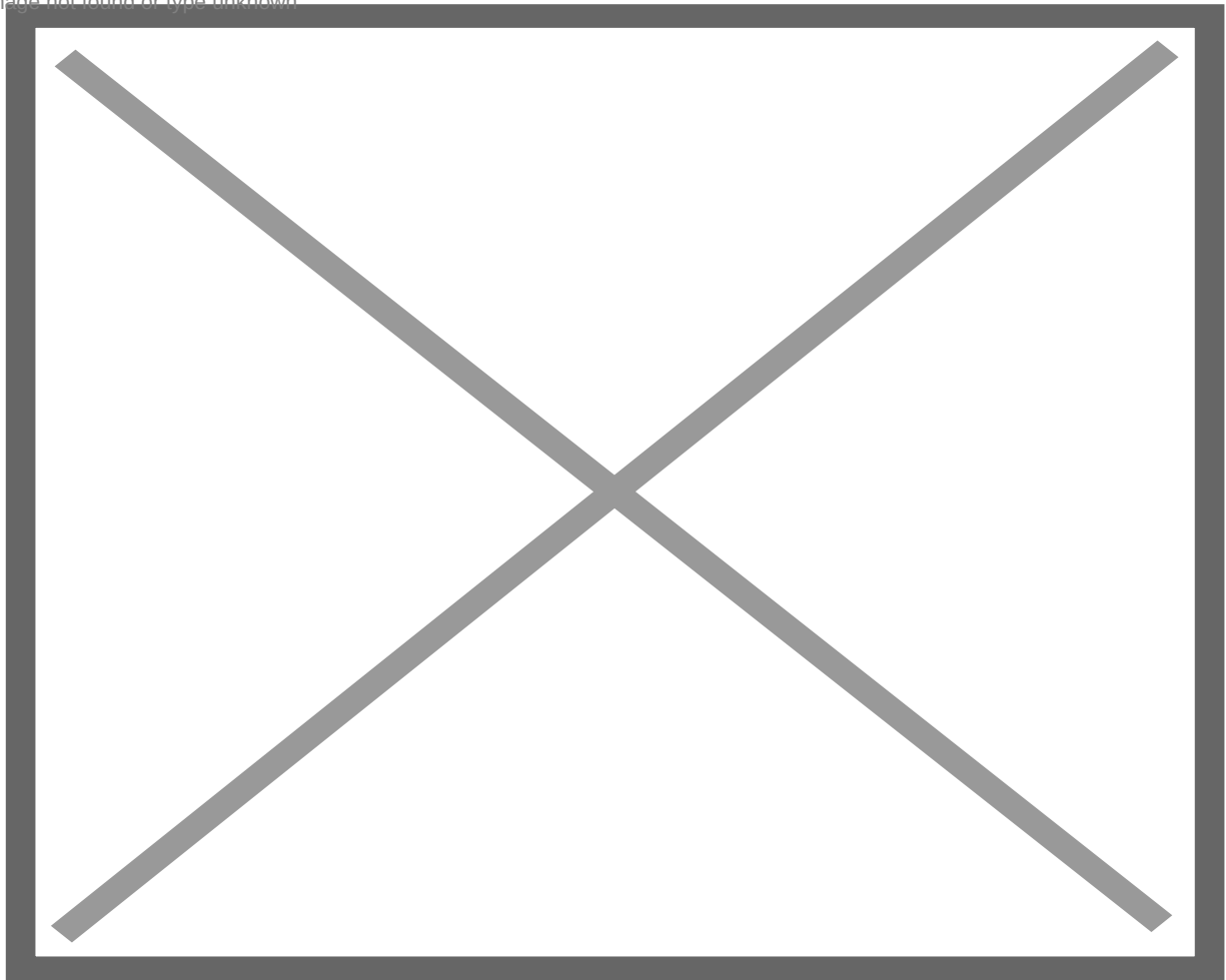
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Magens Bay Authority Considering Temporary Changes in Effort to Minimize Spread of Covid-19 Between Visitors and Locals

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Magens Bay Beach in St. Thomas. By. PICARA PEARL

ST. THOMAS — Katina Coulianos, the chairperson of the Magens Bay Authority, recently sent out a statement clarifying what she explained was an informal discussion held between the Magens Bay Authority Board, Cruise Ship Excursions and local tour operators. The report also sought to address the misperceptions circulating the community about how the authority considers proposals for various uses and activities.

Ms. Coulianos first explained the procedure for requests. "The applicant must first contact the authority whether by letter or email to begin the communication process, then during the board's

monthly board meetings, the applicant will present their proposal," she said.

There has been talk throughout the community about the board allowing St. Thomas company Cruise Ship Excursions to section off part of the beach for only their passengers. However, Ms. Coulianos made it clear in her statement that it was not the board's intention to do so.

Before Covid-19, Disney Cruises offered a tour for up to 200 people at Magens Bay, which included reserved chairs around the concession area. Since Covid-19, Disney has proposed for the authority to prepare for its eventual return to the island. The needs Disney proposed met both of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) requirements for onboard vessels and land tours.

Ms. Coulianos said Disney wanted to ensure that its passengers did not encounter anyone who may have the virus and vice versa. Disney's proposal included possibly reducing the number of people allowed on tour from 200 to 100 or even fewer. The company also proposed increased spacing between groups and having the tour moved to a less crowded area of the beach. Additionally, Disney requested that the board provide services that would make it convenient for their passengers to stay concentrated in one area to reduce the spread of the deadly contagion.

Hence the projected exclusive use of the bathroom trailer for Disney tour participants. Both the tour and the trailer would have their attendants. Ms. Coulianos stated that board members raised questions to the tour company, Cruise Ship Excursions, about the exclusiveness of using the bathroom trailer, but not to the use of that part of the beach. Members of the Board asked, "Would other beach users be prohibited from passing through the area in any direction?" Cruise Ship Excursions ensured that there would be no barriers or restrictions and that the proposal for an alternate location is temporary, only during the pandemic.

There were other questions that board members asked Cruise Ship Excursions which could not have been answered at that particular time, Ms. Coulianos said. Therefore, the company has been asked to submit more detailed information. Until then, the application has been tabled for further discussion and consideration at the next meeting, awaiting the receipt of the required information.

When it comes to proposals for uses and activities on the Magens Bay property, Coulianos said, "The public should be aware that the majority of the activities that occur on the property have come before the board."

In some cases, the policy has been set for repetitive activities like shed or tent rentals, weddings, church or family gatherings and celebrations. Application for these activities has a standard format and are handled by the Magens Bay office and manager. Some proposals do not come to board because they conflict with other rules that have already been established."

For example, "A proposal for Jet Ski rentals would not be considered because jet skis are not allowed at Magens Bay Park," said Ms. Coulianos. Proposals for activities of large events that come before the board are those such as:

- Food events
- Athletic events
- Boating events
- Tours on the parks "flora and fauna,"
- Health fairs
- Photoshoots for national advertising campaigns

- Filming of major motion pictures
- Group beach tours

All the activities listed above would be presented before the board to consider and negotiate the conditions under which said activities would be allowed. Ms. Coulianos said there can be various outcomes when an applicant presents a proposal to the board.

First, if the information supplied is sufficient, a vote is taken with the applicant present. Second, if more information is required, the application may be tabled pending the needed information. "In some cases, there may be multiple meetings before the board can reach a decision," Ms. Coulianos said.

Lastly, when the board reaches a unanimous vote, the conditions of approval are stated. The formalization and follow-through are done through the Magen's Bay office.

Magen's Bay Beach — donated to the people of the Virgin Islands by philanthropist and humanitarian Arthur Fairchild in 1946 — is located on the Northside of the island of St. Thomas. It stretches nearly three-quarters of a mile and is one of the territory's most popular beaches.