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'Marco' to Open Water Bottling Company as Part of Expansion; Senators Approve Other Local Business Growth Plans

Business / **Published On November 18, 2022 07:14 AM /**

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Shawn Baptiste. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

Businessman Shawn Baptiste is continuing to make a name for himself on St. Croix, telling lawmakers on Tuesday afternoon about his intention to add a water distillation plant and to expand into bottling water.

Mr. Baptiste, known as Marco, who is the president, CEO and the only shareholder of Marco St. Croix Inc., a water trucking company, has been in business since 1999.

He told senators in the Committee on the Whole of plans to source distilled water for his company in a bid to serve the people of St. Croix.

Presently, Mr. Baptiste owns a well which allows him to source water in-house for his trucking company but he has to rely on the V.I. Water and Power Authority for distilled water.

“Unfortunately, WAPA frequently experiences service interruptions that prevents us from fulfilling our customers’ needs on a timely basis, which negatively impacts our business,” he said during the hearing. “In order to provide quality and reputable 24/7 service, we need the capability to source our own distilled water.”

To do this, he applied to the Department of Planning and Natural Resources to rezone two plots of his land estimated at 1.42 acres in Estate Diamond from residential to commercial, in order for him to generate distilled water and add a multi-unit office complex.

DPNR reported that there are four wells on the property which were previously owned by Diamond Company but are not being used.

Meanwhile, an underground cistern currently under construction by Mr. Baptiste has the capacity to hold 1.5 million gallons of water which can act as a supply source when WAPA is unable to provide water to residents in Frederiksted.

“I will be able to assist the government with some of the issues when they have a burst water line in different areas,” he said.

“As we know, we’ve been having a problem with the seawater and the seaweed coming into the desalinating plant that they have, [but] with that, we wouldn’t have that issue,” he explained.

Like many other project propositions, Mr. Baptize faced opposition by at least two adjacent property owners who were concerned about the blockage of a privately owned road, improper guttering a road as well as the expansion’s impact on the water table and the possibility of the land sinking because of the removal of earth.

The DPNR told senators that with its permission, all areas of concerns were addressed and they approved the expansion project but denied the water facilitation plant because it did not want an industrial operation in a residential area.

“There’s no commercial zoning in the area and the commercial zone is technically an industrial type zone and so the department was not supportive of an industrial-type zone smack dab in the middle of a business/residential area,” said Leia LaPlace-Matthew, territorial planner at DPNR's Division of Comprehensive and Coastal Zone.

In addition, she said the requested commercial zone would not have allowed the water distillation plant.

A variance use clause established by DPNR will also allow Mr. Baptiste to do some level of water distillation and ice manufacturing on those properties. Alternatively, Mr. Baptiste said he would utilize other technology like robotics to bottle the water if necessary.

He is one of a number of local entrepreneurs that senators threw their support behind when they came to request land zoning changes this week.

Another business owner is Retes Allembert, who applied to have his property rezoned from residential to commercial to start a car rental company. He already owns an electronic repair shop.

Additionally, Estelle McIntosh received approval to expand an existing structure on Estate La Grange, West End Quarter, St. Croix from a one-story duplex to a two-story which will then consist of four apartments with two bedrooms and two bathrooms each. There was no opposition to her proposal and it was approved on the condition that the property does not exceed four dwelling units.

The Department of Public Works, represented by its commissioner, Derek Gabriel also received approval for Plot Nos. 73-B and 271 Estate Concordia, West End Quarter, St. Croix to be rezoned from residential to public.

The rezoning brings the property into zoning compliance and allows for the demolition and renovation of the Department of Public Works' Frederiksted Facility.

The local government has owned the property for over 30 years, which functions as a satellite location for the Department of Public Works.

A rezoning is being requested because the original zoning designation, R-3 residential, does not allow for offices, storage, or mechanical repairs, according to DPNR.