

The Virgin Islands Consortium

St. Johnians Praise VIPA for Inclusive Consultation Process During Enighed Pond Park Townhall

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3D modeling of the Proposed Enighed Pond Community Park in Cruz Bay By. THE VIRGIN ISLANDS PORT AUTHORITY

ST. JOHN — Residents in St John seem generally pleased with the conceptual renderings and the overall vision for the proposed Enighed Pond Community Park in Cruz Bay.

Several residents in attendance at Thursday night's townhall meeting — now the seventh consultation between them and the Virgin Islands Port Authority — were impressed with the level of community involvement VIPA has fostered with regards to the project.

"I want to assure you that this is unprecedented. This kind of input that we have been allowed hasn't happened before in any government agency that I'm aware of," said Pamela Richards, a former chair of the Port Authority.

Residents made remarks like "Thank you and very well done," and "this has never happened before so, we should be grateful for it."

"I'm very pleased that you're open to the ideas of the community. It says a lot," Senator Milton Potter remarked. "I think this project is a classic example of the possibilities that we can do with the Capital Improvement Fund. We can do something that's tangible, that's going to positively impact the quality of life of St. Johnians," he added.

VIPA has held continuous meetings to engage the community, including children, in developing ideas and a concept for the multi-purpose facility that will be used for community gatherings and cultural events on St. John.

The authority has tentatively agreed to six of the top 10 requests from the community, including green space, public art, a food court, a playground, a walk track and an amphitheater (an open-air venue used for entertainment, performances, and sports).

Other requests such as a bike lane, small pavilion, large pavilion and a skate park could not be incorporated into the design due to lack of space, said VIPA Director of Engineering Preston Byer.

"That was the top 10 that was requested from the survey that was done by the sub-committee from the community group," he said.

At least two residents advocated for a skate park. "I think that's a huge oversight. I'm understanding that it could be a real liability but it's a real need on St. John," a woman remarked. But according to Mr. Byer, space is limited and cannot accommodate all of those requests.

"Sports Park is supposed to be doing some construction on their facility and we are trying to keep in communication with them that we can possibly have that skate park right across the street from the community center itself," chimed in a member of the sub-committee group.

Residents also have an opportunity to propose names. One suggestion was having the site named after a respected and accomplished St. Johnian woman, but the opportunity to submit ideas in that respect will continue throughout the consultations.

Residents at Thursday's meeting raised concerns about excessive noise from future functions and events at the facility which is near residential properties. "I want to caution you to pay attention to things like noise pollution and light pollution for people who live in the area because it did come up at one of the last meetings," said one man.

A female resident asked about instituting a firm cut off time for functions so that residents nearby would not be overly disturbed by loud noises and bright lights, but VIPA Executive Director Carlton Dowe was non-committal. While he reassured that events would be held at reasonable hours, the executive director said residents would have to try to "live with each other" in times when there may be events that run later, like in the

week of Carnival festivities.

“St. John is small, it’s challenged so, even depending on how the wind blow, some folks who are living up the hill there can still hear the music,” he noted.

There was also a question of whether plans to make residents pay for parking would remain. Mr. Dowe responded that he would not be advocating for free parking, unless the Legislature decided upon an annual appropriation for maintenance and upkeep of the facility.

“You’re asking for a lot and the community deserves a lot but we have to keep custodian workers here, maintenance people here ... we have to be reasonable but it’s not going to be free,” he insisted.

The Legislature of the Virgin Islands has appropriated \$400,000 for the design of the facility via Act No. 8473., 10 percent of which has been expended on the conceptual rendering that shows a 3D model of the park.

All of the requests by residents will be assessed again during the design phase. The final concept is likely to include concession space and restrooms, a secondary entrance for hazardous events, a storage room with screening and flood protection, operational space for the Port Authority that can double up as facility for disaster operations, and potentially have a two-story parking garage.

The overall site plan including design and grading is expected to begin shortly, according to Mr. Byer, and will take nine months to complete. It will then be followed by the reviews and permitting process which may take anywhere from two to three months, and after that, procurement may take another two to three months.

“Realistically what we’ve been targeting is that this facility will be ready for Festival in 2025,” he said, noting that they would likely still not have completed all the finishing touches by then.