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# NPS Cites Federal Law to Deny Land Donation for New St. John School Construction, Says Exchange is Only Path Forward

Government / **Published On April 28, 2023 05:05 AM /**

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The National Park Service said on Thursday that donating the land [earmarked for exchange](#) on St. John would be a violation of federal law.

The recent public comment period pertaining to a proposed land exchange between the NPS and the Government of the Virgin Islands to facilitate the construction of a new public school on St. John received 400 comments, said NPS. Several commenters said that the land should be donated to the local government from the federal agency outright, instead of GVI having to give up valuable property in exchange.

In its response to the comments, however, NPS cites 54 U.S.C. §102901, which explicitly excludes land within national parks or monuments from being sold or leased, leaving an exchange the only option. The NPS further noted that the requirement for an even exchange means that the government would receive, in addition to the 11 acres of land in Catherineberg St. John on which the school will be built, a cash payment of approximately \$200,000. This is because the island of Whistling Cay which GVI offered as their part of the exchange is valued at \$1.4 million while the NPS parcel is appraised at \$1.2 million, necessitating the transfer of funds to equalize the value of the exchange.

In February, Governor Albert Bryan urged residents to accept that while the land exchange mechanism may not be the ideal way to achieve the long-held goal of offering the children of St. John a way to attend school without having to commute to St. Thomas, it was the only option on the table at this time. “Consider the options that are before us,” the governor [said](#).

Despite being legally barred from structuring the land transfer in a way several St. Johnians would have preferred, NPS says that it is still seeking the input of the public on the exchange proposal. As such, the public comment period has been extended an additional 45 days, and will now close by June 9.

The request is for new comments only, says NPS, as input previously submitted has already been compiled and considered. Those who have not yet done so but wish to submit a comment about the proposed land exchange can do so at the NPS Planning, Environment and Public Comment [website](#), or in-person at the VI National Park Visitor Center on weekdays from 8:15 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.