

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Public Input Requested on St. John Land Exchange Proposal to Build PreK-12 School

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The Office of Senate President Novelle E. Francis has issued a public call to action for residents to share their thoughts and concerns on the proposed land exchange deal for the construction of a new Pre K-12 school on St. John. Residents are encouraged to submit their comments to Mr. Francis's office before the Committee of the Whole meeting, set for Tuesday, July 11.

The committee meeting will take place in the Cleone H. Creque Legislative Conference Room in St. John. Notably, representatives from the Office of the Governor, the Virgin Islands National Park, and various St. John community groups have been extended an invitation to participate in the discussion.

The proposed exchange involves government-owned Tract No. 02-101 Whistling Island, also known as Whistling Cay, Cruz Bay Quarter, St. John, and Tract No. 01-137A Catherineberg (Hammer's Farm), Cruz Bay Quarter, St. John, a Department of Interior/National Park property. According to the agreement, the National Park Service will make an equalizing payment of \$210,000 to the Government of the Virgin Islands as part of the exchange.

Amid the legislative discourse, Governor Albert Bryan [penned an editorial](#) addressing the situation. Reflecting on his administration's accomplishments, the governor shifted focus to a persistent challenge: the absence of a full-scale public school on the island of St. John.

Mr. Bryan highlighted the proposal of a land swap agreement, sent to the 35th Legislature, as a pivotal step towards resolving this issue. His vision includes a state-of-the-art PK-12 public school centrally located on St. John to ease the daily hardships faced by St. Johnian students commuting to St. Thomas for their education.

Governor Bryan acknowledged past discussions about the National Park Service outrightly giving the land to the USVI for a St. John school but clarified that such an option was never on the table. He echoed the urgency of the situation, urging immediate action over drawn-out debate.

Under the proposed legislation, the Virgin Islands Government and its people will retain water rights to Whistling Cay. With a signed agreement for a land swap with the National Park Service and federal government funding commitment, the construction of the school, a community center, and storm shelter can commence post-haste.

Bryan ended his editorial with a rallying cry: "The time for action is now. Say yes to the land swap, call your senators, and tell them St. John students deserve better."

Public comments on this matter should be submitted to senatorfrancis@legvi.org by Friday, July 7, 2023. The committee meeting will start at 3:00 p.m. and can be viewed on Legit TV (VIYA Channel 26), the Legislature's Facebook page, or via live stream at legvi.org. Additionally, the hearing will be broadcasted on 91.9 FM.