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Preservation, Education, Rejuvenation - Magens Bay Authority Reveals 2024 Focus During Budget Hearing

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Magens Bay, St. Thomas.

When the Magens Bay Authority appeared before the Senate Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance on Tuesday, Interim General Manager Memorie Anne Brown Callender presented, along with the authority's financial profile, a vision for what Magens Bay staff intended to accomplish for the upcoming financial year. "These goals, aimed at improving our user experience and foster[ing] environmental conservation, form the form of our future strategy."

The first is preservation and rejuvenation of the arboretum. As Brown-Callender explains, "rehabilitating the arboretum requires replanting of native trees, clearing pathways and installing

informational plaques.” She noted that the restoration of the arboretum serves not only educational goals, but also serves an environmental preservation purpose. “The planting of trees will help in the watershed and soil erosion in inclement weather,” the Magens Bay Authority manager explained.

The provision of increased opportunities in water safety, marine, and job skill education is another key goal for the authority, carried forward from this year. Ms. Brown-Callender spoke of the partnership with a local library to establish “beach storytime sessions”, which was successfully launched with two events this summer. Workshops on the flora and fauna of Magens Bay will be held once the work on the arboretum is completed.

“These programs aim not only to empower individuals with skills, but also foster community development and youth engagement,” Ms. Brown-Callender said, noting that more formal education pathways are also being supported. “We will be reinstating the Edmund Penn Scholarship this upcoming fiscal year,” she told lawmakers, explaining that the award provides four years of funding for the recipient’s education at the University of the Virgin Islands. “Our collaboration with educational institutes will sow the seeds for a generation more attuned to nature’s wonders and the importance of conservation.”

The goals for education also intersect with the authority’s third focus - developing staff and improving facilities at both parks - Magens Bay and Smith Bay . Funding opportunities for workers who have served for at least one year will soon be available, a means to support employees’ educational pursuits. Construction on “bathhouse one” will soon begin, and a fitness trail is in the development pipeline, Ms. Brown-Callender noted.

These projects and goals, along with maintaining regular operations, will cost the authority a projected \$3.1 million for fiscal year 2024, approximately 73% of which is dedicated funding to payroll expenses for the authority’s 38 employees. With revenues expected to come in at over \$4.3 million, the surplus will be allocated towards upcoming infrastructure projects.

As the day’s hearing drew to a close, Ms. Brown-Callender explained why she thought it was important for the Magens Bay Authority to appear before the Legislature during budget hearings even though there is no general fund appropriation made to the entity. “It’s important that the public know how our funds are collected, how we spend our money, and that we are good stewards of the gifts that we received.”