

# The Virgin Islands Daily News

## Plans for luxury West End resort approved

By LYNN FREEHILL

Wednesday, July 26th 2006

ST. THOMAS - Botany Bay Partners on Tuesday was granted permission to build a resort development on 367 near-pristine acres that the company owns on St. Thomas' West End.

The five members of the St. Thomas Coastal Zone Management Committee voted unanimously to issue the developers a major CZM permit to construct the luxury resort, but they stipulated more than 30 special conditions for the project.

Road repaving, public beach access and special lighting considerations for nesting sea turtles will be required, among other measures.

Timbers Co., based in Carbondale, Colo., will oversee development of the project it calls The Preserve at Botany Bay.

The developers had composed a news release in advance of the meeting expressing their pleasure at the CZM committee's decision and detailing the project's components. They include 52 estate lots, which range in price from \$975,000 to \$4 million; hilltop villas; boutique hotel; and luxury amenities such as a waterfront spa.

"We are honored to be given this unprecedented opportunity to develop a luxury resort in Botany Bay's truly pristine location," Timbers Co. founder David Burden said in the statement.

Resort plans call for nine buildings that are two stories tall. The buildings will have 48 one-bedroom units and 18 suites. Because the suites can be divided in half so each becomes two units, 84 rooms are to be available at the resort in all.

Farther inland on the property, developers plan 16 two-story buildings that will house 31 time share units, along with a market, health club, clubhouse, swim-up bar, a reception building, manager's residence, 500,000-gallon potable water storage tank, two 1.5-megawatt emergency generators, a water treatment plant and a restaurant.

Five more two-story buildings will be divided into 40 hilltop villas.

St. John Real Estate also is marketing 42 estate lots, ranging between 2 and 14 acres in size, for individual owners. Because that land lies beyond the first-tier coastal zone, the owners are not required to get a major CZM permit for those lots.

The Preserve at Botany Bay remains in the architectural design stage, project manager Don Parris said, but the developers hope to begin construction this fall.

Among the special considerations specified Tuesday by the CZM committee are that the developers must:

- Coordinate with the V.I. Department of Public Works and "finance the repaving, as needed, of Route 30 from the western portion of Estate Hope to the entrance of its development. Such repaving must address to standard engineering practices the potholes" on that portion of the road, the committee said. Any damage to the road caused by construction activities must be immediately repaired.
- Surround stockpiles of dirt from construction with a "dike and swale system to ensure erosion and sedimentation is minimized. No piles shall be placed within 75 feet of the shoreline," the committee said.
- Use low-pressure sodium vapor lamps or take other measures to reduce the visibility of lighting from the beach, since excess lighting can disorient nesting sea turtles. Motion sensor lights are to be used where possible.
- Provide a walking path 4 feet wide from seven public parking spots to the beach for public shoreline access. Special transport for the elderly and handicapped along that path, which is estimated to be half a mile long, also is required.
- Secure an environmental bond of 25 percent of the estimated construction costs to be used to alleviate any environmental damage caused by construction work.
- Produce a booklet for every homeowner and staff member that highlights what each person can do to help preserve and protect Botany Bay's marine environment and animal habitat.

Several years ago, Botany Bay Partners' building plans ignited public controversy over how such a development would affect the nearly untouched environment.

In September 2002, the St. Thomas Coastal Zone Management Committee approved Botany Bay Partners' request for a major CZM permit to build the resort and time shares portion of the project. CZM staff had recommended that members reject the application, saying developers submitted inadequate analysis of the project's environmental impact.

The company's original plans submitted called for a greater density of development on the site. A 125-room hotel, 80 time share units, 80 vacation villas, a number of commercial buildings to support the project and 40 estate lots for private residences were proposed.

The Environmental Association of St. Thomas-St. John challenged the plans in court in 2002 and 2003 but did not prevail in its lawsuits.

Botany Bay Partners voluntarily relinquished its major CZM permit last March.

EAST president Carla Joseph said after Tuesday's meeting that the organization had hoped Botany Bay would be the cornerstone of a territorial park system and that more would be done to preserve more of the property if it were developed.

"Nonetheless, we are pleased with some of the work they did," she said, citing the developers' work with the V.I. State Historic Preservation Office on archaeological excavation and on the project's provisions for beach access.

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