

USVI Comprehensive Land and Water Use Plan

St. Croix Working Group Kick Off Meeting – May 1, 2023 – 12 pm

The virtual kickoff meeting of the St. Croix Working Group for the USVI Comprehensive Land and Water Use Plan (CLWUP) was held via Zoom on Monday, 5/1/23 from 12:00 – 1:30 pm AST.

Present

Alicia Barnes, Susan Beach, Devin Carrington, Mary Cornwall, Wylie Crowther, Olasee Davis, Joe Dwyer, John Farchette, Nataki Finch Richards, Vanessa Forbes, Kaden Grouby, Aimee Griles, Carey Guilbeau, Sahlil Gulati, Marjorie Hendricksen Emanuel, Celeste Jarvis, Larry Kupfer, Judith Lordi, Dese Maynard, Daphne McIntosh-Rodriguez, James Pisula, Desiree Ross, Perry Sheraw, Kirstin Stutzman, Carlos Tesitor, Barbara Walsh, Genevieve Whitaker, Alma Winkfield, Len Wright, Jeff Davis (HW), Krista Moravec (HW), Nate Kelly (HW), Kellie King (HW), Hilary Lohmann (DPNR), Leia LaPlace (DPNR)

Welcome

Jeff Davis (HW), Hilary Lohmann (DPNR), and Leia LaPlace (DPNR) provided brief opening remarks.

Introductions

All individuals introduced themselves (name, residence, association).

Overview of the Working Groups' Role & Responsibilities

Jeff Davis (HW) provided an overview of the Working Groups' role and responsibilities, expected schedule and time commitment, and structure. The project team would like to work with the Working Groups to determine how best to meet, communicate, and use everyone's time effectively.

Key points related to the role of the Working Groups:

- Working Groups (one for each district) will not have any formal approval authority but are expected to provide important guidance.
- Working Groups will provide oral and written feedback on draft materials and advice and guidance regarding upcoming public engagement activities.
- The project team will rely on Working Groups to help promote public activities and events through their own local networks and provide access to materials that may assist with CLWUP development (e.g., photos).
- Working Groups can provide guidance on key issues important on a particular island and bring local knowledge and experience to the topics covered in the CLWUP.

Key points related to the expected schedule and time commitment:

- Meetings will be virtual (via Zoom or other platform) and Working Groups will meet prior to each major round of public engagement or release of major plan materials. This will likely amount to at least six meetings held approximately once every other month.
- Working Group members will often be given "homework" between meetings to help support development of the CLWUP.
- The draft near-term timeline is as follows:

- Late May/Early June: Online public survey on Formative Issues
- Week of June 26: Second Working Group meeting focused on public engagement for Guiding Principles and Policies
- Week of July 17: Public engagement for Guiding Principles and Policies
- August: Third Working Group meeting focused on Visioning Charrette
- August/September: Visioning Charrette
- The draft long-term timeline is as follows (specific dates TBD):
 - Fourth Working Group meeting to focus on reviewing policy framework and online public survey before they are released.
 - Fifth Working Group meeting to focus on reviewing draft goals, policies, and strategies, and next round of in-person public engagement.
 - Sixth Working Group meeting to focus on reviewing draft CLWUP and next round of in-person public engagement.

Key points related to Working Groups' structure:

- Meetings will be between 60-90 minutes and focus on items that would benefit from group discussion. Individual feedback (e.g., specific text edits) should be collected via “homework assignments.”
- Communications platform is to-be-decided (e.g., email, Google Drive, password-protected page on [project website](#)).

Discussion

Dese Maynard asked for further clarification on the contract details (e.g., deadlines, goals, budget) for the CLWUP.

- The contract is ~\$1.35 million, and the expected timeline is 12-24 months. **Jeff Davis (HW)** and **Hilary Lohmann (DPNR)** both noted that the timeline is variable because we want the process to not be rushed and allow enough time for public engagement.
- **Hilary Lohmann (DPNR)** noted that the contract is financed through the Reclamation Fund (approximately 2/3) and NOAA (approximately 1/3) and is not funded by local tax dollars. **Alicia Barnes** provided additional information on the Reclamation Fund, noting that it is funded partially through local fees (e.g., Submerged Land fees) and is a fund under the discretion of the DPNR Commissioner.

Dese Maynard said that Zoom is likely accessible, but monthly meeting for updates would be helpful on-island. Dese said that this would also help with community involvement.

- **Jeff Davis (HW)** said that monthly Working Group meetings can be scheduled, but that HW (and not all sub-consultants) will not be in the USVI on a monthly basis. Jeff noted that this is a public engagement area that the Working Group members could help lead—HW has used a “meetings in a box” strategy to help community liaisons independently host small focus group and informational sessions in other projects. With “meetings in a box,” Working Group members would be provided all necessary informational and/or presentation materials and guidance to host meetings.

Genevieve Whitaker asked if the Working Group members would be divided into sub-groups to focus on particular interest areas. Genevieve is willing to work with a sub-group to help with Working Group communications.

Alicia Barnes asked about public engagement and wanted to know if the project team has a robust public engagement strategy, any on-island staff, and a plan for grassroots engagement.

- **Krista Moravec (HW)** said that HW has created a Public Participation Plan with DPNR that identifies key points for engagement. The Public Participation Plan identifies pathways for communication for different project milestones. Krista also noted that there are several sub-consultants on each district.
- The on-island sub-consultants are Kurt Marsh on St. John, Clarence Brown and Frandelle Gerard on St. Croix, and John Woods on St. Thomas. Nykole Tyson is the sub-consultant leading communications and marketing efforts for the project and is based on St. Croix. HW also has local staff on the project that are based on St. Croix.
- **Jeff Davis (HW)** said that one of the Working Group roles is to help the project team connect with additional groups and people for public engagement.
- **Alicia Barnes** recommended connecting with the League of Women Voters. **Krista Moravec (HW)** said that we have connected with the League and have already received some materials from them.

Alicia Barnes said that there has been a significant amount of work that has gone into components of the CLWUP—laws, plans, area plans, etc. Alicia asked if the project team has access to these previous efforts and if they are being used.

- **Jeff Davis (HW)** said that the project team is reviewing previous planning efforts and building off previous planning work for the CLWUP.

Judith Lordi asked who the primary contact person for CLWUP questions is, and how to contact them. Judith requested that contact information be sent out to the Working Group members.

- **Jeff Davis (HW)** said he (jdavis@horsleywitten.com) and Hilary Lohmann (DPNR) (hilary.lohmann@dpr.vi.gov) are the primary contacts.

Nataki Finch Richards expressed interest in previous planning initiatives, and would like everyone in the Working Group to have access to those materials. Nataki asked if the CLWUP is starting with the previous planning work as a foundation, or if that material is being opened up to general updates.

- **Jeff Davis (HW)** said the CLWUP will build on many existing plans and studies. Previous planning work is posted on the [project website](#). Additional materials can be shared via the project website as well.

Recap: What We Heard From the Town Hall Meetings

In the interest of time, **Jeff Davis (HW)** proposed skipping this agenda item. Working Group members were emailed the Summary Report of the February 28th – March 8th Town Hall Meetings and Open Houses (all summary materials are also available on the [project website](#)).

Draft Formative Issues

Nate Kelly (HW) reviewed the draft summary of Formative Issues. Working Group members will be provided with a more detailed Formative Issues document after the meeting for their review and feedback. The Formative Issues document is based on the project team's research of existing data, plans, and past planning initiatives; interviews with territorial agencies and staff; and the public engagement sessions. The Formative Issues will translate into Guiding Principles, which will inform the policies that the CLWUP advocates for. At this point, the Working Group members can help the project team confirm whether the Formative Issues are aligned with the needs of the community.

Discussion

Genevieve Whitaker asked about community engagement and how the CLWUP may be able to support efforts to mandate community engagement in the planning process. Genevieve noted there has not been a lot of legislative support for mandatory town hall meetings, etc. and wanted to know if HW has done an analysis of prior community engagement efforts to determine how efforts could be improved.

- **Jeff Davis (HW)** acknowledged that the desire for more community engagement was expressed clearly and noted that James Pisula made a similar point about increasing citizen involvement in the zoning and land use review processes during his self-introduction. Community engagement will be a priority for the CLWUP.

Olasee Davis emphasized that the CLWUP must consider natural resources and cultural resources, and that zoning must be addressed in the plan.

- **Jeff Davis (HW)** said that the CLWUP will prepare the USVI to adopt significant zoning changes, but that the CLWUP itself is not zoning regulations. Jeff also acknowledged that the Territory has already drafted strong updates to zoning that have not yet passed.

Mary Cornwall asked about how HW is managing the process of creating the CLWUP and wants to know the key milestone and deliverable dates. Mary also expressed that there should be coordination between meetings, and that each Working Group meeting should have documented action items and meeting summaries/minutes. Mary noted interest in seeing HW's contract with DPNR for the CLWUP and emphasized that any delays to key milestones and deliverables should be clearly documented.

- **Jeff Davis (HW)** said that he would share the timeline with everyone, and that every Working Group meeting will have a staff notetaker. A meeting summary will be sent out later in the week. Jeff also reiterated that the project team wants the Working Group to help shape how its time could best be used and HW can help.

Kaden Grouby noted that the USVI is currently heavily reliant on tourism—how land and water is designated for use is important for diversifying the USVI's economy. The USVI cannot depend solely on tourism, especially in the context of climate change and drought. There must also be adequate land for agriculture.

Devin Carrington asked if the Senate's process of zoning (and spot zoning) will be reviewed and incorporated into the plan.

- **Jeff Davis (HW)** acknowledged that HW has heard that process is problematic and that the Working Group and public will help the project team develop recommendations on how to improve and reform the decision-making process for land and water use decisions.

Alicia Barnes emphasized Kaden Grouby's previous point, saying that there was no reference to how the CLWUP will align with the Territory's Vision 2040 Long-Term Economic Development Strategy. Alicia also expressed caution, saying that perfect should not be the enemy of good when it comes to moving the CLWUP forward. Alicia also said that there needs to be grassroots engagement of the community beyond just the Working Group and its members' network. Some of the people with the most historical and local knowledge are USVI's elders, and an elder engagement strategy would be useful.

- Camoin Associates, the lead consultant for the Vision 2040 Long-Term Economic Development Strategy, is part of the CLWUP project team.

Judith Lordi asked for clarification about whether the CLWUP is a zoning plan.

- **Jeff Davis (HW)** said that the CLWUP is a plan that will address zoning, but that the CLWUP is not itself zoning regulations. Jeff noted that this issue is something the project team is looking for guidance on, as it is the project team's understanding that one of the reasons past efforts to pass a CLWUP is failed is because they were too prescriptive about zoning. The project team will need help determining how prescriptive the CLWUP should be about zoning, in addition to establishing general goals and guidelines for zoning.
- **Judith Lordi** noted that the 2014 CLWUP version is so amorphous it could be interpreted in multiple ways, which is another reason why it did not pass.
- **Alicia Barnes** noted that there have been lots of proposed zoning code amendments that have not been passed (Town Blueprints, Form-Based Code, etc.). They would have helped the 2014 CLWUP if adopted.

Closing

Jeff Davis (HW) reiterated that all Working Group members will be sent the draft Formative Issues document, presentation slides from the kickoff meeting, and a contact list of Working Group members via email. Additional materials and meeting minutes will be sent later this week.