

USVI Comprehensive Land and Water Use Plan

St. John Working Group Kick Off Meeting – May 3, 2023 – 10 am

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 Wednesday, 5/3/23 from 10:00 – 11:30 am AST.

Present

BJ Harris, Jay Swartley, David Silverman, Sharon Coldren, Jeff Davis (HW), Krista Moravec (HW), Nate Kelley (HW), Kellie King (HW), Hilary Lohmann (DPNR), Leia LaPlace (DPNR), Marlon Hibbert (DPNR)

Welcome

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

Introductions

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

Discussion

David Silverman asked how the Working Group members were selected and noted that the attendees are not very representative of St. John. David observed that no ancestral St. Johnians are in attendance.

- **Jeff Davis (HW)** acknowledged David's point, noting that the St. John Working Group is not yet representative of the island's population.
- The Working Groups are open to everyone. The project team is asking the Working Group members to continue inviting individuals to participate and join the Working Groups.
- **Jay Swartley** asked about the official procedure for joining the Working Group. **Jeff Davis (HW)** said anyone interested can contact him directly (jdavis@horsleywitten.com), **Hilary Lohmann (DPNR)** (hilary.lohmann@dpnr.vi.gov), or sign up via the [project website](#).

BJ Harris asked for the [project team](#).

Sharon Coldren asked if there is a way to acknowledge when someone submits the Working Group interest form on the project website immediately.

- **Jeff Davis (HW)** said he will add an auto-acknowledgement to the website but noted he also emails individuals personally upon receipt of the interest form submission.

David Silverman asked whether the National Park Service had been contacted about joining the Working Group.

- **Jeff Davis (HW)** said that the project team has engaged the NPS generally as part of the planning process but that the project team would like to defer to the Working Group members about whether it would be appropriate to have an NPS representative in the Working Group.
- **Sharon Coldren** said that it is not possible to talk about land management in Coray Bay without talking about NPS land.
- **Jeff Davis (HW)** asked about a good contact for the NPS. **Sharon Coldren** said that the ask should go to the local NPS administrator (Nigel Fields, VI National Park Superintendent). **Marlon Hibbert**

(DPNR) said that NPS was initially invited to all meetings but that they have been busy. Marlon said that he would personally contact Nigel Fields to reinvite NPS to the discussion.

Role of the Working Groups

Jeff Davis (HW) provided an overview of the Working Groups' role and responsibilities.

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.

Discussion

David Silverman asked how the Working Groups' feedback would be considered and incorporated into the final version of materials, and to what extent feedback would be incorporated.

- **Jeff Davis (HW)** acknowledged the importance of the question and said that how feedback will be incorporated depends in part on feedback across all three districts. DPNR will have the final say. The project team is committed to making it very clear and public what requests for changes have been made by each Working Group, whether feedback was incorporated, and why feedback was not incorporated (if that occurs).
- **David Silverman** asked for additional clarification on which territorial body has the final say on the CLWUP (e.g., the Legislature or DPNR). **Jeff Davis (HW)** emphasized that the Legislature must ultimately adopt the CLWUP, but that the CLWUP is DPNR's document in the sense that the the agency has been charged by the Governor and Legislature to create and present a plan to the Legislature. **Leia LaPlace (DPNR)** restated that the CLWUP compiles the people's concern. **Sharon Coldren** expressed that it is important (from the perspective of a community non-profit organization) that the CLWUP stays principally with the community and executive before it is ready for presentation to the Legislature to ensure that the plan does not get early opposition. **BJ Harris** agreed with Sharon Coldren's statement. **Marlon Hibbert (DPNR)** reiterated **Leia LaPlace's** statement that the CLWUP is prepared with the input of the community and should represent their interests and concerns and reflect the direction the community wants the Territory to move towards. Marlon reiterated that community participation is important to creating the CLWUP and ensuring the Legislature knows the CLWUP is reflective of the community's wants. Marlon said that DPNR and the consultants, including sub-consultants from the USVI, are not here to alter things and is here to help shape the CLWUP as the community's document; it is important to put aside any personal agendas.
- **Jeff Davis (HW)** reiterated that the goal is to incorporate common themes from the community, and in some cases the common will of USVI residents may be counter to the Legislature's opinion.

- **BJ Harris** said it would be helpful to have a sense of what happens in the St. Thomas and St. Croix Working Groups to stay in the loop. **Jeff Davis (HW)** said the project team is letting the Working Groups make their own rules regarding structure, but having guests from other Working Groups is a good idea—he will propose BJ Harris’s idea to the other Working Groups. All materials from Working Group meetings will also be posted online for viewing.

David Silverman summarized what he heard: the CLWUP should represent the collective vision of the communities and DPNR/the project team is facilitating that process. David acknowledged that the people in the Working Group have not always been aligned with DPNR’s policy positions and that DPNR also has its own political mandate. David said he hopes that DPNR can put aside its political mandate and act as the facilitator for this CLWUP process.

Expected Schedule & Time Commitment

Jeff Davis (HW) provided an overview of the expected schedule and time commitment throughout the CLWUP process.

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.

Discussion

Sharon Coldren asked for a general outline of the CLWUP that would help the Working Group get a sense of what sections and content may be included. Sharon asked for examples of plans from other jurisdictions that could be a reference for general content and format. Sharon also asked for clarification about what a “plan” is, and whether it includes zoning, subdivision regulations, etc.

- **Jeff Davis (HW)** said the plan structure will evolve as the process continues and will reflect previous planning work. The CLWUP must also incorporate the topics/issues as laid out in the

Governor's executive order from the 1990s. **Sharon Coldren** expressed specific interest in plans from other jurisdictions and wanted to know if there are other plans the project team has worked on that would be relevant. **Jeff Davis (HW)** emphasized that part of the project team's charge is to incorporate relevant past planning work. Land and water use comprehensive plans are a bit unique and there are not many direct corollaries; however, HW does have examples of comprehensive plans from the mainland that can be shared with the Working Groups. Jeff said that it is important to differentiate between the plan and 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. The CLWUP should establish a framework for how laws and zoning regulations are changed; the USVI has great examples of zoning rewrites that were not adopted, and hopefully these can move concurrently forward for adoption soon after the CLWUP. **Leia LaPlace (DPNR)** agreed with Jeff Davis (HW).

Jay Swartley said there was a lot of frustration from native St. Johnians and newer residents about DPNR's capacity for enforcement expressed during previous public engagement and in general.

- **Jeff Davis (HW)** agreed, saying that point has been expressed on all three districts and is something that will be incorporated into the Formative Issues document.

David Silverman reaffirmed Sharon Coldren's statement about needing to make the CLWUP more "concrete" for people. David expressed that a plan is a vision for where we want to end up in the future and as a roadmap for how to get there.

Working Group Structure

Jeff Davis (HW) provided an overview of the intended structure of the Working Group. 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 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

BJ Harris prefers email. **Jay Swartley** said it may be beneficial to have items all in one place. **David Silverman** is happy with any form of electronic communications but thinks 60-90 minutes is too short for meetings. **BJ Harris** said meeting length will depend on how much Working Group members get done between meetings, and **Jay Swartley** asked how other Working Groups are being structured.

- **Jeff Davis (HW)** said the St. Croix Working Group kickoff meeting was about 90 minutes, with about 25 members present (of 40 that volunteered). The St. Croix Working Group requested a Google Drive to host materials.
- **Jay Swartley** proposed starting with email and adjusting as needed.
- **David Silverman** and **Jay Swartley** said they are open to longer meetings if necessary to cover the agenda items, and **BJ Harris** said the Working Group should aim to be efficient. **Jeff Davis (HW)** agreed and will reserve two hours for the next meeting if needed.

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

David Silverman said the draft is a fantastic list of Formative Issues and captures a majority of what he has heard in discussions. David said that some Formative Issues will vary by island and expressed surprise that food security was not mentioned.

- Nate Kelly (HW) noted that food security is included in the expanded version of the Formative Issues document, so there is the opportunity to provide feedback directly on that point.

BJ Harris expressed support for the draft Formative Issues.

Jay Swartley asked for the presentation slides and whether it is okay to share the materials.

- **Jeff Davis (HW)** said all Working Group members would receive an email with the expanded version of the Formative Issues document, the presentation slides, and contact information for Working Group volunteers. It is okay to share these materials with other people interested in Working Group. Ideally, Working Group members will return feedback by May 15th to allow the project team to make any adjustments before developing the public survey.

Jay Swartley provided some points about how the project website could be improved and noted navigation had been difficult.

- **Jeff Davis (HW)** said he would address Jay’s concerns (DNR contact information, interactive map, etc.). **BJ Harris** asked about the subscription button and **Jeff Davis (HW)** noted the website has the subscription button and a separate page for people to sign up for the Working Group.
- **Sharon Coldren** asked about eblasts that have been sent so far. **Jeff Davis (HW)** said eblasts have been sent about the public engagement events and summary of public engagement events. Jeff

said the next eblast will likely be about a public survey on the Formative Issues in the next few weeks.

David Silverman joked about getting team T-shirts to advertise the Working Groups and CLWUP!

Jeff Davis (HW) reiterated that materials can be shared, but asked the Working Group members to be strategic as draft materials may need adjustments and finetuning before being officially released to the general public and media.

Sharon Coldren asked about rebranding the CLWUP to a less wordy acronym—“Virgin Islands Plan” (VIP). Jeff Davis (HW) said that the “CLWUP” term has a legal meaning, but an easier way to refer to it would be helpful.

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.