

# USVI Comprehensive Land and Water Use Plan

## St. John Working Group Kick Off Meeting – June 28, 2023 – 10 am

The virtual kickoff meeting of the St. John Working Group for the USVI Comprehensive Land and Water Use Plan (CLWUP) was held via Zoom on Wednesday, 6/28/23 from 10:00 – 11:30 am AST.

### Present

Alan Smith, BJ Harris, Jay Swartley, Jeff Davis (HW), Krista Moravec (HW), Nate Kelly (HW), Gabby Queenan (HW), Hilary Lohmann (DPNR), Leia LaPlace (DPNR), Marlon Hibbert (DPNR)

### Welcome

**Jeff Davis (HW)** provided brief opening remarks. **Nate Kelly (HW)** provided a brief update on the Cruz Bay charette.

- **Jay Swartley** repeated Sharon Coldren’s question regarding why the Working Group was not informed about the Cruz Bay charette.
- **Nate Kelly (HW)** responded that this was an oversight on the part of the project team and that this will not happen again moving forward.

### Shorthand for the Comprehensive Land & Water Use Plan

**Jeff Davis (HW)** shared that based on feedback from the Working Groups and project team, moving forward the Comprehensive Land and Water Use Plan which has been referred to as “CLWUP” will now be referred to as the “Comp Plan.”

### Formative Issues, Policy Directions & Working Strategies

**Jeff Davis (HW)** provided an overview of the responses from the Formative Issues public survey. There were approximately 30 responses. Though limited, the responses included many substantive comments. The vast majority of responses expressed support for the proposed Formative Issues as-is or with modifications. Less than 2% of responses were not in support of the proposed Formative Issues. The most common request from the responses was to make water uses more prominent.

**Jeff Davis (HW)** provided an overview of the responses from the Working Groups to the Formative Issues. There was a strong focus on people, culture, and heritage from the Working Groups. There was also an emphasis on government transparency, accountability, and capacity. There were also many requests made for more opportunities for local decision making, particularly in St. John. There were also specific environmental concerns raised across several topics, including regeneration, sustainability, conservation, and development. There was also an emphasis on water uses.

**Jeff Davis (HW)** provided an overview of the guidelines for government decision making and implementation summary. Key steps include the following: set goals, collect data, be accountable, act equitably, mind the future, and embrace change.

**Jeff Davis (HW)** provided an overview of the draft Policy Directions and Working Strategies document. Written comments will be accepted through July 5 to allow the project team enough time to incorporate this information into the boards before the town halls.

## Discussion

**Alan Smith** noted that it is important to recognize the systemic constraints that exist outside of the Comp Plan process, most importantly that these systems of decision making have substantively minimized and marginalized sectors of the population. This is a constraint of every community involved in the planning process, but it is essential that in this Comp Plan there is a structure developed such that there is an ongoing conversation at the lowest possible level in the community to ensure that people continue to be engaged in the process. In addition, there is a need to sustain ongoing education of the community about how to work on the externalities which pressure the community and in some cases are outside of the community's control. The use of the word "comprehensive" in the Comp Plan may be misleading given the constraints of this existing system, and it might be better to only refer to this as the "land and water use plan." The overarching question remains how can we give as much agency as possible to community members on those issues which are endemic? There needs to be progress with respect to these issues with this Comp Plan, even if it is a small step forward.

- **BJ Harris** asked who has the responsibility for moving the Comp Plan forward if there is not a citizen group who is responsible for tracking implementation and ensuring accountability. It is crucial to build this as a living document, similar to what other trade associations have done, to ensure the long-term success of the Comp Plan.
- **Jeff Davis (HW)** responded that this issue also came up in the St. Croix Working Group meeting earlier this week. The St. Croix Working Group was pleased with the structure of the Working Group model and noted it would be ideal to maintain this structure after the Comp Plan is adopted. HW has worked this kind of structure into other comprehensive plans to ensure there is a resident-led committee responsible for tracking implementation with the authority to report to the government.

**BJ Harris** expressed disappointment with the limited survey responses. The survey link was shared with the St. Croix and St. John realtors list, and at least one person responded that they had a hard time completing the survey. The Working Group needs to discuss who else should be pulled into the conversation. People who have trades that are interwoven with land and water need to be engaged (e.g., builders, landscapers, attorneys, realtors) in addition to other external groups like AARP. A more aggressive approach will be needed with the next survey to make sure that different groups in the community are reached.

- **Krista Moravec (HW)** noted that while the upcoming July town hall is intended to focus on policy, attendees will be invited to comment on anything they would like. The formative issues will be presented and feedback on the formative issues will be accepted during that time as well.

**BJ Harris** noted that it seemed like respondents to the survey seemed to approve of the sections for the most part, except for a few concerns raised with the transportation section.

- **Jeff Davis (HW)** responded that one concern that was raised in particular was around freight and what alternative measures would be used to address freight on the islands (e.g., rail, small boats to various harbors).

## Town Hall Meetings and Open Houses – July 18-20

**Krista Moravec (HW)** provided an overview of the expected structure and logistics for the upcoming town hall events in July. For St. John, the town hall meeting will take place on Wednesday, July 19 from 5:30-

7:30 pm at the Sprauve School. The town hall will include an overview of the Comp Plan process and a review of what has been done so far for those who were unable to attend previous town halls. The primary goal of these town hall events is to gather feedback on the draft policy directions and working strategies. Staff will be at the town hall to answer questions and have informal conversations around each of the 10 “stations” for each of the Formative Issues. Feedback will be gathered from the public via a hard-copy worksheet or online survey. There will be an informal open house event prior to the town hall at 4:30 pm for individuals to review the materials in more detail and speak with staff. For those unable to attend the town hall, a “virtual open house” will be open from July 18-August 6 on [www.planUSVI.com](http://www.planUSVI.com).

**Krista Moravec (HW)** provided an overview of the draft participant worksheet and draft boards for the July town hall events. The hard-copy materials include QR codes for those who want to view additional information and comment online as well.

### Discussion

**BJ Harris** noted that she will be unable to attend the town hall event that evening but will find someone to go in her place.

**Alan Smith** expressed concerns about the amount of information on the draft boards for the town hall. Cartoons might offer an effective alternative to share information in a more digestible format. People may be overwhelmed by the amount of information they need to read with the current drafts.

- **Krista Moravec (HW)** responded that this has been an ongoing discussion within the project team. There are a lot of ideas right now, and it may be better to hold back on those and stick with something more straightforward.
- **BJ Harris** noted that one of the main reasons that earlier plans did not work is that there was not a sufficient effort made to get buy-in from the public.
- **Jeff Davis (HW)** responded that the project team has struggled from the beginning with the level of information to share during this process. One option is to bring the public along every step of the way in great detail or try to focus on engaging a smaller group. It can be difficult to communicate some of the Comp Plan topics broadly without getting into the weeds. For the purposes of the open house and town hall event, it may be better to keep the boards at a high level, list policies only, and have information for staff about different strategies to share if needed.
- **Alan Smith** suggested that the team stop thinking like planners and start thinking like advertisers to come up with something that would engage the public broadly and quickly. A jingle or catch line that resonates will people would be helpful. The public needs to understand how this plan will impact people every day. For example, with Love City St. John, everyone knows this slogan and understands what this means to them.

**Jay Swartley** noted that St. John is very different from St. Thomas and St. Croix. If a nerve is touched, people will be activated very easily. Information needs to be simple and straightforward so that people do not feel overwhelmed.

**BJ Harris** suggested reducing the existing formative policies document to two pages of bullet points without examples. The reduced document could be shared with local lists, although everyone may not read it.

- **Krista Moravec (HW)** responded that the document does need to be edited and that it is likely not everyone will read it.
- **Jay Swartley** emphasized BJ Harris' early point that the document be kept simple to stimulate conversations.

**Jeff Davis (HW)** noted that the project team will make it clear in communications that they have heard and are including new ideas, in addition to keeping some of the old ideas from prior plans that were good.

- **BJ Harris** noted that some of the prior plans were not good.
- **Jeff Davis (HW)** confirmed that only the ideas which are good would be brought forward again.

**Jay Swartley** raised a point that David Silverman had asked earlier regarding involvement of the National Park Service. It would be good to have them at the next town hall.

- **Nate Kelly (HW)** confirmed that the National Park Service was at the recent Cruz Bay charette and that the project team has connections with their staff. The project team will follow up with them to make sure they attend the town hall.
- **Alan Smith** asked whether there was a general need to increase the participation of government actors in the public forum.
- **Nate Kelly (HW)** responded that thus far, there has been a good showing by the legislature. DPNR and the rest of the project team has continued to do other outreach and engage with agencies like VITEMA.
- **Jeff Davis (HW)** noted that DPNR has a master list of other agencies involved in decisions and they have been in conversations with them about the Comp Plan.
- **Leia LaPlace (DPNR)** noted that the formative issues documents have been shared with the other agencies as well.

**Jay Swartley** asked when the rest of the project team would arrive on St. John.

- **Jeff Davis (HW)** confirmed that the project team would be in St. Thomas the night before on July 18<sup>th</sup> and would take the ferry over to St. John in the morning on July 19<sup>th</sup>. The project team was unable to secure accommodations on St. John for that evening, so will need to return to St. Thomas for the evening. The project team may not have a car on St. John, so any support with transportation is appreciated.
- **Jay Swartley** asked the project team to reach out to the Working Group before they arrive to make sure they can schedule outreach in advance.
- **Jeff Davis (HW)** confirmed that the project team will reach out to the entire Working Group in advance about scheduling and figure out coordination for in-person outreach on July 19<sup>th</sup>.

**BJ Harris** offered to share contact information for Myrtle Berry who is likely to attend meetings and is a very involved member of community.

**BJ Harris** asked whether the town hall events would have a Zoom component for those unable to join in person.

- **Nate Kelly (HW)** responded that there is usually at least a Facebook Live option for the event with the opening presentations, but this forum is not ideal for online because it has an open house structure.

**Alan Smith** asked whether the Comp Plan has the highest level of executive support and if so, how to get an articulation of that support.

- **Nate Kelly (HW)** asked if this was in regard to support from the Governor.
- **Leia LaPlace (DPNR)** asked if support would take the form of commercials.
- **Jay Swartley** asked if support would be shared via a government Facebook page.
- **Alan Smith** confirmed that the question was in regard to support from the Governor and any kind of public message would be useful.
- **Leia LaPlace (DPNR)** offered to pass this request along to the commissioner.

### Other Outreach Opportunities

**Jeff Davis (HW)** expressed appreciation for the suggestions for outreach opportunities that have been shared thus far and inquired as to whether there were additional events or organizations the project team should coordinate with.

### Discussion

**Alan Smith** emphasized that in person outreach will be the most effective means to engage people on St. John. Though funding may be a factor, the next survey should be one where people go directly to churches, clubs, organizations, malls, and other locations to talk to people in person. This will increase the cross section of the community who is providing input and educate members of the community who otherwise are not engaged with the Comp Plan. The right online internet influencers can help to provide the necessary foot traffic for these engagement opportunities and the Comp Plan in general.

**BJ Harris** suggested that the project team increase outreach with schools, for example having seniors read the survey to youth to get their input.

**Alan Smith** suggested that the project team reach out to homeowners' associations. These entities have annual meetings and can send information with annual dues. People in public housing complexes should be reached as well. They are tremendously impacted by land and water use planning, but they rarely participate in these processes.

**Jay Swartley** recommended that the project team visit churches, food stores, gas stations, and public gatherings such as festivals. Teams with clip boards at these events could talk to people directly and engage them on these topics.

- **Alan Smith** recommended that the project team station outside of the Starfish Market entrance, the head of the docks, post office, Pine Peace Mini Mart, and Dolphin Market.
- **Jay Swartley** suggested that that the project team try to meet the community on the ground because if they are only asked to participate online, they may not engage at all.
- **Krista Moravec (HW)** responded that the project team can organize before the July town event at some of these locations to hand out information and encourage attendance that evening. It would be ideal to have a member of the Working Group join each member of the project team at these locations to help with outreach.

**Krista Moravec (HW)** asked if there were other organizations or associations that the project team should reach out to.

- **BJ Harris** suggested that the project team reach out to AARP, the historic society, and the schools.

- **Alan Smith** encouraged the project team to encourage young people to take the survey. There are several summer sports programs for young people that include a service component, and the survey could be shared with them.
- **Jeff Davis (HW)** noted that project team is limited in some regards because they are not on the ground the entire time, so the more support the Working Group can provide to make in person interactions happen, the better.
- **Nate Kelly (HW)** noted that while the project team does have some limitations, there has been a very informative engagement process thus far. The project team has events on the islands in July and August and there will be large chunks of time slated for in person engagement. To the extent that the Working Group can help to facilitate these conversations in person, that would be appreciated.

**Jay Swartley** recommended that for future surveys, the project team should try to keep the surveys simple.

- **Jeff Davis (HW)** noted that the Comp Plan is large and needs to cover a lot of ground. It would be ideal to get feedback on all aspects of the Comp Plan, but for in-person interactions people may only give their attention for 3 minutes. The project team needs to find more ways to boil down information or ask generalized questions which can be interpreted as specific aspects of the plan. The project team would like assistance from the Working Group to figure out what are the right questions to ask.

## Marketing & Communications

**Krista Moravec (HW)** expressed support for the marketing and communications suggestions that have been made thus far and inquired as to whether there was any additional information or particular strategies that could be implemented to ensure strong public engagement with the Comp Plan.

## Discussion

**Krista Moravec (HW)** noted that the project team is still seeking input on ways to entice people to visit the website to learn more about the Comp Plan.

- **BJ Harris** responded that while there is no local newspaper, there are many online forums in St. John and people may be willing to share the Comp Plan website there.
- **Jay Swartley** responded that social media is very popular in St. John and specific groups might be willing to post information about the Comp Plan.
- **Jeff Davis (HW)** asked if the Working Group could help to identify online influencers who can help to share information about the Comp Plan.
- **Alan Smith** noted that the users of social media may include demographics which would be very valuable to get feedback from.
- **Jay Swartley** noted that not everyone has access to social media, including platforms like Facebook Live which the government has used previously for press conferences.
- **Krista Moravec (HW)** responded that the project team does have a media communications lead (Nycole Tyson, NT Media Productions, St. Croix) who has coordinated all media outreach. The project team will check in with Nycole to see if there are additional social media groups that could be engaged on the Comp Plan.
- **BJ Harris** offered to share a list of Facebook groups in St. John.

- **Leia LaPlace (DPNR)** noted that the planning office only has three staff currently so it is challenging to do in person engagement, but they will do their best to connect with boots on the ground efforts. DPNR does have a Facebook page and a media lead.
- **Alan Smith** offered to reach out to Jason Budson, a local community activist, to see if he might be willing to share information about upcoming engagement opportunities and the Comp Plan.
- **Jeff Davis (HW)** emphasized that the proposed “buddy system” of coordinated outreach in July should be useful to expand in person outreach.
- **Alan Smith** suggested involving Ian, Curt, and Dan and Priscilla Knight. In addition, there should be someone stationed at the local hardware store to share information about the Comp Plan too.

### Closing

**Jeff Davis (HW)** reiterated that all Working Group members will be sent the meeting materials and meeting minutes later this week. As a reminder, written comments on the draft Policy Directions and Working Strategies are due by July 5 via email.

### Action Items

Action Item	Responsible Party
Share St. John specific Facebook groups to engage on the Comp Plan	BJ Harris
Coordinate sharing information about upcoming engagement opportunities and the Comp Plan on the DPNR Facebook page via the DPNR media lead	Leia LaPlace (DPNR)
Reach out to Jason Budson to see if willing to share information about the Comp Plan	Alan Smith
Confirm attendance of National Park Service at next town hall event	Nate Kelly (HW)
Coordinate in-person outreach with Working Group and recruits for July 19 <sup>th</sup> pre town hall meeting	Jeff Davis (HW)