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St. John striving for ‘zero waste’ status

By SUZANNE CARLSON Daily News Staff Apr 13, 2019



Harith
Wickrema

Residents are fundraising to create a processing plant that could make St. John a “zero waste” island, eliminating the need to ship St. John’s trash to the landfill on St. Thomas at an annual cost of more than \$1 million, according to Harith Wickrema, president of the conservation nonprofit Island Green Living.

“This is a big deal because we feel St. John can become the model to other island nations,” Wickrema said Friday.

Island Green Living held a fundraising event that collected \$100,000 toward the effort, and Wickrema said he personally matched that amount, bringing the total raised so far to \$200,000.

The group is working to raise another \$300,000 by April 30.

Additional donors have stepped up to help match pledges with the goal of raising \$500,000 to create a Sustainable Living Center on half-acre of government land at the intersection of Centerline and Giffit Hill roads, which Island Green Living has leased for the last 35 years.

“Our aim is 100 percent community engagement,” said Wickrema. “Donations of any amount are welcomed, whether it be a few dollars or a few thousand. The important thing is we want our neighbors to feel part of the center and personally invested in making positive change.”

The center would process waste, 60 to 70 percent of which is organic material that can be mulched and composted, Wickrema said.

Reclaimed goods will be sorted and sold at a thrift shop to keep valuable items out of the Bovoni landfill, and glass crushing and plastic extrusion facilities will enable the center to do on-site recycling for aluminum, glass, plastic and cooking oil.

The planned center will also include a composting center and demonstration area, solar power station with storage, water collection and recycling system, a community center, gardens with an organic food co-op and farmers market, a learning center for green job training and production of recycled products, a visitor’s center for education about green issues and ecotourism and an electric vehicle charging station.

The center would also serve as an emergency “safe room” during future hurricanes, and “the hope is that the SLC model will be replicated on other islands in the USVI and beyond,” according to a news release.

Those who donate financially to the project will be honored on a “Resiliency Tree” at the center, with additional partnership opportunities available upon request.

“For instance, an EDC company can underwrite the glass crusher or the plastic recycling machine or GORE technology for composting operations, etc., creating a lasting legacy for their part in saving planet Earth,” Wickrema said.

To make a tax deductible donation, visit www.islandgreenliving.org or send a check to: Island Green Living Association, P.O. Box 410, St. John, VI 00831, EIN #66-0714681

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