

Home › News › Local news › VIPA Wants Plan for STJ Multipurpose Park by End of Year

News Local news St. John TW

VIPA Wants Plan for STJ Multipurpose Park by End of Year

September 9, 2022

V.I. Port Authority Director Carlton Dowe told a room full of St. John residents that he has “no clandestine plan, map or drawing” for his proposal to develop 3.75-acres as a multipurpose park between the gravel lot and the barge terminal in Cruz Bay.



A screenshot from Map Geo shows the site (circled) for the VIPA property proposed for the site of a multipurpose facility. (Map Geo screenshot)

“This is a clean slate,” Dowe said. “We need to tap the people who live on St John, architects and others with expertise... We need to show sensitivity to surrounding residents and businesses, including limitation to hours of operation, light pollution at night, and other issues.”

Dowe made his remarks at a crowded public meeting held Thursday night at the Cleone H. Creque Conference Room at the Legislative Annex in Cruz Bay. Seventeen individuals also attended through Zoom.

Dowe said the proposed multi-use community park and cultural center should be a place that could accommodate crowds for carnival events but also where “people can enjoy some green space and go relax with their children and grandchildren.”

When the meeting was first announced as a town hall “to design a multipurpose facility for cultural events at the Enighed Pond property on St. John,” many assumed that Dowe’s concept included an enclosed structure, one that could possibly serve as a hurricane shelter. It did not.



Carlton Dowe says he doesn't have time to procrastinate at the meeting to plan a multipurpose park on St. John. (Amy H. Roberts photo)

At the meeting, Dowe explained that the site adjacent to the Theovald E. Moorehead Marine Terminal in Enighed Pond is within a flood and "wave velocity zone." Furthermore, the site is largely composed of spoil-dredged material deposited during construction of the terminal.

Almost any structure built on the site will need to be supported by piles; a large, enclosed structure sturdy enough to withstand a hurricane would be difficult to support, officials said.

Dowe said the multi-use community park and cultural center envisioned by the Port Authority would include a performance area, bathrooms, a vendors section, a storage structure, and facilities for recreation such as a walking track and playground.

But he said the site must also be able to “turn on a dime” and be used to support emergency operations, especially following a hurricane.

The concept Dowe was presenting has been in the works for decades. In 2015, St. John businessmen Steve Black and Jack Andrews proposed a similar project that would also **include a marina for recreational boaters in Enighed Pond**.

“Using this four-acre parcel as an area for our yearly carnival event would provide a far greater venue than the squeezing of the event into the little U.S. Customs lot, congesting our town at the busy ferry dock even further for a month each year,” Black said in 2015. “Our carnival has outgrown our little Customs lot, and this move will greatly enhance our celebration.”



Port Authority staff members stand while being introduced by Director Carlton Dowe at the town hall meeting Thursday night. (Amy H. Roberts photo)

At Thursday’s meeting, Dowe agreed that St. John’s carnival had outgrown its current space in Cruz Bay across from the post office.

Port Authority officials met with Black and other community leaders in December 2019 to further develop the plan, but the COVID-19 pandemic put a halt to public discussions until Thursday night.

Scott Lagueux, director of waterfront planning for Moffat & Nicholl, the Port Authority’s marine consultant, showed slides of a successful **project in Lawrenceburg, Indiana**, that included a performance stage, a green space for viewers, and area for vendors and food trucks within an urban setting.



Monifa Marrero Brathwaite, VIPA's public information officer, listens to Scott Lagueux, director of waterfront planning for VIPA consultants Moffat & Nicholl. (Amy H. Roberts photo)

He also presented a timeline that included a target for completing a master plan by the end of 2022 and breaking ground in 2023.

Following his presentation, community members offered their suggestions.

First to offer comments was Lorelei Monsanto, who asked why the timeline showed the completion of the master plan before topographical studies were completed. "The area used to be a dump for dredging. Shouldn't we know what's there before we begin our grandiose idea?"



Meeting goes listen attentively at Thursday's meeting. From Left: Aubrey Bridgewater Jr., Hadiya Sewer, Lorelei Monsanto, Pam Gaffin, Theodora Moorehead, Kurt Marsh Jr., Charles Brown Jr., Earl Thomas. (Amy H. Roberts photo)

Dowe responded that the Department of Public Works and the Department of Planning and Natural Resources would be working along with the Port Authority throughout the process to expedite the project.

Crystal George-Thomas said the area near the gravel lot is already prone to flooding and asked what plans were in place. St. Thomas Administrator Avery Lewis, sitting in for St. John Administrator Shikima Jones-Sprauve, said a plan to correct the flooding is fully funded, and the bidding process for the project is now being prepared by Property and Procurement.

Kelly McKinney, executive director of Island Green Living Association, said her organization would like to offer expertise and support regarding the use of sustainable practices and materials, including solar roofing.

Dowe responded that St. John residents should come together to generate a master plan; his remark led Kim Lyons to suggest the Port Authority should plan further meetings.

Dowe said his team would attend meetings organized by St. John residents, prompting Carmen Wesselhoft-Hedrington to pass around a sign-up list for community members who want to get involved. "Let's present our plan to them so that we can fight for what we want," she said.



Steve Black and Carmen Wesselhoft-Hedrington discuss details of an earlier plan to develop the property near Enighed Pond. (Amy H. Roberts photo)

Lorelie Monsanto and Clarence Stephenson suggested building a skate park for youngsters now that the tennis courts are no longer available for Friday night skating activities.

Dior Parsons suggested involving youth in the planning process.

Parsons and Abigail Hendricks both mentioned the need for a covered meeting area that could be used for community meetings and disaster preparation when it rains.

Hadiya Sewer reminded the audience of the need to incorporate culture and history in the design of the project.

Bosede Bruce suggested completing a traffic study because Fish Fry Road becomes congested when vehicles disembark from the barge. Lagueux responded that a study would be incorporated when the master plan is developed.

Joseph Harrigan asked if the 3.75-acre site includes the current gravel lot, a parking area that has been mired in controversy since the Port Authority **started charging** to use the space.

St. John Coastal Zone Management board member Kurt Marsh Jr. reminded Port Authority officials that a landscaping plan for the gravel lot mandated by CZM has never been implemented.

Dowe confirmed that the 3.75-acre site under consideration included the gravel lot and that "some parking" would be maintained as part of the master plan. That prompted architect Michael Milne to ask if the fence that surrounds the gravel lot could be removed and if there would be a charge to enter the multi-use community park.

A view from a hill above Cruz Bay shows the site of the proposed multipurpose center. (Amy H. Roberts photo)

Lagueux said, "My understanding is that there will be no fee, but for security reasons, you might need to fence things off."

Dowe added that the Port Authority must protect its investment. "There is a segment that must be closed off," he said.

Several audience members called for more comprehensive planning on St. John. "We only build for today. Let's remember that St. John is continually growing, " said David Marsh.

The design phase of this project is funded through a \$400,000 appropriation during the 34th Legislature via Act No. 8473 using the St. John Capital Improvements Fund. Dowe said the costs of construction and maintenance cannot be determined at this time.

"Funding for the capital side has not yet begun. We need to come up with our concept and implement the plan after that." Earlier in the meeting, Dowe emphasized his determination to move forward on the project. "I don't have time for pause. I don't have time for procrastination," he said.