

Government of the Virgin Islands of the United States

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE 36th LEGISLATURE

BILL NO. 36-0200

March 16, 2026

Good afternoon, thank you Senate President Milton Potter and members of the Thirty-Sixth Legislature for the opportunity to testify today on Bill No. 36-0200 concerning the proposed rezoning of REM 6 Beeston Hill from R-1 to B-2.

My name is Olasee Davis. I am a native Virgin Islander and internationally known ecologist, ethnobotanist, naturalist, agriculturalist, cultural historian, writer, scholar, conservationist, and professor at the University of the Virgin Islands, School of Agriculture. For decades or donkey years, I have advocated sustainable development and land stewardship of our limited natural resources in the Virgin Islands. I don't need to take up much of your time for the Virgin Islands community at large know where I stand when it comes to responsible development.

Today, I stand not in opposition to housing, but in defense of sound planning.

The Department of Planning and Natural Resources carefully reviewed this proposal and recommended denial. That decision was not emotional. It was not political. It was rooted in the Comprehensive Land and Water Use Plan and in established zoning principles. DPNR concluded that the developer's stated goal, constructing 24 residential townhouses, can already be achieved using existing residential planning tools such as a group dwelling permit, R-3 or R-4 zoning, or a Planned Area Development (PAD) overlay

So the question before this body is not whether housing is needed. We know housing is needed. The question is whether commercial zoning is necessary to accomplish it.

B-2 is a business designation. It is not a housing designation. Under B-2, there are nearly 200 permissible uses, only a handful of which are residential.

Once rezoned, the land is no longer bound by today's promise of townhouses. It becomes available for commercial activity tomorrow. That is the nature of zoning. It runs with the land, not with the developer.

This is precisely what our Comprehensive Plan warns against: spot zoning. The piecemeal reshaping of land use for financial leverage rather than community alignment.

During the public hearing, it was stated that B-2 allows "a greater degree of leveraging of resources." But DPNR clearly stated that zoning decisions should not be based on individual financial needs or marketplace value

Planning must serve the public interest, not private balance sheets.

We already have a model for responsible density. In Bill No. 36-0095, the Legislature approved a Planned Area Development in Estate St. Joseph and Rosendahl to allow 80 townhouses and single-family homes. That PAD was rooted in comprehensive planning, legislative oversight, environmental coordination, and a clear residential framework

It demonstrated that housing and zoning integrity can coexist.

The contrast is instructive. One project used the tools designed for housing. The other seeks commercial rezoning to accomplish residential development.

Land in the Virgin Islands has always required discipline. Our hillsides are fragile. Our drainage basins are real. Our history shows what happens when planning gives way to speculation. Once commercial precedent is set within a residential corridor, it does not reverse itself. It expands.

This moment is larger than Beeston Hill. It is about whether we honor the Comprehensive Land and Water Use Plan we adopted only recently. It is about whether professional planning recommendations are respected. It is about whether zoning remains a framework for order, or becomes a tool for leverage.

Housing is necessary. Sustainable planning is essential. The two are not in conflict when we use the right mechanisms.

I respectfully urge this Legislature to uphold the recommendation of denial for Bill No. 36-0200 and preserve the integrity of residential land use in Beeston Hill.

Thank you for listening to what I have to say in writing. I was unable to attend the public hearing due to my class conflict at UVI. Nevertheless, I count on you senators to do the right thing by upholding the Comprehensive Land Water Use Plan and the existing laws (zoning laws) that govern Beeston Hill residential areas.

Should you have any question, please do not hesitate to contact me (340-692-4053 or odavis@uvi.edu)

Or olasee1davis@gmail.com

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Olasee Davis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Prof: Olasee Davis