
TESTIMONY ON BILL NO. 36-0200
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
MONDAY FEBRUARY 23, 2026
EARLE B. OTTLEY LEGISLATIVE HALL

Good day Honorable Milton E. Potter, President of the 36th Legislature of the US Virgin Islands and Chairman of the Committee of the Whole, Members of the 36th Legislature, and the listening and viewing audience.

I am Alicia V. Barnes, Principal of Rittenhouse Consulting. I appear before you today on behalf of applicant and property owner, Atta Misbeh, to provide testimony in support of Bill No. 36-0200 – An Act amending Official Zoning Map No. SCZ-7 for the island of St. Croix, Virgin Islands, rezoning a portion of the Remainder of Estate Beeston Hill (South Portion), Matricular No. 6a, Company Quarter, St. Croix, from R-1 (Residential–Low Density) to B-2 (Business– Secondary/Neighborhood). I would like to thank the Honorable Albert Bryan, Jr., Governor of the US Virgin Islands for transmitting this measure to this august body, and you, the members of the 36th Legislature for scheduling today’s Committee of the Whole.

Bill No. 36-0200 proposes to amend the official zoning map to rezone the subject property from R-1 to B-2 to allow for a housing development to address the chronic and severe housing shortage on St. Croix. Mr. Misbeh has lived and worked on St. Croix most of his life. He is a product of our public education system and like many of us has witnessed firsthand the challenges many residents experience when seeking adequate and affordable housing. The proposed development would increase the available housing inventory on St. Croix and thus aid in mitigating the islands housing crisis.

The proposed development includes the construction of 24 units of residential moderate-income rentals in Estate Beeston Hill. This will be a thoughtful planned development with natural buffers and green space. The plan includes six two-story buildings with four units each, ranging from 750 square foot efficiencies to 1,500 square foot two-bedroom apartments. There will be two parking spaces per unit, a playground, and as previously mentioned green space.

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It is important to note land use allowance is the first step in the development permitting process. Inherent in applicable permitting processes are safeguards to ensure protection of our natural environment as well as public health and safety.

Many if not all the concerns raised during the application's public comment period will be addressed later in the proposed development's permitting process. Notwithstanding, I would like to take this opportunity to address the concerns raised regarding the proposed development and to clarify any resulting misunderstandings.

Regarding the concern that the housing development entrance off the Beeston Hill private road will lead to traffic congestion, please be advised that formal traffic studies are a requirement during the land development and permitting phase. This phase is the appropriate time for the relevant authorities to address potential traffic issues and provide recommendations accordingly.

In response to the inquiry regarding the necessity of a B-2 designation over R-1, R-2, or R-3, it is important to note that this project requires millions of dollars in private financing. Because townhouses and apartments are permitted as a matter of right within the B-2 designation, this specific zoning allows for a greater degree of financing leverage necessary to move the project forward.

Furthermore, there have been concerns that the rezoning will result in environmental, safety, and aesthetic issues. During the land development and permitting phase, the Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR) requires flora and fauna studies, cultural resource surveys, and safety studies. These are standard regulatory requirements imposed on every major land development to ensure no detrimental harm to the environment occurs.

To address the comment that the cost estimates presented at the hearing were not realistic, the applicant possesses significant control over the major costs of the development. As the

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applicant owns the land, a concrete company, and heavy equipment, they are uniquely positioned to manage these expenses effectively.

Regarding the inquiry into the plan for the unused acreage remaining after development, there are currently no plans for that land beyond establishing an appropriate buffer for the adjacent property.

In response to questions concerning the assessment of utility infrastructure—including sewage, electrical, and water—as well as stormwater management and environmental impact, please note that these detailed studies are required during the land development permitting phase rather than the current allowable land use phase. All necessary assessments will be conducted at the appropriate stages of the permitting process.

I hope this information clarifies our position and addresses the points raised.

On behalf of the applicant, Mr. Atta Misbeh, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Bill No. 36-0200. This bill seeks to amend Official Zoning Map No. SCZ-7 for the island of St. Croix by rezoning a portion of the Remainder of Estate Beeston Hill (South Portion), Matricular No. 6a, Company Quarter, from R-1 (Residential–Low Density) to B-2 (Business–Secondary/Neighborhood).

Mr. Misbeh and I remain available to answer any questions or provide further clarification as you consider this matter.