



GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS OF THE UNITED STATES

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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May 11, 2026

Honorable Milton E. Potter
President
36th Legislature of the United States Virgin Islands
Capitol Building
St. Thomas, Virgin Islands

Re: Petition to Amend Official Zoning Map No. SJZ-1, Application No. CCZP0085-25

Good day Senate President Milton E. Potter, members of the 36th Legislature, legislative staff, and members of the public. My name is Leia LaPlace-Matthew, Territorial Planner with the Division of Comprehensive and Coastal Zone Planning (CCZP) within the Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR). I am here to present the department's recommendation on Zoning Map Amendment Application No. CCZP0085-25.

This application was submitted by Ronnie Jones of Susannaberg LLC seeking to amend the zoning designation of Parcel No. 15 Estate Susannaberg, No. 17A Cruz Bay Quarter, St. John, from R-4 (Residential-Medium Density) to R-3 (Residential-Medium Density).

The purpose of this request is to develop, in three phases, a 48-room hotel/guesthouse within six buildings, with a maximum height of three stories. The first phase of this development will erect public spaces such as a restaurant, event space, spa, gym, pool, and 42 parking spaces. In the second phase, construction of the first set of guest rooms will take place. The third phase will develop the final set of guest rooms and landscaping. The site plan includes 12 ADA-accessible guest rooms and two ADA parking spaces. The architect made statements about a terraced, low-impact design.

DPNR has conducted an exhaustive review of the application, including an analysis of the surrounding land use, zoning trends, infrastructure availability, and public input. The surrounding area includes National Park land to the north and west, and residential lots to the east and south. The surrounding area has R-1, R-2, R-3, R-4, B-2, B-4, C-Commercial, and P-Public zoning.

The Department notes the following key findings:

- Water will be provided by cisterns while sewage will be managed by an on-site wastewater treatment plant.
- No additional DPNR division reviews are required other than permits for new construction.

At the DPNR-CCZP public hearing held November 25, 2025, there were two commenters and three post-hearing correspondences submitted. Commenters input included:

- Questions requesting development details and the differences between R-3 and R-4 zoning.

- Objections regarding the unauthorized widening of the access road and associated encroachments.
- Broad concerns were raised regarding island-wide zoning trends, enforcement challenges, and community impacts.
- Concerns about setbacks, height, and environmental protection including erosion, contamination, and drainage into sensitive guts were also raised.
- One commenter supported rezoning while requesting conditions be put in place including: a 15-foot setback, a maximum of three stories, and stormwater and waste management protections, including fencing and berms.
- The applicant's responses to these concerns are documented in the report (File Item 19. Applicant Response to Public Comments).

The request represents a shift between two medium density residential zones. While R-3 allows a broader range of uses as-of-right, it imposes more restrictive development provisions, including:

- lower lot occupancy (30% for R-3 vs. 50% for R-4),
- higher usable open space requirements (35% for R-3 and none for R-4) and
- less environmental impact.

The R-3 zone is more consistent with the site's sensitive context, particularly its proximity to National Park land and low-density residential areas. It also aligns with the 2024 Comprehensive Land and Water Use Plan's recognition that the Susannaberg/Centerline corridor may evolve into a mid-island mixed-use center which requires zoning reforms that allow appropriately scaled developments while protecting environmental and community character. An R-3 zone possesses greater environmental safeguards due to the stricter development standards which align with the proposed hotel/guesthouse development and associated amenities. The density of the proposal (72 persons per acre) is also within R-3 limits.

Following thorough analysis of the applicant's request, the surrounding uses, and the applicable permit standards, the Department finds that the proposed rezoning is reasonable, more environmentally protective, and supports long term planning objectives for the area. Therefore, the Department of Planning and Natural Resources recommends approval of the zoning map amendment request from R-4 to R-3 and concurs with Bill No. 36-0266.

Pursuant to Title 29 Virgin Islands Code, Chapter 3, Section 238, the report of the Planning Office regarding this proposal, including the detailed reasons for our recommendation, is incorporated into the records submitted prior to this Committee of the Whole Hearing. We respectfully request that the PowerPoint presentation for CCZP0085-25 now be displayed.

This concludes the testimony on behalf of the Department, and we are available to answer any questions.