GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS OF THE UNITED STATES

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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November 9, 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. STZ-10, Application No. CCZP0014-26

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. CCZP0014-26.

This petition, submitted by the Department of Property and Procurement, seeks to amend the zoning designation of Parcel No. 9A-6 Estate Nazareth, No. 1 Red Hook Quarter, St. Thomas, from R-1 (Residential-Low Density) to R-3 (Residential-Medium Density) in order to bring an existing Children's Home into zoning compliance.

The subject property consists of approximately 0.40 acres and is owned by the Government of the Virgin Islands. The surrounding area is primarily residential, with adjacent vacant and residential lands, as well as nearby waterfront related zoning classifications.

DPNR has conducted a comprehensive review of this application, including an analysis of the site, surrounding land uses, infrastructure, public input, and consistency with the 2024 Comprehensive Land and Water Use Plan.

The Department notes the following:

- The property is currently developed with a two-story, 12,000-square-foot residential structure that has been converted from a short-term rental into a 24-hour emergency group home for infants and children, operating in partnership with a nonprofit organization.
- The facility provides care for up to 12 children, ages newborn to 12, with approximately three staff on site at any given time and minimal expected traffic.
- The site includes existing parking, fencing, and vegetative buffering, and there are no proposed expansions to the building footprint, only resiliency and security improvements.
- Infrastructure is supported by cistern water and an independent sewage disposal system.

At the DPNR-CCZP public hearing held on April 20, 2026, no opposition or concerns were expressed, and no post hearing comments were received.

The Department evaluated the request within the context of the Virgin Islands Zoning Code and the Comp Plan.

Under the current Zoning Code, Children's Homes are only permitted in specific zoning districts, including R-3, R-4, R-5, and S. The subject property's existing R-1 zoning is therefore inconsistent with its current use, resulting in a nonconforming condition.

The Department also considered broader housing policy trends, including the increasing importance of group homes and supportive housing arrangements as part of addressing housing and social service needs, particularly for vulnerable populations.

The Comprehensive Plan supports:

- Provision of housing and services for vulnerable populations
- Adaptive reuse of existing structures
- Community scaled residential uses compatible with surrounding neighborhoods
- Sound and rational land use decision making

The continued use of this property as a children's emergency home aligns with these objectives. The proposal maintains neighborhood compatibility, introduces no additional development intensity, and has no identified adverse environmental or infrastructure impacts.

The Department, however, also recognizes that the parcel is owned by the Government of the Virgin Islands. Under Section 229(q) of the Zoning Code, government owned properties are appropriately designated as P (Public), regardless of previous zoning classifications. Therefore, while the intent of the application to bring the use into compliance is supported, a modification to the requested zoning designation is warranted.

Accordingly, the Department recommends the following:

- That Official Zoning Map No. STZ-10 be amended to change the zoning designation of the subject parcel from R-1 (Residential-Low Density) to P (Public); and
- That a use variance be granted to allow for the continued operation of a Children's Home on the property.

This approach ensures consistency with the Zoning Code, maintains transparency through the public hearing process, and allows the continuation of an essential community service in a manner that is compatible with the surrounding residential area.

Pursuant to Title 29, Virgin Islands Code, Chapter 3, Section 238, the report of the Planning Office regarding this proposal, including the detailed basis for our recommendation, is incorporated into the record submitted prior to this Committee of the Whole Hearing. We respectfully request that the PowerPoint presentation for CCZP0014-26 now be displayed.

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