

Gershwin Sprauve
PO Box 1568
St. Thomas, VI 00804

July 18, 2024

Honorable Novelle E. Francis, Jr.
President, 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands
Legislature of the Virgin Islands
Capital Building, Charlotte Amalie
P.O. Box 1690
St. Thomas, Virgin Islands 00804

Re: Re: Bill No. 35-0281 An Act Amending Official Zoning Map No. SJZ-1 - Testimony of Gershwin Sprauve Before the 35th Legislature Committee of the Whole

Dear Honorable Senator Francis,

The Housing Market in the Virgin Islands currently faces a severe shortage of affordable and long-term housing, with a substantial number of residents struggling to find suitable and reasonable accommodations. The lack of affordable housing options, high housing costs and limited availability have led to overcrowding, homelessness, and economic strain on local families. This housing crisis not only affects individual families but also undermines community stability and economic growth.

In the 1970s, the late Dr. Gehardt Sprauve made available Parcel No. 16 Estate Adrian, St. John, No. 18 Cruz Bay Quarter, to the Government of the US Virgin Islands for the purpose of creating an affordable housing development (Namely the George Simmonds Terrace) for eventual homeownership residents of St. John.

The demand for affordable housing in the Virgin Islands is significant and growing, driven by population growth, tourism, and economic development. There is a critical need for decent, safe, sanitary, and affordable housing types in St. John from single family to multifamily. There is also a significant concern for moderate to middle Income wage earners who represent the workforce and working class ranging from young professionals, teachers, retirees and hospitality and essential workers.

In continuing the vision and legacy of my grandfather, I have identified land suitable for additional affordable housing developments in the Estate Adrian area that will offer a mix of one, two, and three-bedroom dwellings, each equipped with modern amenities and energy-efficient features to promote sustainability. A commitment to sustainability extends to the

design and construction of the development, incorporating green building practices to minimize environmental impact. Such a development will take the better part of five years to make it a reality given the challenges with sourcing building materials, labor, and the coordination of organizing all the necessary resources to bring this affordable housing development to life.

The focus will be on developing vibrant, thriving, and sustainable buildings featuring hurricane hardened construction, distributed power generation to include solar systems and other elements to adapt to an eco-friendly environment. The ability to provide safe, modern long-term residential housing opportunities thoughtfully designed to meet the needs of the diverse residents on the island of St. John. The development will offer convenient access to amenities, schools, and employment opportunities for residents and the seasonal workforce that support the hospitality sector which is the backbone to the local economy. The development will also allow housing to families that would otherwise have to commute daily to and from St. Thomas due to the shortage of long-term housing on the island of St. John.

A Virgin Islander, having strong family ties to the island of St. John, I am acutely aware of the disparities in land ownership and affordable housing opportunities for the local resident population and general workforce housing accommodations on the island. A vast number who work on St. John have no alternative but to seek housing on the island of St. Thomas due to the lack of long-term housing and the cost of any housing that may be available for rent. With my professional experience and background as a local developer, I am remarkably familiar with the local building codes and practices and can provide insight into the needs of the local population. The overall benefit to the community will not only be the development of meaningful affordable housing, but also the creation of jobs for St. Johnians.

The rezoning application submitted reflects and responds to addressing a critical need for the St. John long-term resident and workforce market. In an environment that caters more to the visitor than to the locals, it is the intention to fill a void allowing local families to live and work in the same community where they can effectively provide service to the community at large.

In closing, I would like to highlight the fact that there were no objections to the zoning map amendment application request submitted through the pre-application phase from any of the surrounding neighbors at the DPNR-CCZP hearing held in April. Favorable approval of this zoning map amendment application request is most appreciated.

Respectfully Submitted,



Gershwin Sprauve