



GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS OF THE UNITED STATES

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DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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Office of the Commissioner

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Senator Milton E. Potter  
Chair, Committee on Disaster Recovery  
5 Infrastructure and Planning  
35<sup>th</sup> Legislature of the Virgin Islands  
St. Thomas, VI 00802

**RE: UPDATE ON THE VI COMPREHENSIVE LAND & WATER USE PLAN**

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Good day Senator Potter, Chair of the 35<sup>th</sup> Legislature’s Committee on Disaster Recovery, Infrastructure and Planning, other committee members, non-committee members and legislative staff present, and members of the viewing and listening public, my name is Jean-Pierre L. Oriol, Commissioner for the Department of Planning & Natural Resources (DPNR). We are present today at the Chair’s request to present an update on DPNR’s efforts to formulate a Comprehensive Land & Water Use Plan.

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3 VIC § 402(a) established the Division of Planning within DPNR in 1987; one of the duties of the Planning Office, as specified under 3 VIC § 402(c), is to prepare and have in continuous process and revision, the long-range comprehensive plan of the US Virgin Islands – more commonly known as the Comprehensive Land and Water Use Plan (Comp Plan). The legislation states that the plan shall identify and stress island-wide goals, objectives and opportunities, and then lists a number of factors to be considered in the establishment of the plan.

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Over the years I’ve heard a number of things attached to the Comp Plan, but I would like to review what our Comp Plan is – it is a shared vision for the USVI’s future that helps us make decisions about: what new development looks like and where it happens; how we balance competing uses for our land and waters; how to protect environmentally sensitive areas, waters, coastlines and historic sites; prioritizing future investments in community services and infrastructure; and it seeks to ensure that the land use decision-making process is fair, equitable and consistent. The Comp Plan is NOT a regulatory tool, but rather, a framework for how we make decisions.

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DPNR started the process for completing the Comp Plan in October 2022 with a series of inter-governmental meetings to ensure we received buy-in for the effort, and would be provided respective agency plans, such as transportation plans, Ag Plans, housing plans, to name a few. We then began a series of public engagement town halls in February 2023, followed by town halls in July and November 2023, and most recently in June 2024. Over 1500 residents participated in the town halls over the last 15 months. In addition to the town halls, DPNR has engaged with 92 volunteers across the territory that have assisted with the process, ensuring local input along the way. We have maintained an online presence at [www.planusvi.com](http://www.planusvi.com) where we have kept all our documents and direct our sign-up list of over 1000 residents to as we update our materials.

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We began the engagement process by asking our stakeholders to summarize where they think we are now and tell us what is important to them - what must be preserved. In our second round of town halls, we asked our residents to provide us what issues need to be address. Some of the more common things we heard were: no more spot zoning, eliminate  
5 the two-tier permitting system, more local control over land use decisions, protect beaches, guts, access to the shoreline, ground water and drinking water, and make it easier for people to walk, and enforcement must be a priority. In the third round of town halls, we took the information from the first two rounds and developed guiding principles and policy directions and some preliminary goals. We brought these to the community, along with a visual example  
10 in each district of what locations could look like, incorporating some of the policy recommendations. The feedback was key in informing the department if we were capturing the vision of the community, or if we needed to reset. Thankfully, we received positive feedback and continued to move forward.

15 DPNR is now at the point where we have developed four guiding themes of the Comp Plan – Making Better Land & Water Use Decisions; Protecting our Natural Resources; Preparing for a More Sustainable Future, and Living & Thriving Together – and goals, policies and strategies under each theme; these are the core components of the draft plan. At our last round of town hall meetings, we engaged the public on two issues; first, to provide feedback on island-specific strategies (see slides), and second, to provide feedback on the policies and strategies  
20 for at least two thematic areas, or as many could be collected as time permitted. The in-person exercise was also intended to be training for the community to then provide additional feedback on the thematic areas not commented on during the in-person meeting, through our website. The exercise will be available through July 26 ([USVI Comprehensive Plan – USVI Comp Plan \(planusvi.com\)](#)).  
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As we review the information gathered at the town hall meetings and over the website, our next step will be to release the *draft* Comprehensive Land & Water Use Plan in its entirety for the public. Through our engagement with the 35<sup>th</sup> Legislature, we anticipate that there will  
30 be public engagement on the draft plan, likely through the Committee of the Whole, and with the support of all, finally have an approved Comprehensive Land & Water Use Plan at the end of the calendar year. Please note that the adoption of the plan does not represent an end for the Department, but rather a beginning as there will then be several actions by the department (primarily amendments) necessary to support the plan.  
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I would like to conclude by thanking my staff who have been diligently working on this project from the draft of the Request for Proposals, to where we are presently. Ms. Leia LaPlace-Matthew, Ms. Hilary Lohmann and, most recently, Ms. Jozette Walker have truly been  
40 a driving force within the Department pushing this initiative forward. I would like to thank the Horsley Witten Group and their local team for all the work done thus far on the plan. I would like to thank Ms. Nykole Tyson of NT Media for leading the promotion of the Town Halls. Lastly, I would like to thank the people of the Virgin Islands for providing their voice to this process. All along the way we stated that we wanted this to be OUR Comp Plan, and we are appreciative of the support and input along the way. This has truly been an amazing,  
45 inclusive experience, and I am grateful for all of the comments and dialogue that I've engaged in with our community.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this update. My team and I are here to answer your questions to the best of our ability.