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Senior Assisted Living and Daycare Facility Planned for Estate Whim as Lawmakers Signal Support

Andrea Christian-Michel is seeking a use variance to build a 2,700-square-foot residential-style facility for six to eight live-in seniors and four to five daytime participants, with DPNR backing the proposal as a boost to caregiving on St. Croix.

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A proposed senior citizen assisted living and daycare facility in Estate Whim, West End Quarter, St. Croix, is moving toward approval, with lawmakers voicing strong support for a project they say could help address the territory's need for more elder care options.

The proposal is detailed in Bill No. 36-0289, which seeks a use variance for the property. The current R-2 zoning does not allow for a senior living facility, making legislative approval

necessary before the project can move forward.

According to Keshoi Samuel, a planning technician at the Department of Planning and Natural Resources, the project calls for a single-story, 2,700-square-foot, five-bedroom residence that would accommodate six to eight live-in seniors and four to five daytime participants. The daycare component would operate from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

The applicant, Andrea Christian-Michel, expects to hire five employees, including three nursing staff. Construction is expected to last between six and nine months, Mr. Samuel told the Committee of the Whole.

Mr. Samuel said the Comprehensive Land and Water Use Plan “emphasizes improving access to health and appropriate housing options, including specialized housing for seniors and the vulnerable population.” DPNR recommended approval of the variance, saying the project is expected to “contribute positively to the island’s caregiving infrastructure.”

Ms. Christian-Michel told lawmakers that her request is rooted in both personal and professional experience caring for others.

“The hardship that leads to this request is a limited availability of small home like care environment for seniors on the west side of St. Croix,” she explained.

She said families often struggle to find spaces where their “aging loved ones can receive supervision, companionship and assistance while maintaining dignity and quality of life.”

The facility is expected to operate as a “residential style home environment,” offering activities that promote “social interaction and emotional well being.” Ms. Christian-Michel also assured lawmakers that the property “will remain clean, well maintained and responsibly managed with minimal impact on surrounding properties.”

Senator Alma Francis Heyliger praised the concept.

“I am happy to hear when we, as individuals here in the territory, start to look at these other options to really help take care of our elderly,” she said.

Ms. Christian-Michel told the senator that she is “investigating” all of the training and certifications needed to operate the facility.

She also told lawmakers that she has the “financial backing to start and looking forward for grants to complete everything needed.” Ms. Christian-Michel said she has hired a grant writer.

Senator Angel Bolques Jr. also expressed support for the project, pointing to the need for more adult services in the territory.

“I am very, very happy to hear that someone out there is actually putting this on their radar because we know of the issues or the lack thereof of adult services for our elders and elderly,” he remarked.

Ms. Christian-Michel said she intends to eventually expand the facility by adding additional levels that would remain accessible to elderly residents.

Senator Ray Fonseca, chair of the Committee on Health, Hospitals, and Human Services, was also encouraged by the proposal.

“This is great. This is awesome. I think we need, we need you to come over to St. Thomas as well,” Senator Fonseca said.

He urged his colleagues to support private-sector efforts to provide needed care services.

“This is one of those areas where we need to support the private sector in getting these services done for the community,” he said.

Bill No. 36-0289 is expected to receive a favorable vote during a legislative session later this month.

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