

Cruz Bay Projects Advance as Architect Warns Major Rebuilds Need Better Government Coordination

A series of Cruz Bay recovery projects is moving through CZM review, but Commissioner Kurt Marsh warned that government agencies must better coordinate work in the town's small footprint as the fire station and Westin RO projects advanced.

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Cruz bay, St. John.

Major recovery and infrastructure projects planned for Cruz Bay are moving through the St. John Coastal Zone Management process, but Commissioner Kurt Marsh is again warning that government agencies must better coordinate how multiple developments will function together in one of the island's most compact and heavily used areas.

During Wednesday's meeting of the St. John Coastal Zone Management Committee, Mr. Marsh, an architect and St. John resident, raised concerns during discussion of the proposed demolition and reconstruction of the gazebo pavilion at the Winston Wills Ballpark. His comments centered not on opposition to the project itself, but on whether the many major projects planned in Cruz Bay are being coordinated across government departments and agencies.

According to Habibah Bell of Harnell Engineering and Construction, the hurricane-damaged Winston Wills pavilion would be rebuilt to withstand 175 mile-per-hour winds and include bleachers capable of seating 64 people.

"This is a very critical part of the community, so to get it up and running...I know the community would be grateful for that," she said.

Commissioners, however, questioned how the new pavilion would operate within the current conditions in Cruz Bay.

"As we all know, the ball field is otherwise occupied at the moment," Commissioner Raef Boulon pointed out.

Parking proposed for the project also came under scrutiny. Mr. Marsh questioned whether the project team could rely on eight parking spaces across the street, given information presented earlier during discussion of the Cruz Bay Fire Station reconstruction project.

"Guys are under the impression that you have eight parking spots across the street, when, based on what we just observed from the fire service presentation, you don't," Mr. Marsh observed.

For Mr. Marsh, the parking question reflected a broader issue.

"The real issue isn't parking. The real issue...is the unclear coordination between all of the entities that are doing major projects in the same area. That's the overarching issue right now."

"I think too often we look at these projects on a case by case basis, when really we need to be approaching this from a comprehensive macro scale perspective," the architect continued. "We need to look at how all of these projects are happening simultaneously and how they will all affect each other."

Mr. Marsh made similar comments in 2024, when the Morris De Castro Clinic rebuild was moving through the approval process. At that time, while serving as a member of the Historic Preservation Committee, he criticized the lack of interagency communication, saying it created "a lot of disconnect between what's happening, especially with these large projects."

Two years later, Mr. Marsh said the broader conversation still appears to be missing.

"I think we're just talking about a bunch of individual projects, but we're not talking about comprehensive rebuilding of infrastructure in the town area."

While making clear that he supports the reconstruction of public facilities in Cruz Bay, Mr. Marsh urged greater collaboration among government agencies.

"There's a lot to consider. It's a really small space," he said.

The Winston Wills pavilion project was presented for public discussion only, and no approval decision was taken during Wednesday's meeting.

Two other projects, however, received favorable action from CZM commissioners.

The first was the redesigned Robert O'Connor Fire Station. According to John Wood, principal at Jaredian Design Group, the proposed structure was reduced from three stories to two, making it "more consistent with the recommendations for that area" under St. John's Comprehensive Land and Water Use Plan.

Along with the smaller overall footprint, the floor plan was modified "to accommodate three vehicles, which was important for the fire services."

St. John CZM Chair Andrew Penn said the redesigned structure was "a lot better," and praised the design team for "really listening and considering" the feedback they received.

Commissioners approved a motion granting the fire station project a federal consistency determination.

The Westin Hotel also received federal consistency approval for a proposed upgrade to its reverse osmosis plant. The upgrade is intended to help the resort meet its potable water needs. Currently, the hotel has had to rely on water delivery trucks to supplement production from its existing reverse osmosis plant.

According to Amy Dempsey, the project will not cause any major disturbance to the shoreline or to surrounding wildlife and flora.

Commissioners granted federal consistency approval for the Westin project, with a requirement that the hotel implement and maintain turbidity sedimentation control measures while the work is underway.