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Governor-Elect Mapp Pledges Support to Save Coral Bay, Says Marina Is “Too Big”

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CORAL BAY — The night before facing veteran Delegate to Congress Donna Christensen in a run-off election for Virgin Islands Governor seat, candidate Kenneth Mapp traveled to Coral Bay to talk with residents opposed to a permitted mega marina.

About 20 residents and members of Save Coral Bay, which formed in opposition to Summers End Group’s planned 145-slip mega marina for Coral Bay harbor, met with Mapp in at a relaxed town hall style meeting at Pickles in Paradise which stretched on for three hours on November 17.

The group, which has an online crowd funding site at www.GoFundMe.com/CoralBay to help cover legal costs, had already met with Christensen, explained David Silverman, a community activist and main organizer of the Save Coral Bay campaign.

“We had met with Donna Christensen before the General Election and had asked her for her views and expressed our community views about the Summer End Group marina,” said Silverman. “Then it turned out that they were headed to a runoff election and I was urged to reach out to Mapp and invite him out here, which I did.”

Silverman made it clear to Mapp what exactly Save Coral Bay members’ main concerns were, he explained.

“Prior to the meeting, I shared with him [Mapp] the questions that I intended to ask,” said Silverman. “I asked him about Guy Benjamin School and I asked him about sustainable economic development on St. John. And my final question was, if he were elected Governor would he, with the powers that he has under the Coastal Zone Management Act, revoke the permits that had been signed by Governor John deJongh.”

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Responding to his stand on the shuttered Coral Bay public elementary school Guy Benjamin School, Mapp explained that education was a top priority, according to Silverman.

“He [Mapp] said that the Department of Education was a top priority and he felt that the community of St. John would best be served by a central school for the island,” Silverman said.

At first Mapp, was unaware that he could strike down the permits which sailed through a questionable St. John Coastal Zone Management Committee process, Silverman explained.

“Initially he didn’t know if he would have those powers and I asked if, hypothetically, he had the powers would he revoke the permits and he said he would have to consider it,” said the community activist.

In several short videos from the meeting with Mapp, which were posted to the Save Coral Bay website, the newly elected governor clearly states that Summers End Group’s planned marina is too large.

“It’s too big,” Mapp says on the video. “From the time it was proposed, we’ve said it’s too big. We don’t believe the bay can handle it and to be quite candid, I don’t think it can pass the muster of the Army Corps of Engineers.”

“When I saw it I just said, this is just ridiculous; the whole size of it, the whole enormity of it,” Mapp says in a second video posted on the Save Coral Bay website. “In the governmental process, locally as well, there are more progs to go.”

There is an effort to push the project through the governmental process of permitting for submerged lands, Mapp said in the video.

“Clearly there is an effort to try to beat the clock on January 5,” said the governor-elect. “And they really aren’t going to be able to beat that clock. Without going too far, I’m suggesting that time is on the side of the community.”

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Mapp makes it clear in a third video that developers have no intention of reducing the size of the large-scale project.

“I asked one of the developers if the reason they made it so large was so that when there was a clamor about it they would be prepared to reduce it to a size that was amendable to the community and they get the marina,” Mapp said in a video. “And the person responded, ‘No, we want it that size.’”

With Mapp taking over the territory’s top governmental job soon, last month’s meeting was a great opportunity, Silverman explained.

“It was very gratifying that on the eve of a run-off election, he chose to come all the way out to Coral Bay,” he said.

For more information about the Save Coral Bay campaign, go to <http://savecoralbay.com>. To donate to the group go to www.GoFundMe.com/CoralBay.