

Mr. Jean Pierre Oriol
Acting Commissioner
Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources
Coastal Zone Management Program

Dear Mr. Oriol,

I am writing to express my opposition in the strongest possible terms to the proposal by the Summer's End Group LLC to build a marina in Coral Harbor. As a 16-year-old high school student and third generation Virgin Islander, I am deeply concerned about practically every possible aspect of this proposal and the utterly devastating consequences that it would have for the future of St. John in general and the Coral Bay area in particular. I could go on for many, many pages about the numerous and varied reasons why this project is a completely terrible idea, but to avoid being too long-winded I will try to keep my comments relatively brief and to the point. I will focus on three main areas of impact: social, environmental, and economic.

First, the social consequences. I have lived on St. John all my life, and my father has been a resident of Coral Bay for about half that time. Over these years I have come to deeply appreciate the wonder that is Coral Bay. Quite apart from the natural beauty of the area, the community is an amazingly special place. It is remarkably laid-back, placid, and free of congestion, crowds, and the unpleasant trappings of other, excessively developed areas. Unlike other towns in the VI, Coral Bay has been mostly safe from the mad rush for development and expansion that has plagued our islands for decades- until now. The idea of such an insanely large marina, as well as the vision of the developers as represented to the public, is nauseatingly out of character with the spirit of the community. The entire tone of the project as stated by the developers is jarringly unlike that of its surroundings. By catering explicitly to the rich and glamorous, by taking over the majority of the harbor for the installation of a massive and ever-growing number of slips, by creating a number of these slips specifically for mega yachts, the proposal shows itself to be the antithesis of all that Coral Bay stands for. And make no mistake about it, what Coral Bay stands for is truly beautiful. It is true that a fairly high percentage of the area's residents are people who have moved there from the US mainland, but the overwhelming majority of these people moved here specifically because of their great love for the soul of the place, and so are incredibly committed to fighting for their adopted home's best interests. And of course, the town has its share of problems and points of dysfunction. But despite it all, ultimately, Coral Bay still functions as a large, complicated, but supportive and loving family. And if there's one term that unquestionably does not apply these developers and their vision, it's "family."

Next, there are the effects of the project on the environment. Of course, with any sort of development there will inevitably be environmental impacts. But the proposed marina makes absolutely no attempt to contain or mitigate these effects. Quite the contrary: it almost seems as if there has been a deliberate effort here to have as much adverse impact as possible. Most importantly, the beds of critically

important and endangered seagrass would be devastated. Not only would the massive docks, slips, and mega yachts shade the grass to the point of death, but the construction of the marina would involve driving one thousand, three hundred and thirty-three steel pilings into the bed of the harbor. Not to be overly melodramatic, but this is the equivalent of driving 1,333 knives through the metaphorical heart of the community. And besides the impacts on wildlife, there is the issue of the construction itself. The proposal completely fails to take into account the extremely limited infrastructure there. For just one example, the one paved road in and out of Coral Bay is very narrow, steep, in terrible repair, and highly unstable in many places--as shown by the recent collapse of several parts of the road due to flooding.

Then there is the problem presented by the preposterous plan to locate the marina on the highly exposed west side of the harbor. Anyone who has any experience of storms in the Coral Bay region knows that any ships in that part of the harbor are very likely to end up on the shore, in the precise area where the marina buildings are supposed to be set up. This is only a sampling of the terrible environmental impacts that this development would create, but it at least serves to give an idea of the awful consequences of approving the proposal.

Finally, there is the question of the supposed economic benefits of the project to the town. A brief assessment of the situation shows that the impacts in this area would in fact be extremely negative. First of all, the chances of such a venture actually succeeding are practically negligible. One need only look at the abject failure of Yacht Haven Grande on St. Thomas to see the foolishness of even suggesting that this marina would be an economic success. Yacht Haven was vastly in debt even six years ago, and its slips sit almost entirely empty most of the time. And this is a less pretentiously grandiose project, located in a far more central, well visited, and upscale area. And even if, by some insane chance, the project actually succeeds to some degree, its positive economic effects will likely be non-existent. The developers have greatly touted the supposed economic stimulus and job creation from their monstrosity. But as far as local jobs go, the reality is that few if any people with any St. John heritage would be likely to be employed there. The service industry on St. John is completely dominated by "continentals," most of them here on a very short-term basis. And this would be especially the case at an establishment with such gaudy, "upper-class" pretensions as this one. And even if a few local youth were to be employed by the development, the jobs would all be extremely undesirable. Speaking as a local youth myself, I would want no part of such a degrading, badly paying, and dead-end job as any of those linked to this proposal, and I know very few of my peers who would. But most importantly, in all probability, if it is approved, the project will fail miserably. And if it does, the community will be left with a massive economic dead zone in an area that formerly contained a number of businesses. Economic stimulus? Hardly.

So, those are a few of the what I see as the most pressing reasons why the proposed Summer's End Marina project absolutely must not be allowed to go through. The developers involved, judging by the tone of their public announcements lately, seem

to have no regard for the local community and its opinions. Further, they have vastly underestimated the massive dedication and spirit of the many, many people of all ages and backgrounds who passionately love Coral Bay and will go to great and inspiring lengths to protect it. And with that, I would like to add my voice to the great chorus that has risen in defense of our home. I respectfully ask that you deny the permit application of Summer's End Group LLC, and protect the future of one of the most special places I have ever known.

Sincerely,

Alex Ray