

DeJongh, senators, please don't let developer steal 'one of the last great places' in territory

Coral Bay and the East End of St. John are two of the remaining jewels and last of the great places in the Virgin Islands territory, arguably the finest across the Caribbean.

An expansive bay and natural harbor rich in resources and beauty, it's been recognized as an "Area of Particular Concern" by the Virgin Islands. It adjoins the V.I. National Park and the Coral Reef National Monument.

Coral Bay is the heart and soul of the East End, a magical place. You can look all over the Virgin Islands and fail to find such a place that has been virtually untouched by greed and growth.

Sure, we have our issues in Coral Bay but you cannot find a more proactive community in the Virgin Islands, and therein is the problem: We choose to plan our own path to sustainability and neighborhood, but the government of the Virgin Islands has decided to force its vision on us.

I came late to the islands, a place and life I now treasure. I have spent 15 years working with other committed people to preserve, protect and restore V.I. natural resources, despite many institutional barriers and government policies. Sadly and objectively, we've made little progress against insatiable, poorly planned over-development and growth at every possible cove, beach, shoreline and important natural area.

It seems the public must spend most of its time and countless resources opposing ill-conceived and poorly planned projects from one developer after another, all of whom are supported by confused politicians.

Krause Lagoon, Christiansted, Salt River, Altona, Magens, Red Hook, Mangrove Lagoon, Charlotte Harbor, Cruz Bay, Great Cruz Bay, Botany Bay, are all unrecognizable from what they were. They were diamonds in a sparkling necklace of what were the Virgin Islands, but for decades our leaders could only see their beauty and value for mega growth and tax income. The growth was for the most part badly planned over-development producing polluted environments.

Every gem of our natural world seems to have become game to feed the pigs we call Growth and Greed. Grande Bay, Serenus, Pond Bay — all are failed projects the St. John residents rejected and our politicians approved. Now, St. John's East End and Coral Bay are to be the pigs' trough.

Despite territorywide development for decades, the V.I. government is still broke and has an abysmal record of poor environmental leadership through every administration.

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Barry Devine

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Coral Bay's natural resources, its thriving and growing tourist economy, its culture and valuable history, along with the Coral Bay community itself, all will be destroyed in a risky attempt in which a challenged government and an inexperienced developer try to pull off a business miracle, even as many other marinas are struggling and failing around the region.

They will drive off protesting, annoying residents and, in hopes of replacing them with the transient "one-percent crowd" in a lame effort to satisfy financial deficits and bal-

ance the budget.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, an agency charged with protecting our dwindling national environmental legacy was recently reprimanded at the top leadership level for ignoring scientific integrity in decision-making. This same agency has misused federal funds by approving a Boating Infrastructure Grant (BIG) to DPNR for the clearly ineligible project — which unfairly excluded community input in any way.

The grant irregularities are now the subject a battle between the community and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service leaders and are the subject of a federal investigation by the Office of the Inspector General of the U.S. Department of the Interior federal investigation.

You might ask: Why would leaders charged with serving the public try destroy one of the last remaining great places in the world?

The answer is simple. Our leaders are politicians first and stewards of the public trust last. People in charge always think they know what is best even when they have little or no training in issues they must deal with.

Greed, desperation, power, ignorance and more than a decade of animosity toward the stubborn Coral Bay community seem to fill their short-term vision. The Coral Bay community is pro-active, engaged and planning for its future despite the obstacles posed by a the dysfunctional government, despite little support and despite lack of representation at the decision-making level.

It seems as if the V.I. government wants to teach Coral Bay's "uppity hippies, ex-pats, lost souls and miscreants," as we've been called, that pigs will feed wherever they want.

The striking evidence for this is witnessed every day by the lack of any government initiatives to support and assist the community's vision.

For example, in Coral Bay, dumpsters are seemingly married to the mangroves despite our multiple efforts to eliminate this obvious blemish. Lacking any community input, Coral Bay got a badly planned, poorly sited and unsupported government plan for an RO plant.

Also lacking any community input, Coral Bay got a badly sited and over-dense housing development that struggles economically and is located at the bottom of a major drainage gut.

Coral Bay also had to endure DPNR's chief of enforcement Roberto Tapia, who proved to be a drug-runner, and his DPNR cohorts arriving in Coral Bay with automatic

See **GREAT PLACE**, next page

'GREAT PLACES'

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 20

weapons drawn, threatening the residents over minor regulations and creating a state of fear — all of which was caught on tape.

But we can assure you of this: We are not going to be replaced. We are not going away. We have the vision to see the future and the support to fight ignorance and gluttony.

Millions of dollars, uncountable hours of work, multiple federal agencies and grants and an active community in Coral Bay are addressing the previous planning mistakes of the our past and making tremendous progress in restoring water quality, building a sustainable economy, protecting and restoring our resources, ensuring quality of life and acting as stewards of our world.

Show me other V.I. communities that can say they are actively planning a greener future and have the results, organizations and residents to prove it.

This huge marina project will destroy that ongoing effort and put the community on a downward spiral and in a development gamble you wouldn't take in Vegas.

The Save Coral Bay coalition will

oppose and stop this catastrophe.

Governor and members of the 30th Legislature, if you will act as leaders and not politicians and will honestly and objectively assess the facts about the Summers End project, you will see that it makes no economic, environmental, cultural, historical or political sense.

I urge you consider your legacy and be remembered for the educated vision that put our natural resources, our citizens and our communities above the risky short-term gains to be made by profiteers.

Please reject the Trust Lands lease of Coral Bay Harbor for the risky promise of an insignificant annual payment, compared to the infinite value of Coral Bay lands.

What we save now will be one the last of the great places saved in the while world. These last great places are our legacy to our children and their future. There will be no more.

Governor and members of the 30th Legislature, you can be remembered and remembered by the public as a leader for what you have saved, or you can be forgotten for what you have given away.

—Barry Devine, St. John