



October 28, 2019

33<sup>rd</sup> Legislature of the United States Virgin Islands  
Committee of the Whole  
Capital Building, Charlotte Amalie  
St. Thomas, VI 00804

Good morning Senate President Francis, other Senators and staff, supporters of the St. John Marina, Virgin Islanders and others listening on radio, or viewing on television or online.

For those of you who don't know me, my name is Robert O'Connor, Jr., but most call me Bob. I am a native Virgin Islander and a generational St. Johnian. I have previously served 2 terms as Senator at Large of this very body. I've also served as Chairman of the USVI Port Authority.

I own and operate O'Connor Rentals, and have various other business interests including being co-founder of the St. John marina project in Coral Harbor, and am a member of the Summer's End Group, LLC. For years I have actively donated to the Julius E. Sprauve School and a wide variety of worthwhile charities on St. John and throughout the territory. Giving back to my community has always been important to me.

For 40 years, native St. Johnians have strived to bring a marina to St. John. I myself, have been personally involved in this effort for nearly 14 years. I am here today, on behalf of me and my partners, to ask this Committee of the Whole to consider and approve a submerged lands lease for our proposed St. John Marina.

We received our first of 2 different CZM permit approvals for our Coral Harbor marina project back in 2007. Then in 2008 the Great Recession caused our funding for the project to withdraw. In 2009, I brought on new partners and I began with them to revision the project into one for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one that would stand the test of time and benefit the native community and the environment for generations to come.

I'll ask Chaliese to review the project and some of those benefits in a moment, but the result of the development of the St. John Marina will help to reverse youth flight, unemployment and underemployment for locals, restoration of hope for generational St. Johnians and correct the economic genocide of our people being perpetrated by those most actively opposing the project.

A healthy St. John economy is vital to the preservation of the local community, for without a healthy economy, we locals, perish. Even before Irma and Maria, the prosperity of local St. Johnians in Coral Bay was in dramatic decline. Because of a lack of jobs and economic opportunity, locals in Coral Bay have and continue to move away, selling homesteads that had been in their families for generations.

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I am asking this body for more than just the consideration and approval of a submerged lands lease. I am asking you to be proactive and enthusiastically support projects like the St. John Marina territory wide, not just for the benefit of natives, but all who want to work, raise a family and experience the American dream right here in our beloved Virgin Islands.

We all know St. John as Love City. It's a place where I grew up that deserved the name Love City. But there are those who live here that have used hate and abuse to advance their agenda of eliminating native Virgin Islanders from Coral Bay.

Members of the Coral Bay Community Council opposed affordable housing at Calabash Boom. How, and most importantly why would anyone oppose affordable housing? They also opposed WAPA's efforts to bring a desalination plant and fresh water to Coral Bay. Why? I'll tell you why, it stymies their agenda of economic genocide for local St. Johnians.

These are the same people who continue to pollute Coral Harbor and oppose projects like ours that helps to restore the environment and revitalize the local economy.

So today, you're going to hear from some people who say they want to "save Coral Bay." But my question to you and to them is, "save Coral Bay for who?" Because you're not saving it for us, you are not saving it for us.

Senators, I pray that you see what's before you today for what it truly is; continue allowing the environmental disaster going on in Coral Harbor and economic genocide of native St. Johnians, or approve a submerged land lease valued at \$ 3.9m over the term of the lease whose revenue will go directly to the government of the USVI, clean up and bring order to Coral Harbor and have a net positive environmental impact.

Thank you, Senators, for your consideration.

Robert "Bob" O'Connor, Jr., Member  
The Summer's End Group, LLC  
Co-founder, St. John Marina