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## Moorings for Day Charter Boats Would be a First for Magens Bay

By Shaun Pennington - December 3, 2018



*Jean-Pierre "JP" Oriol, director of Coastal Zone Management for the Virgin Islands, addresses Saturday's gathering at Magens Bay.*

A preliminary proposal to place four to eight permanent moorings for the exclusive use of transient and day charter boats in Magens Bay met with mixed reviews at a public meeting at the beach Saturday.

"I am going to fight that," said Carol A. Callwood, whose regular routine includes three early mornings a week at the beach.

"Amen to that," chimed another of the dozen or so residents who sat on cement benches and at picnic tables through the hour-and-a-half meeting at Shed No. 2.

The attendees included Magens Bay Authority Board members, University of the Virgin Islands students and faculty and concessionaires and potential concessionaires seeking information on the coming changes to the beach's restaurant and other commercial operations.

Jean-Pierre "JP" Oriol, director of Coastal Zone Management for the Virgin Islands, told the group he was there to speak for the day charter boat operators.

Oriol said the British Virgin Islands has for years been the destination of choice for day charter

operators, but issues such as increasing fees and bureaucracy have turned the business away from the BVI back toward the U.S. Virgin Islands.

“We are playing catch up,” he said, which is why Magens needs day and transient use moorings.



*A few fishing skiffs are moored at the far eastern end of the Magens Bay beach.*

Currently a smattering of moorings positioned at the far eastern end of the beach are for the use of a small number of local fishermen. They create little traffic and only three or four small skiffs usually occupy them.

Oriol said the V.I. Professional Charter Association was “keen on” being able to off-load charter boat guests at Magens, something that has yet to happen at the mile-long beach that is both the islands largest natural tourist draw and St. Thomas’s only designated nature preserve.

Oriol said the business people have to gear their water tours to the cruise ship passengers, making sure they can bring them to places that already have restaurants, bathrooms and other commercial operations in place. He said the north side beaches, including Hull Bay, which is the next bay to the west from Magens, are naturals for the tours.

“They pick them up at 7:30 and are done by 3,” he said.

In general, all in attendance agreed moorings beat anchors.

“I’m for moorings,” said environmentalist Dalma Simon. “Moorings are important for the environment.”

Many in attendance expressed concern for the sea grasses, a haven for turtles, that are affected by anchors being dropped into the fragile habitat.

This is important because with or without moorings, there is nothing to prohibit the day boaters from anchoring outside the swim zone and ferrying passengers or letting them swim into the beach. Under the V.I. Open Shoreline Act, no one can be prohibited from accessing any beach in the U.S. Virgin Islands from the water side.

On a busy cruise ship day, Magens Bay welcomes as many as 3,000 guests arriving via safari buses, vans and taxis to its shore, but it has never been home to day charter boats, does not allow jet skis to launch from the beach and has very little area designated for boat access to or from the beach. The largest part of the inner bay is a designated swim area. It is an offense punishable by a fine for water craft of any kind to operate inside that buoyed demarcation.

As a restricted area under V.I. code, it is also unlawful for motorized vessels to operate parallel

to the beach at more than six knots – approximately seven mph – Oriol confirmed.



*Magens Bay mangroves at sunset.*

If the charter boat operators were to have their wishes granted from the semi-autonomous authority, they would be able to back their boats into the beach stern-to to unload their passengers, go back to their mooring and then come back and reload the passengers, again stern facing the beach.

Oriol was clear, however, the vessels would be limited to 65 feet, carrying between six to eight passengers only.

Opposite the shoreline at the other side of the flat part of the Magens sanctuary lies another fragile area ravaged by last year's Category 5 storms. The Alfonso Nelthrupp Arboretum was once home to scores of rare trees, frogs, lizards, birds, and five different species of bats – including a rare variety only found in the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

According to UVI wildlife expert Renata Platenberg, who also weighed in at Saturday's meeting, two of the five bat types are among the missing since the storm. (See [Bats Struggle for Comeback After Hurricanes.](#))

Platenberg, who along with several master's degree students from the university's marine biology program, is working on a plan for MBA to restore what was lost with primarily endemic trees and plants. Nevertheless, particular care will be given to saving the few rare trees, planted almost a hundred years ago by Magens Bay benefactor Arthur Fairchild, that have survived. (See [Long Road Back for Nelthropp Arboretum Has Begun.](#))

Another issue affected by the storm is the long-planned relocation of the bar, restaurant and beach shop located near the entrance to the park. It was put on hold after the storms. Saturday was the first public meeting since March 2017 and little was said other than that the authority is waiting on a date for the Coastal Zone Management hearing required before work can commence. (See [Magens Bay Authority Shares Open Design Concept for New Concession.](#))

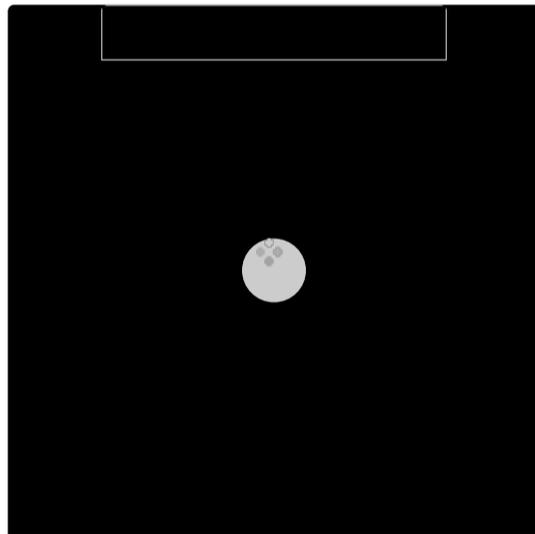
The redesign and relocation, among other things, will allow visitors coming through the gate to enjoy an unobstructed view of the bay, according to John Woods of the Jaredian Design Group. Muted colors, and stone construction will enhance the basic surroundings of Magens Bay Park and be more in keeping with its natural beauty, the authority members believe.

Board chairwoman Katina Coulianos speculated the CZM hearing will be held sometime after the first of the year.

Meanwhile Callwood believes "The beauty of Magens Bay is that it is unspoiled."

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