

# GREAT ST. JAMES - U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

◆ PROJECT FEASIBILITY REPORT ◆

APRIL 2016



## Great St. James Island USVI

*Estate Great Saint James Island* is a Civil in St. Thomas County, VI with an elevation of 125 feet, or 38 meters above sea level. Estate size is about 162 Acres with existing *Five Bedrooms* and *Five Bathrooms*.

Latitude: 18.3100259

Longitude: -64.8291459



Great St. James Island aerial view - Existing Compound



Great St. James Island aerial view from St. Thomas - Christmas Cove

## AREA CALCULATION

<i>Parcel A-1</i>	4.2	Acres
" A-Rem	56.1	Acres
" A-2	19.8	Acres
" B-1-1	2.6	Acres
" B-1-Rem	10.3	Acres
" B-1-2	19.7	Acres
" B-2-1	1.3	Acres
" B-2-2	2.4	Acres
" B-2-Rem	4.4	Acres
" C-1-2	2.89	Acres
" C-1-Rem	26.9	Acres
" C-2-1	2.4	Acres
" C-2-2	3.0	Acres
" C-2-Rem	2.5	Acres
<i>Easement Aa</i>	1.806	Acres
" Ab	0.704	Acres
" Ac	1000	sf
" Ba	6340	sf
" Bb	?	
" Bc	1.498	Acres
" Ca	?	
" Cb	13660	sf
" Cc	13180	sf
<i>Total</i>	161.272	Acres

The island is divided in to several parcels as shown on the VI Cadastral web-site Estate Great St. James Red Hook Quarter, St. Thomas, C-1 & C-2 Estate Great St. James No. 6A Redhook Quarter, St. Thomas and B-1 & B-2 Estate Great St. James, Redhook Quarter, St. Thomas. The Tax IDs are ID 109801010100, ID 109801010300 and ID 109801010200 respectively.

## Introduction.

On January, 1980 the Kjaer family bought the island from James H. Evans with no plans to develop anything. Christian Kaier during an interview said: "I don't want to say, really, we are not going to ruin that island, that's for sure. If anything develops it will have esthetic value. We want to deliver something nice," as we (The Danes) did in 1920, to the United States." Located only five minutes by power boat from St. Thomas makes Great St. James a prime location. "We cannot build condos there, its zoned low density. There are a few cottages, but it's not livable. In fact, we'd have to get everything-roads, water and power there.

"I do feel, however, "Kjaer continued," that if you (the people of the Virgin Islands) continue to develop Virgin Islands pollution, travelers will not be able to get the standards (in accommodations) they'd really like. Development on Great St. James could be the answer. But, again I say, we are not planning any development at this time." My family plans to build a dock on Christmas Cove only". (a year later a hurricane completely destroyed).



In 2007, twenty-seven years later, Great St. James faced with the prospect of slow extinction by bulldozers, dynamite, deforestation, pollution and wholesale mutilation despite the fact being considered a nature park with beautiful walks acclaimed by naturalists from the States as superior to the national park on St. John. Owner, Kjaer family, is looking to construct and sell 53 individual home units priced at about \$750,000 each.

Existing terrain conditions where slopes on the island often reach at least 45 degrees, pose formidable construction hurdles. So that the *U.S. Geological Survey* concluded that Great St. James was unsuitable for development, agriculture, grazing or any other use except nature trails.

In a letter dated May 4, 2007 *Fish and Wildlife Director David Olsen* requests that the applicant, listed throughout the CZM documents as Christian Kjaer, presents an "adequate" tree-boa mitigation plan (designed to preserve the habitat of one of the island's indigenous reptiles) and suggests that the island's salt ponds and surrounding wetland vegetation be segregated from the development sites.

Until the applicant fixes various "deficiencies" listed in an environmental-assessment report, Fish and Wildlife recommends that a "permit not be granted at this time," Olsen continues.

On another portion of the permit application, typed in bold lettering, CZM has also tacked on its own disclaimer: "Great St. James Island is surrounded by a marine sanctuary. Any proposed development of this island should come under heavy scrutiny." Studies of the proposed development area also state that the island's terrestrial and marine ecosystems have also "flourished" due to the lack of activity in the area.

CZM reports also indicate that some of the proposed lots contain wetlands and should be excluded from the actual building site.

"After buffering, the land is not appropriate for construction of any kind," the report says. "Great St. James has one of the highest densities of wetlands in the USVI. The six coastal ponds on Great St. James are coastal features, which serve as sediment traps to maintain water quality and serve as an important wildlife habitat. The coastal ponds can be drastically altered by upland development and may fill in too rapidly with sediments."

According to the development plans, the proposed homes will span approximately 163 acres -- the entirety of plots marked on CZM maps as A, B and C. Each two-story house will also sit on about three acres of land.

A letter attached to the application from the project's designer, *William Karr and Associates*, also states that homes built on the island will, during the short term, be responsible for the production of their own electricity. "Homes will rely on roof catchment for water supply and will have individual batch sewage-treatment plants," the letter states.

If the homes sell at the proposed \$750,000 price, the V.I. government will collect nearly \$300,000 in property taxes annually, the letter adds. Currently property taxes paid to the local government totals about \$21,530.



Christmas Cove View

Other local government agencies, such as the *Waste Management Authority* and the *State Historic Preservation Office*, have also included letters detailing various suggestions for the proposed development.

*WMA Executive Director May Adams Cornwall*, for example, states that a solid-waste collection and disposal plan has not been addressed in the CZM application. "Development of individual lots on the island will require a solid-waste disposal plan," Cornwall writes.

*Historic Preservation Director Myron Jackson* also details the need for developers to preserve some of the island's archaeological treasures -- such as the remains of *Great St. James Village*, a few grave sites, cart paths and a well at Christmas Cove on the southwest side of the island.

According to a *2005 archaeological report*, the village contains the ruins of at least 17 domestic and store buildings, along with a large rectangular cistern with a vaulted roof, a bathhouse and a water trough. Studies show that at least two grave sites, marked by a gathering of coral and shells, lay between two of the structures.

Cart paths to the west of the village site appear to lead to Christmas Cove, the report states. *Historic Preservation* also indicates the need to preserve a well located at Christmas Cove, which contains a dry-laid rubble casing.

While some of the artifacts found within or around the village date to the 19th and 20th centuries, a few also appear to indicate that the village was occupied during the late 18th century.

On June 21, 2007 citing various environmental and ecological concerns, members of *the Coastal Zone Management Committee* voted unanimously earlier this week to deny plans for the construction of a high-end housing community on Great St. James Island.

Detailed within a lengthy CZM permit application, the plans included the building of 53 individual home units, priced at about \$750,000 apiece. The documents state that the proposed project would have spanned approximately 163 acres, with each house sitting on three acres of land.

In denying the application, committee members cited such concerns as an increase in soil erosion and the disruption of local plant and animal life. Over the past month, a variety of residents and community groups have spoken out against the development, saying that the project would have detrimental effects to the island's pristine land and water communities.

Development plans indicate that Great St. James is home to certain indigenous species, such as the V.I. tree boa, and also serves as a nest ground for the endangered green sea turtle.

CZM documents also describe the island as a marine sanctuary, which includes six natural salt ponds, along with a diverse community of corals and other marine life.

Studies of the proposed development area also indicate the island's terrestrial and marine ecosystems have "flourished" because of the lack of activity in the area.

Representatives from agencies such as the *State Historic Preservation Office* have also called for the project's developers to preserve some of the island's archaeological treasures, such as the remains of Great St. James Village, a few grave sites, cart paths and a well located at Christmas Cove on the southwest side of the island.

Community members brought these concerns to the *project's designer, William Karr*, during a public CZM committee hearing held late last month. At the time, Karr explained that much of the historical village would be preserved, and would remain accessible to both the island's inhabitants and other residents of the Virgin Islands.

Methods for controlling soil erosion and runoff would also be implemented, he said, including the installation of grass-seeded roadways designed to absorb up to 10 inches of water in a 24-hour period. Still, residents continued to oppose the development, stating that the construction of the housing community could also negatively impact economic-development activities within the territory and ultimately disrupt one of the last "untouched gems" of the Caribbean.

In a detailed 11-page report sent out earlier this week to the CZM Committee, staff members within the CZM Division of the Department and Planning and Natural Resources seemed to concur with the public's concerns. The findings and conclusions included in the report state, among other things, that the proposed development:

- will eliminate existing vegetation and marine life in the area as new roadways are constructed to connect the homes. (The report also says that soil runoff on some of the island's steeper slopes will increase once trees and other plants are cut down to make space for the new roads.);
- does not plans to provide sufficient access to the island for residents and public agencies. (The report also says that a larger access dock will have to be constructed if the homes are built in the future.);
- does not include specific road plans, or information detailing whether the proposed housing units will have access to public utilities or will be self-sustaining; and
- has not received the approval of the state Historic Preservation Office.

Portions of the report were read during a recent CZM Committee hearing held on St. Thomas. After the findings were read, votes to deny the permit were cast by committee members *Winston Adams, Fern LaBorde, Henry Harrigan, Austin "Babe" Monsanto and Peggy Simmonds.*



Nautical Chart

## Recommendation

Community leaders and associations have recently raised their voices in protest against any possible plan for this Virgin Islands treasure. But there is a prior question that no one thus far seems to have addressed. Aside from the impact on the environment, is any development project itself feasible? Are there conditions on the island that could thwart or undermine development and cause the project to founder, such as cost overruns. And will there be hazards or annoyances that will discourage or drive away future guests, buyers or lessees of additional dwellings? The island is still virtually in a primeval state and therefore highly resistant to development and the conduct of conventional lifestyles.

In other words, will the island prove to be intractable when confronted with any kind of heavy development?



Great St. James Island closest aerial view – Lower Level Existing Compound

**Project Guide Lines.**

The island is more than 90% undeveloped. There is a small residential compound located off the northeastern facing bay. The property has been in residential use for the last 50 years. There are several dirt roads on the northern end of the island but the rest is forested. There are 6 salt ponds on the island as well as historic ruins also in the northern end.

The property is used for a private family vacation area. There is a caretaker who lives on the property. Three cabins as Bedrooms and another one as Living-Dining room are situated in the lower level of the bay, while in the upper level, at the top of the hill, may be founded a small pool & cabana, a caretaker cabin plus a sort of utilities-solar power system combined with a quonset hut serving as a storage. There is a tennis court near the beach and a small dock. There are no paved roads. All of them barely can be seen from the water, in a perfect harmony with nature, a rare idyllic scene.

A possible approach to plan a renovation-expansion must be extremely respectful of the uncontaminated nature, using traditional and local materials technologically advanced.



Coastal Land and Water Use

A combination of stone, wood and glass to resist extreme condition weather that provides a good comfort level should be pursued. As for all the dauntless critters of the West Indies, termites are unpredictable and ravenous, so that all lumber for construction must be pressure treated with a preservative.

Additional consideration is regarding exposure to constant ocean breezes that has a severely corrosive effect on machinery, appliances, electronics, or metal-structural material. A particular attention goes for infrastructures and utilities.

*Water* is a prime necessity on the island, long-term droughts are common because the island is located in the dry part of the territory. It has to be addressed by cisterns (there is an existing well on the property, with RO attached to, plus a small cistern) and reverse osmosis as reasonable possibility.

*Power*, an attractive alternative is underwater cable mocking the LSJ system, rather than generators producing noise and pollution.

*Sewage* treatment (the property has a multi chambered system that appear to be malfunctioning and full. The effluent is used for irrigation) by a septic system with septic tanks is a key component, a small-scale sewage treatment system is common in areas that lack connection to main sewage pipes provided by local governments. (.....when a public sanitary sewage disposal system cannot be made available, the Planning Office will permit the installation of individual sanitary sewage disposal systems, such as septic tank drain-field systems or individual aerobic treatment plants, when a minimum lot size of one-quarter (0.25) acre is maintained, when the residential density does not exceed two dwelling units per lot, and when other conditions (such as steep slopes, shallow soil over rock, or high water table) do not preclude the use of such systems....).

*Roads & Trails* needs to be reconsidered (steep slope driveways and subdivision road plans require. . . .no greater than 20%. . .slope under the code). And last but not least every new constructed element requires solid-concrete foundations and would still be subject to destruction by hurricanes.

### **The Project.**

The proposed project is very conservative, simple and not invasive considering dormant protest. It's planned in order to avoid long time and difficult permit process, considering of actual zoning, local building code and multiple restrictions though. So that to avoid hold-up and delays for every single building a permit application will be submitted. This specific proposal increases the existing 5 Bedrooms and 5 Bathrooms with an additional Bedroom – Bathroom and 2 Half-Bathrooms.

*Living-Dining* will be extended for one third toward the beach while the adjacent *eastern cabin*, also enlarged, will be the *New Kitchen*. The *Living-Dining* is going to have a new below beach level to be used as *New Lounge*. The *New Living-Dining* furthermore, on its back, is going to have a new improvement cluster such as, a Pantry, a Powder Room, a Half Bath, a Closet and a Walk-in Refrigerator.

The other two *Existing Cabins*, for a total of four Bedrooms, will be only improved by a new layout and an addition of four bathrooms on their back, leaving so the front elevation more or less the same.

A *New Building*, on the Cove west side, is going to be constructed aligned to the Living-Dining. This will be the only one new building. It's going to contain a bedroom and its relative bathroom, a walk-in closet, a wellness-therapy space, and a utility room. Similarly Living-Dining this particular building, at the beach level and below its bedroom, will have an additional room as Study-Library.

There is a possible option about enlarging the upper level *Pool-Cabana*. Besides, at present time, doesn't meet any particular priority and/or necessity.

Other important component to be considered is converting the existing Tennis Court in *Heliport*. Avoiding so to build from scratch additional roads and other costly connections. Creating a single landing point (Dock + Eli-pad) seems to be the wisest thing to do. The considered landing zone, according US Dept. of Transportation – FAA – Heliport Design circular, has a pad of 100 ft x 100 ft, free of obstacles upon determined wind direction. Nevertheless the pilot is the final authority to accept or reject any landing zones and may elect coordinate a more suitable location.



Northeastern Bay – Existing Dock