

Transcript of the February 8 Public Civic Engagement Meeting  
Virgin Islands National Park- Caneel Bay Redevelopment and Management Plan  
2/8/2022

Speaker 1:

The broadcast is now starting. All attendees are in listen-only mode.

Kelly Daigle:

Good evening, folks. We're going to give people a couple of more minutes to join and then we'll begin our meeting. Thank you. Nigel, I want to do a soundcheck for you.

Nigel:

Yes, Nigel's here.

Kelly Daigle:

Wonderful. Thank you. I, can-

Nigel:

You hear me okay?

Kelly Daigle:

I do.

Nigel:

Very good.

Kelly Daigle:

Thanks.

Kelly Daigle:

(silence).

Kelly Daigle:

All right. Good afternoon. Nigel, if you wouldn't mind pulling up the presentation, we can begin. Great, I can see it. All right. Good evening and welcome. It looks like we still have some folks dialing in, but we'll get started. Welcome to the Caneel Bay area Redevelopment and Management Plan. This is our civic engagement public meeting for Virgin Islands National Park. My name is Kelly Daigle and I'll be helping to facilitate and moderate today's presentation. Before turning things over to Superintendent Nigel Fields, I first want to thank you for are joining us virtually. And I'd like to go over some logistics for the meeting just to make sure everyone is comfortable using this GoToWebinar platform and knows how to provide comments or ask questions. Nigel, if you wouldn't mind going to the next slide for me. Thanks.

Kelly Daigle:

As an attendee, you'll be in listen-only mode for the entire meeting. So we're asking tonight that you please type your questions or comments into the questions box on your control panel. And you can do this at any time during the presentation and during our question and answer session. At the end of the

presentation, we're going to read aloud your questions and address them with our panel of subject matter experts. You can also enter any comments into this questions box and we will make sure that they are recorded through our public comment system with all of the other public comments. So I want to draw your attention to the screen just to show you where that questions box is. So feel free to type in any questions or comments there. I will also chat out a link in just a second to our planning page. This has our newsletter, our frequently asked questions. This website also has a YouTube video of this presentation as well as a PDF of the slides from tonight's presentation.

Kelly Daigle:

I want to let folks know during our question and answer session, I may combine some similar questions as we go. But please be assured that anything entered into that questions box will be recorded and all of your comments will be entered into PEPC following tonight's presentation. During the presentation, we're also going to launch three voluntary polls to help us gather additional feedback on our purpose and need, our preliminary alternatives, and our environmental issues. So I'm going to launch a practice poll right now, just so folks can see what this will look like during the presentation. So if you're able or you choose, feel free to go ahead and answer this. And if we get a lot of nos, we'll circle back on how to add questions or comments in.

Kelly Daigle:

And for each of these polls, I'm going to wait till we get a majority of folks that respond and then I'll go ahead and close the poll and show the results. So it looks like we had about 75% people respond, which is great. So I'm going to close the poll and I'll go ahead and share the results so you can see what this will look like during our presentation. Great. So I also want to let folks know I will circle back with you at the end of the presentation and go over some of these logistics as well, just to make sure you have all the information you need to answer or to submit any questions or comments through that chat box. So with that, I'm going to turn things over to Superintendent Nigel Fields and rejoin you at the end of the presentation. Thank you.

Nigel:

Hey. Good evening, everyone. This is Nigel Fields. I am also grateful that you're here with us this evening. I am the superintendent here at Virgin Islands National Park and Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument. We have a portion of our team that's with us here tonight, and I'd like to have them introduce themselves. We have a really interdisciplinary team working on many different facets of Caneel Bay. It's great for you to get a sense of some of them. And also they're going to be really helpful during our Q&A session for any of the questions that you may have. The subject matter experts are going to be able to lend their thoughts and ideas that can help you form some of the best comments possible, that helps us improve the process. So why don't we have each of them quickly introduce themselves. We'll start with Elsa and we'll go down the line here.

Elsa Alvear:

Good evening. This is Elsa Alvear.

Anna Toline:

Hi. This is Anna Toline, I'm the acting resource chief at the park.

Linda York:

Hi. I'm Linda York. I am the National Park Service regional coastal geomorphologist and I am helping out with any beach and shoreline concerns.

Jami Hammond:

Good evening. I'm Jami Hammond. I'm the regional environmental coordinator for the region, for Interior Region 2. And I am helping assist the park and Washington office with the planning side of the effort.

Bill Hunter:

Good evening, folks. My name's Bill Hunter. I'm the regional historian and I'm helping the project develop through the National Historic Preservation Act process.

Kelly Daigle:

Hi again. Kelly Daigle, I'll be the project manager for the National Environmental Policy Act process. Thanks.

Gordy Kito:

Good evening, folks. My name is Gordy Kito. I'm the leasing program manager for the National Park Service in Washington. I'm also part of the commercial services program for the National Park Service.

Bill Stevens:

Yes, this is Bill Stevens. I'm the chief of commercial services for Interior Region 2.

John Wiser:

Hi. I'm John Wiser with Stantec Consulting Services. We're supporting the National Park Service with the redevelopment and management plan.

Nigel:

So I want to thank the team for being here this evening just like I want to thank all the participants that are attending. We know that it is not easy having to have these kinds of sessions, where there's a lot of interest in something that means so much to all of us and doing so virtually. But we do appreciate everyone's patience and their willingness to find a way to communicate, to share, and also to keep each other safe. It is critically important here in the Virgin Islands that we maintain safety. And that's the case everywhere, but certainly here. We want to make sure that all of our folks are well taken care of and safe. So while we have this pandemic, we're finding as many as ways possible for us to engage folks in safe ways, so this is one of them. And I'm glad to see the number of people that we have participating. I'm glad to see people that are already submitting their comments in PEPC. It's very encouraging to us. So thank you very much. I'm going to go ahead and get going with the rest of the presentation here.

Nigel:

So this evening, we're going to review a short background on Caneel, the history of the site, its direct relevance to the plans that we are foreseeing, and the history is going to be really relevant to our discussion today. We're going to review the purpose and need for the Park Service to outline the future for Caneel Bay Resort. We're going to share the four preliminary alternatives for the future activities of the site, the key environmental issues that may differentially impact the outcomes across the four alternatives I've already mentioned. And you are encouraged to provide public comment on the concepts that we're sharing with you today. We're aiming to build and improve the options that you see. And so I'm going to share with you, excuse me, exactly how you can provide those comments later in the presentation. And Kelly's going to be coming back also to moderate the Q&A session.

Nigel:

So from what we understand, there have been transitional and permanent settlements on St. John for over 2000 years. Taino artifacts that were found on St. John and within the area of Caneel Bay reveal a thriving, stable, and sophisticated culture. The colonial period introduced permanent settlements of Africans and Europeans across the entire Caribbean, and Caneel Bay contains historic structures and archeological features which speak to that tumultuous period. Caneel Bay is also a key site in the 1733 slave revolt, which sparked a series of subsequent protests against slavery in the new world. Life ways on St. John continue to evolve during the postcolonial period, and that introduced new cultures leading up to the American transfer in 1917. A focus on tourism eventually led to the idea of establishing a national park. And at the same time, Laurance Rockefeller's interest in establishing a new model of ecotourism led him to purchase an existing resort, a modest resort in the 1950s. And he envisioned a new Caneel Bay in which a resort will then focus on the natural and cultural features of the landscape.

Nigel:

In 1983, Laurance Rockefeller donated Caneel Bay Resort to the National Park Service. And he did so using a unique mechanism, he used a retained use of state, which we often referred to as the RUE. So this retained use of state, the RUE, allowed for the resort to continue operating independently for 40 years until September 30th, 2023. This upcoming transition, which is just a year away, in 2023, was anticipated over a decade ago. And a public law allowed the park service to determine if a non-competitive long-term lease was the best option for seamless operations, for protecting the resources, and for continuous economic benefit to St. John. At the time, the National Park Service began negotiating with the holder of the RUE to begin evaluating the site. And this included nominating historic structures as contributing features to a Caneel Bay historic district. This period also included a basic site assessment to identify any environmental concerns.

Nigel:

In 2013, an unfinished report recommended the transition of the RUE into a lease. However, more environmental investigation was needed. So between 2014 and 2016, an environmental sampling was conducted. And it revealed that there were some contaminants of concern as described in a 2017 report. In 2017, you also had hurricanes Irma and Maria, and they caused significant damage to Virgin Island National Park, to Virgin Islands in general, and also to Caneel Bay. The resort closed, and to date, the overnight accommodations have not resumed. This event changed the equation as our goals not only were to establish a National Park Service commercial agreement, such as a concession or a lease but also now to potentially rebuild the resort.

Nigel:

So I have summed up quite a bit of time and circumstance on these three slides. But I think that what I'm conveying is clear, the people of St John, the national park, and Caneel Bay Resort have a shared history. And with this in mind, we asked the public back in April and May four key questions. We asked, what type of connection do you have with Caneel Bay? What are your thoughts on preserving the history and culture of Caneel Bay and St. John? What have been the greatest challenges at the resort? How can the National Park Service improve operations at Caneel Bay and move them into the 21st century? And we had tremendous response. We heard from many different states, we heard a lot from the Virgin Islands, we heard from people in other countries. So we were really positively overwhelmed by the response that we received.

Nigel:

But the key things that we heard was that Caneel Bay must highlight the cultural significance of the area, including the archaic period through European colonialism and that post-colonial emancipation era. We heard about the importance of access to residents and to visitors. We heard very touching stories from former employees and from long time vacationers of their deep affection for Caneel Bay. And we heard about the relationships that have been forged between employees and vacationers over decades of time. We heard about the importance of Caneel contributing to the local economy. We heard about the values of community stewardship. We heard that there's a desire for Caneel of the future to have approaches such as offering living wages and hiring locals. And of course, we heard about rebuilding sustainable and resilient ways and protecting the natural and the cultural resources.

Nigel:

So let's get oriented with the site here in St. John. So on your left, you see an image of the island of St. John. And our primary study area is identified there in the box in red. You'll also see the existing park service maintenance facility area in downtown Cruz Bay. And this is going to be relevant for two of the alternatives. On the right, you see the larger image of the resort area. So I'm going to read the purpose statement for our redevelopment plan. Our purpose is to identify a sustainable and resilient redevelopment strategy for the Caneel Bay area that preserves and protects its significant cultural and natural resources, while providing a range of visitor experiences, including overnight and day-use opportunities, and promotes economic activities that integrate the values and history of the community of St. John. That's all one sentence and it's a lot of words.

Nigel:

I do think it's helpful for us to take another pass at understanding this purpose and digging into it to see what's within that sentence. So we are envisioning a purpose where the rebuilding is done in a sustainable and resilient way. We want to ensure there's a good investment in the public's trust. We have learned so much since the Rockefeller era on how to be light on the land and how to design safe water systems, energy systems that minimize adverse impacts. Construction materials and practices which withstand the environment. A key part of the park service's mission, of course, is to protect those natural and cultural resources that are within our care. It's a driving force of what we do every day, it's our *raison d'être*.

Nigel:

Additionally, engaging visitors in rich experiences, meaningful experiences, where they learn about and hopefully love and care for these special places like Caneel is also a key part of what we do. We also see there's a real opportunity for economic development. But we also know that we must have economic activities that are equitable and that balance economic opportunity with environmental protection. And no matter what the outcome, we want to make sure that the values and the specificity of St. John really shine through. There are many Caribbean experiences that one can have, many different resorts in the Caribbean, but there's only one St. John and there's only one Caneel Bay. And the future of Caneel Bay must be infused with the richness of the history and the experience of the people here in St. John.

Nigel:

So our need is to understand what are the ongoing impacts from hurricanes Irma and Maria, what are those cultural and natural resource impacts? We need to also make sure that Caneel Bay is integrated into the overall plan of Virgin Islands National Park. And we need to make sure that the area is accessible and it's welcoming to locals and guests at the time of the expiration of the RUE, come September 2023. So our objectives essentially meet the need. Our objective is to establish that national park experience.

Nigel:

We want to provide for those economic opportunities and we want to preserve and protect the natural, cultural resources, the Marine resources, be light on the land, and whatever development happens, make sure it blends in with the natural landscape as Laurance Rockefeller envisioned. And make sure that we're integrating the overall footprint of the RUE into the overall park. So I think this is a great time for us to take a bit of a pause and have our first poll here. We'd like to poll your thoughts on our purpose, need, and objective. And I'm going to ask Kelly to come back to lead us to the poll here.

Kelly Daigle:

Sure thing, Nigel. So I should have just launched it for folks. We'll keep an eye on how many folks are responding. And once we get a majority, we'll go ahead and close that and show folks' responses. So I'll give you a couple of more seconds here to chime in. Hopefully, everyone's finding this function simple to use.

Nigel:

I'm just going to quickly go back. There's the purpose statement there. I need...

Kelly Daigle:

All right. It looks like a lot of folks are responding. I'm still seeing some come in so... All right, looks like we've slowed down. I'm going to close the poll and go ahead and show these results. So, Nigel, it looks like 91% of people found this clear and understandable. 3% said no and then 6% are going to submit some suggested edits in PEPC, which is excellent.

Nigel:

Fantastic. That's exactly what we like. If there are ways for us to improve or better clarify the purpose, need, and objective, great. And for those that feel that we captured it, thank you for your feedback as

well. So let's now talk about the alternatives. So we have a non-commercial option and we have three commercial options. So our non-commercial option is our no-action option. The commercial options are three of them, alternative A, B, and C. So we're going to go through all of them. Let's start with that non-commercial no-action option. So in this scenario, the no-action scenario, the National Park Service is not issuing a lease or a concessions contract. In this scenario, the park service keeps the roads and the trails clear for safe passage and access to the beach. The beaches are open, historic structures are assessed, and we get a sense of what is stable or what needs to be stabilized. We want to develop a deferred maintenance plan and make sure that we're monitoring plants, animals, and marine life, archeologic sites, just as we do along many of the North Shore Beaches currently.

Nigel:

So whatever we do with a no-commercial action, if there's a no-commercial option here, regardless there's a lot of responsibility that we have, to still maintain ecological balance, to focus on the cultural history, and to ensure that there's public safety on the site. Before we dive into the details of each of the action alternatives or the commercial alternatives, it's helpful to note that each of the three options, alternative A, B, and C, all provide for greater access, they all promote cultural, natural resource protection, each of them has development that would be focused on being light on the land and making sure that the approach for redevelopment is mindful of the geographic and historical context, and also aims to provide that St. John guest experience that really fully represents the history of the island. So let's start with Alternative A. And this is the National Park Services preliminary proposed action. So each of the options are viable to us, but this is the one that we're kind of eyeing for right now. So we're going to take some time to go through it. You'll see, on the map on the right, there are five colors across the study site. We're going to go through each of these colored zones. So let's first discuss the purple area on the map. This is designated as the Resort Zone. So imagine a rebuilt Caneel Bay Resort with a variety of overnight accommodations, recreational activities, spa services, outdoor event spaces, restaurants. Virtually, all within the original footprint, but without the need of a 450 acres. So this scenario makes sure that many of the functions and features of what people come to expect from Caneel Bay as that kind of one of a kind experience. Many of those are still here while making room for other opportunities as well. And that takes us to the blue zones on the map.

Nigel:

So the Public Recreational Zone, these blue zones of we've outlined. Imagine a National Park Service experience where Honeymoon Beach is open for day use. We have trails that connect you from the downtown, a headquarters building through Lynn point, those trails can then take you over by Caneel Beach. You can then connect to the Tamarind Trail, the Caneel Trail, you can go all up to Turtle Point Trail. Day use at Honeymoon Beach could include water sports, local vendors, featuring local foods, local crafts, a snack shop, a comfort station. The commercial activities at Honeymoon Beach could operate independently under a concessions contract or under commercial use authorization. It'll just be independent from the purple area, that's the Resort area, Hawksnest Beach area, which is just under Turtle Point Bay, could also provide another option for a commercial activity. In this case, there could be the option for overnight accommodations in more of a mid-price range.

Nigel:

Think about a pricing niche that's somewhere between Cinnamon Bay Campground and the higher end resort in purple as it could be more of a higher end space there. So day use at Hawksnest could also offer the opportunity with a road that we're investigating that could connect it to North Shore Beach, connecting the Hawksnest that we know and love off of North Shore Beach all the way over to that under Turtle Point. So thinking of all that is one public day use area.

Nigel:

The green zone is the natural undeveloped spaces which will remain undeveloped. We would make sure that any access to the trails are maintained and roads are maintained in those areas. There's the operational maintenance zone. This is an opportunity that we have to build a combined maintenance campus. Under a different funding source, the park service is anticipating being able to rebuild or replace our aged maintenance facility. It is past its lifetime. And so we are buying a funding opportunity to build a new facility in the 2025, 2026 time period. So it aligns right around the same time as we're looking at rebuilding Caneel Bay Resort. So it makes sense to us to consider having a combined maintenance facility instead of having two maintenance yards that are just less than two miles apart, we may find efficiencies to having one campus where the National Park Service has a couple of its buildings that it uses for its purposes.

Nigel:

And then the rest of the buildings there in that same area currently on Caneel's campus could be used for the Caneel's maintenance operations. This also allows for us to consider making use of the downtown space where the current maintenance building is located and having that as a potential transportation hub. So imagine being able to have the designated necessary parking all in one space, being able to have a transportation hub where taxi cabs can have safe turnarounds. We could also think about electrification of vehicles and being able to do so by design, wifi and 5G technology, providing smart parking options, being able to make use of wristwatch or a cell phone in the palm of one's hands to make many critical decisions about how they're going to get where they're going to go and being able to do so from that location.

Nigel:

So it offers us a unique opportunity to really rethink that space downtown, to also solve some significant parking problems that we currently have and reducing congestion along North Shore, but also thinking about ways to manage parking for the resorts so that we're not having to build an awful lot of pavement services on Caneel Bay. So it's an option that we're really considering. Alternative A also allows us to consider an interpretation and an engagement zone, so we can provide a National Park Service style, interpretive experience where park service staff can interpret the Sugar Mills and some of the other ruins and archeological features there on Caneel Bay. It also provides for the opportunity for potential contact station and there may be an opportunity here for us to work with an outside organization to construct, maintain, build and manage a community space such as an amphitheater, museum, a cultural center.

Nigel:

So in summary, alternative A provides for the resort facilities under a potential lease, similar to in tradition to the location of the pre hurricane resort. It provides for concessions opportunities at

Honeymoon Beach and Hawksnest Beach, just under Turtle Point. It includes a shared maintenance facility and a downtown transportation hub. It protects the undeveloped green spaces and provides for interpretation and a community facility through a partnership.

Nigel:

Alternative B is quite similar to alternative A but in this case, Hawksnest Beach, just under Turtle Point remains as a part of the original footprint of the resorts, but we still maintain that other opportunity for a commercial activity independent of the resort down by the Honeymoon Beach area. In this case, we still have the shared maintenance facility, but we don't have the National Park Service presence. We would turn the interpretation and the care of those historic structures to the potential Le Sea of the resort. But it does still allow for, in this case, the possibility of that community space, an amphitheater, museum, a cultural center.

Nigel:

Alternative C maintains the original footprint of the RUE. So the boundaries are the same. It removes the transportation hub, in this case, we're not having that combined maintenance facility. We're not having NPS presence to do interpretation in this case, we're also not having that separate community space. So this allows us to just have the one commercial agreement with one entity to do all of the engagement, to do the protection of the resource and to provide for access to spaces that we designate as accessible under one commercial authority.

Nigel:

So I think it's clear there's some differences between these alternatives. Between A, B and C. And although we're going to have some time for back and forth with questions, I do think it would be good if we could take another poll now to get a sense from you on whether or not the alternatives have been clearly presented. So Kelly, can you open up another poll here for us?

Kelly Daigle:

Yes. I just opened it up so we should be collecting responses now. And as folks are chiming in, I wanted to let you know, in the last poll we had 79% of... Looks like or roughly 204 attendees response. So thanks everyone for the participation. Likewise, we'll keep an eye on this number and as we start to get to a majority, we'll go ahead and close that so we can continue on. The great news is it looks like folks are submitting answers. Give folks just a couple more seconds to do so.

Nigel:

Just showing those up options again. A, B and C. I think the distinctions are clear.

Kelly Daigle:

Great. So for the sake of time, it looks like we have about 85% of people that have submitted a response. So I'm going to go ahead and close the poll and show those answers to everyone. It looks like we have a majority of folks that feel as though some of their desired outcomes are captured. What I'm happy to see is 18% of the respondents will submit suggestions for improvements in PEPC, which is very helpful to us. Thanks, Nigel.

Nigel:

Fantastic. Our goal is to evaluate the consequences of these different options so that we can figure out which is going to be the best path going forward. So you can see there were some distinct differences. And as we look at the environmental consequences, visitor use is one of those things we want to evaluate across those four. I know that there are many people here, on the call this evening, that have expertise in hospitality or in visitor services. So your expertise is going to be helpful for us to think about those differences and those options for what visitors can experience. Similarly, when it comes to culture resources, archeology, depending on the type of development, those will be differentially impacted.

Nigel:

The historic structures that remain there both not only from the colonial period, but also the mid-century period. What options we come up with may have differential impacts on what remains or what gets stabilized or what things have to be modified or changed. And also we want to make sure no matter what the coastal resources, the shorelines are protected and whatever development happens. So these are examples of the key environmental concerns that we're looking at evaluating. But wanted to just very quickly get a sense if this is adequate, according to you, do you think these alternatives for it... Looking at environmental consequences are sufficient? What are your thoughts? I thought we could have our final poll for the evening.

Kelly Daigle:

Thanks Nigel. And that should be live now.

Nigel:

I'm just going to put that slide back again.

Kelly Daigle:

Yes. Folks are entering comments. I also wanted to note that in the newsletter, we do have additional environmental resources that we have considered, and some of those include vegetation, wildlife, sea turtles. So just want to make sure folks are aware of that newsletter as well. All right we're collecting quite a few votes now. Again, I'm going to wait till we get to majority and then we'll close this poll and show the results. Okay looks like we have about a majority. So I'm going to go ahead and close this poll and show these results. And again, we welcome you to submit any feedback into our PEPC system that Nigel will go over here shortly. So do the preliminary issues presented address your concerns? 69% said yes, 13% said no and 18% said they will submit additional environmental issues in our PEPC system for us. Thank you.

Nigel:

Very good. Thank you. Today we're discussing this conceptual range of alternatives. Our goal though is to drive towards a decision of action or no action. So our goal is by January of next year, to know whether or not we're going to have an action or a no action. Action being one of the alternatives or no action being no commercial activity. If indeed we're moving toward commercial activity, if that is what we decide that some level of commercial activity is expected, we'd like to then move forward with an RFP, a request for proposals, our consecutive perspectives as early as possible. In 2023, we'd like to

make a selection of any of the awardees for that concessions or potential lease, whichever is appropriate getting toward the middle of 2023... Certainly by the fall of 2023. So that we can start working with that partner or partners on the design work and getting all the design plans in place so that we can move toward construction in 2024, going through 2025 and then looking at a phased opening of the resort in moving into 2026.

Nigel:

So that's the big picture of where we are expecting to be in the next three to five years. Most immediately, where we are, is with our public comment period. So we're having our meeting this evening on February the 8th. We've extended the public comment period for 15 days, so we want to make sure that people have time to review all this information, to continue to have conversations and to really be able to put in the types of comments that are going to help us improve these options. So we're moving this public comment period until March 4th, that would be the new closed date for the public comment period. In the meantime, we're continuing the environmental investigation that we began last year. This is the EE/CA that you see here, that's essentially our environmental investigation. We've taken another round of sampling. We expect this to be the last bit of sampling that we need to do on the site.

Nigel:

Our goal is to release to the public, the results of that sampling between April and May, and then for us to have a report for everyone to review in the summer around July of 2022. And our goal is then to complete that report, to complete our action memorandum and have that closed out so that we have our plan for any contamination removal. We have a plan, we have the amount that is going to cost all outlined by September, 2022. Also, around that same time, getting into the fall we play and to issue our public report on this process here, we will be kicking off our environmental assessment, part of our NEPA process very soon. And we'll get that report out to the public, we expect in the fall. So that we can complete this NEPA process by January, 2023. We want to get a signed document with that action and no action around January so that we can move forward. If we're going to have commercial activity move forward with those prospects or with any request for proposals.

Nigel:

So we have a pretty ambitious agenda, but we're confident that we can stay on track to keep this moving forward and keep the momentum and the public's participation. You see there's several spaces all along the way where the public will really help us make sure that we're getting the best information possible.

Nigel:

So we've teed this up already, right? We're really wanting comments on the clarity and purpose, the needs, the objectives. We really want to hear back from you, regarding the conceptual range of alternatives, how they can go forth as they are? If you see ways to improve them ways to maybe mix and match them a bit. If you see things that aren't present, visitor services that you feel are really important, that are not clear. Those are the kinds of comments that will really help us. It's good for us to hear that you like option A, B or C, but it's better for us to know well, why you? What about option A, B or C really resonates with you? What is it that is doing that better protects the resources or better

provides for infrastructure or better provides for visitor service? So if we can get a better sense of what is driving your thoughts around a particular alternative, that's really helpful for us.

Nigel:

You can provide your comments to us electronically, which is the best way for us. By going to [parkplanning.nps.gov/CaneelBayResort](http://parkplanning.nps.gov/CaneelBayResort). You can also mail or hand deliver your written comments to our park headquarters, right Downtown Cruz Bay. For those of you, all that are here, or visiting, you can address your letters to Caneel Bay Redevelopment/Management plan, to the Superintendent, 1300 Cruz Bay Creek, St. John VI 00830. Any comments that we receive electronically or by hand must be given to us not later than March 4th, 2022. When you go to the website, you'll be able to see, here in step one, click on the comment spot, which opens up this space for the newsletter. Go ahead and click on that and that takes you to "Comment Now" that's what you want to get to once you press on "Comment Now" you can enter your name and then your comment. So it's a couple of clicks to get there, but it's fairly intuitive. Click on the comment, get to the comment now, and then go ahead and put in your comment and we'll be able to take in what you're suggesting.

Nigel:

I want to do a quick plug for our commercial services program. We have a great website where you can see much more about the commercial opportunities that the park service has in general. So there's information there about our methods, our processes, our laws, that guide actions. So you can get there by [nps.gov/concessions](http://nps.gov/concessions), [nps.gov/leasing](http://nps.gov/leasing). We also have a couple of our experts here on the line with us today. So if any questions come up around commercial services, we'll be glad to have our subject matter experts answer those questions for you. And with that I'd like to once again, thank you for your engagement, thank you for participating in our polls. Thank you for offering to give us comments. And I'd like to turn it over to Kelly so that we can now go forth with our session here.

Kelly Daigle:

Wonderful. Thanks Nigel. So as a reminder, you'll be in listen only mode for the rest of the meeting, but it looks like we have a wealth of information already coming into our questions box. For those of you that have not found that yet, I wanted just remind you, it is on your go to webinar control panel, type in questions or comments at any time. We'll make a record of all of these and enter them into PEPC. But for now, I'm going to go ahead and read these in order, if I can, I'm going to combine some like questions and then put those out to our subject matter experts for response. We're going to go as long as we can until about 7:30 PM and any questions or comments we don't get to, please know, we will review these as a team. We'll enter them on the PEPC site so there will be a record of these. And then likewise, if you have individual comments that really need to be addressed or questions, you can reach out to us individually.

Kelly Daigle:

We have so many great ones coming in. I'm just going to start from the beginning. So Nigel I'll direct this one to you, will the NPS require any or all concessionaires to hire a high percentage, say 90% of employees from St. John residents who have lived here at least five years, or are there some other similar requirements?

Nigel:

Yeah. Well, thank you for the question. And I think there are things that we can do to encourage the hiring of locals. I want to bring in our experts though, like to bring in Gordy and Bill, since this is their bailiwick, they write these types of agreements all the time. What flexibility do we have when it comes to these types of criteria? So Gordy or Bill, can you help us out here? Give us some pieces.

Gordy:

Sure. I think I can take this one. I have to say that right now, we're really looking for ideas and thoughts that the folks have out there in the public about what they would like to see in terms of those types of requirements and provide us that feedback. I am not sure right now what our abilities are to require those types of things. We can definitely encourage those types of behaviors by folks that are offering commercial services in the types of questions that we ask them for their proposals, but I think there are probably some statutory limitations on what we could actually require in terms of those hirings. I'll have to take a look into that and find out exactly what is possible.

Nigel:

Yeah. Well, thank you, Gordy. Kelly, I think they're ready for the next question.

Kelly Daigle:

Okay, great. I had a couple folks ask how many people are participating this evening? I just wanted to make note. It looks like now we have 205 attendees. So just wanted to let folks know that. Our next question is, is action by the US Congress required for this project to go forward? And Nigel, we can start with you.

Nigel:

I'm not aware of the action required by the Congress. My understanding is that the National Park Service has been delegated the ability to move forward with the process. Once again, Gordy, you are quite familiar with what's happening in the Washington, D.C. area. Is there any awareness that you have of congressional action for our competitive process that we're laying out?

Gordy:

Thanks Nigel. No, not that I am aware of at this time.

Kelly Daigle:

Okay, great. We have another question here. Why does the no action alternative have no facilities for concessions or no bathrooms? Would there be trash removal and grounds care? How would the NPS pay for these services when the local NPS has been very short staffed and underfunded for years? So we'll start with you, Nigel.

Nigel:

Yeah. Thank you. So the options that we're looking at for this planning exercise are either having a commercial activity or no commercial activity. So even if we go with a commercial activity, it could be limited to just one or two small concessions. It does not have to be a very broad, large scale. And that's a

part of what this process is. We need to get a sense of if there's going to be commercial activity, what's the appropriate scale what's appropriate for the site. So we're open to feedback on what level of commercial activity could be, should be on Caneel, or for those who feel there should be no commercial activity at all. That's an option too. If there is no commercial activity, we do not have any commercial options. We don't do any commercial activity in the site. So the National Park Service would make sure similar to what we do in some of the other areas of the park, make sure the beaches are open, that they're safe and they're secured. It would be minimal activities in these places. So there would be trash pickup as we do another north shore beaches.

Nigel:

It would be similar to an experience that one might have out at Francis Bay, or what you would see at Salt Pond where there's very little development. There's no concessions, there's no water sports activity, but there could be the possibility down the road for visitor services, such as a restroom or, any shade structure or something like that. Those could be funded through... We have recreational fees that we receive not only here in St John, but also within the park service. We would be able to look at funding a shelter or, any other type of comfort station, bathrooms and so forth, in our funding stream down the road.

Nigel:

So, this time period for us to be thinking about this and planning is really key because if we're going to go with a no commercial option, it sets in place, the types of things we need to do to prepare for what that's going to look like and how we can make sure that visitors have decent services. Even though there'll be very little ways for us to bring more resources, more funding to the spaces. We have to do so within our current budget. But I think that the... Any structures like a shade structure or any things like a comfort station, we would be able to work with the park service on making sure those are available through our recreational fee dollars. So there are some options to provide some safe, enjoyable spaces under the no action option.

Nigel:

With the commercial option though. It gives us a lot more flexibility with how we go about doing that development and making sure that once again, we remain light on the land, but provide for additional visitor services that we deem to be necessary and appropriate.

Kelly Daigle:

Thank you. Okay. We have a couple questions here about the estimated timeline to complete the environmental cleanup, and whether or not we anticipate the currently see to hold up this process at all, whether that's through a lawsuit or other delays.

Kelly Daigle:

So Nigel, send that to you again, to begin with.

Nigel:

Yeah, thank you. I'm just going to reflect back on that timeline here. So this is for us to complete the environmental investigation that we are currently have in place. And we are confident now that we will get to the point in September to kind of wrap the several years of this investigation up. For those contaminants that fall under our circle authority. That's kind of our Superfund authority. We have the ability to, compel a reimbursement of any expenses that the park service takes on and, or we can work with any potential responsible party for the costs of cleaning this up. So, we're going to follow the law and follow the process for moving forward with the cleanup based upon what the law allows us to do. I'm not anticipating any holdups, but we want to be prepared for whatever's coming down the road. Right?

Nigel:

So I think part of our job is just to make sure we have a plan in place regardless, to ensure clean up and to do as quickly as we possibly can, but our goal is to follow the law to do so. And the law gives us the ability to both by either directly cleaning up the contamination and being reimbursed, or to work with the potential responsible parties to move forward with the cleanup. It really moves us toward action to clean up the site. So, we will be able to share more once we have more than we can share, but at this point, our goal is to wrap up the investigation and move forward with the next steps to our cleanup.

Kelly Daigle:

Great. Thank you, Nigel. Okay. We have a couple comments and questions here that I'm going to loop together, because I think they're really relevant. So one commenter noted that there is concern about nesting sea turtles at the site and that when other areas have become public like Maho, there were no longer nesting sea turtles. So does the Park Service have a plan for the protection of cultural and natural resources at the Caneel Bay area?

Nigel:

Thank you for the question. Yeah. Oh, thank you, thank you for the question. I think we want to make sure we are protecting, especially those well, all of the natural and culture resources in the area. Those that are specific to the Caneel Bay area include nesting turtles, that we have been able to document that continue to nest there. I do want to check in with, I think [Dr. Toline 00:52:42] is here. If she can also provide some insight in terms of how we'd be focusing on protecting those natural resources; the sea turtles, no matter what the option would be.

Dr. Toline:

Hi, thanks. That's a great question. In terms of protecting sea turtles, there are things that we can do and we are aware of the need to make sure that we're working closely with the regulatory agencies that manage the... Oversee the sea turtles, make sure we're following compliance. These are listed species under the endangered species act. So we have to be careful that we maintain them. We've got... We want to maintain the nests and make sure that we do the best we can for recommending actions to protect the nest from predation. And then also make sure that the turtles themselves and the hatchlings, have the right environment to nest or leave the nest. A lot of that has to do with lighting, and protection of the turtles when they're nesting. So we are considering that and we're working closely with our agency partners to make sure that we're going to do everything we can to make sure that they're safe. [inaudible 00:54:01] Does that answer the question?

Nigel:

Well, thank you [Dr. Toline 00:54:02]. I'd like to just also ask [Gordy 00:59:29] or [Bill 00:54:06] you know, how do we make sure that when we're negotiating a lease or concessions, that those types of protections are built within like the type of appropriate lighting as an example?

Gordy:

Sure. This is [Gordy 00:59:29] here. You know, those are just provisions that we put into our contracts, whether they be leases or concession contracts or the operating conditions that we have under a CUA. So all of those commercial activities will have to comply with the Park Service's requirements, whether they be for historic preservation or for natural resource protection or cultural landscape protection as well. So they will definitely be addressed as part of the requirements for any type of commercial activity.

Nigel:

Yeah thank you. I think that just clarifies that, you know, we are conveying over those responsibilities to them in their agreement with us. So there's no light between what we are expecting for protecting those natural and culture resources, and how they run their operations. Thank you for the question.

Kelly Daigle:

Great. Alright again, I'm going to combine some comments and questions here, because there's some great ones about Honeymoon Beach and Hawksnest Beach. A couple folks have noted the current situation at Honeymoon Beach does not seem to be very good for the environment. So the first question is; what will the concessions look like at Honeymoon Beach? And then I also think [Nigel 00:55:39], a clarification about what portion of the Hawksnest Beach area we're talking about in our zone might be helpful here. So first question dealing with Honeymoon.

Nigel:

Part of our interest is to hear what our audience is considering or what they think should be out at Honeymoon. If you have a concessions that's there. If you have a day use opportunity where visitors can walk on the Lind Point Trail from downtown Cruz Bay, or if they get there along the trail, like the Caneel Hill Trail and walk across, or if they're going and parking in some way or taking the transportation hub, hopping on a taxi and getting there and they're walking over to Honeymoon, what would you like to see? Part of this opportunity is for you to share with us what seems appropriate and, what is going to be the best use of that space that also protects the natural and culture resources that are there. So I'm not aiming to be prescriptive, we really want to hear from you on what would be appropriate.

Nigel:

I think it is good to go back and let's talk about Hawksnest Beach. So once again, this is the Hawksnest Beach that's right under Turtle Point. So that area where there's already some overnight accommodations and the opportunity that we see there is to have those operate independently of the resort area that you see in purple. So in this scenario, this area would kind of spin off as its own separate commercial opportunity. We feel that the opportunity to have something in a more mid price range is good for us to diversify the types of offerings we have here for overnight accommodations. And it allows

for day use there at the beach as well. So the connection that I was aiming to make before is that most of Hawksnest Bay, the whole bay now for the most part, most of it now becomes publicly accessible.

Nigel:

And we have an interest to see if that old road bed that is here in the area, going off of North Shore Road, going over to Hawksnest Beach, if that could be an independent way of getting to that part of Hawksnest Bay just under Turtle Point. So it's a consideration, it's something we're wanting to get some thoughts and ideas on from the public as to what they envision here. Could that be something that spins off as a separate commercial opportunity, a separate day use area open to the public, or should it remain a part of the original footprint of the resort as you see in option "B" and option "C". So thanks for the question. Hope that clarifies.

Kelly Daigle:

Thanks [Nigel 00:58:38]. And I do see a couple comments here, potentially folks that missed the first slide of who is available to speak. Would you mind just going back to the slide about who our panelists are today and I'll move on with our questions. So we do have a couple option... or a couple questions here about commercial options. So the first is, and I'll pause and just let you get to that slide. Great. Thank you. So hopefully that, that helps some folks see who, who may be chiming in. So would commercial options be year round, so say without laying people off in the off season and then what, what would be the length of the leases or concession contracts that would be offered to potential resort operators? So I'll turn that over to you, [Nigel 00:59:26], and then I'm sure [Bill Stevens 00:59:28] or [Gordy 00:59:29] could offer some assistance.

Nigel:

Yeah. This is another one where I would love to hear from folks to give a sense of what they would like. So if they could say, well, what would you expect? What would you like the park service to consider? What's going to be best for the natural and cultural resources what's best for equitable economic development. What's best for the protection of what, you know, our mission for making sure there's safe, meaningful, deep, rich experiences by visitors. So since these are the key things that we're considering, what types of operation is going to help us meet that goal? So if you have ideas, this would be a great time for you to share those with us, but I think it would be helpful if [Gordy 01:00:19],[Bill 01:00:19] could chime in regarding, once again, how these things may be structured within a commercial opportunity with the park service.

Bill Stevens:

Yeah, so it like [Nigel 01:00:35] was saying, it really depends on the service. Especially when it comes to leases. It depends on the type of service, the type of rebuilding, the type of investment will dictate typically the term of that lease and concession contracts, somewhat the same thing. We're a little more limited in the length of a concession contract. But once again, it really goes towards the type of service and the amount of rebuild that we're looking at.

Gordy:

So this is [Gordy 01:01:13], I just wanted to add on to that. So the statutory authority for the leases, they cannot exceed a term of, sorry, our regulatory authority. Leases cannot exceed a term of 60 years, and

concessions contracts can go up to 20 years. They are normally in the 10 year range, but they can be authorized for up to 20 years.

Gordy:

I think to, I want to touch on the other piece too, seasonality that really is dependent upon, you know, what the proposal is, what they propose. There are times when we've had seasonal operations. I think everybody can appreciate that in a place like Denali in Alaska, they're not going to have year round operations. Understanding though that there's also a hurricane season that happens. There is no limitation that says they can't operate year round. And so I think to [Nigel's 01:02:10] point, we'd really like to get your feedback on what folks would like to see in terms of the operations. Whether or not they have a seasonality, whether or not they're available year round. So definitely the scope and scale of those services. Feedback on that would be great.

Nigel:

Yeah. Thank you both.

Kelly Daigle:

Great! Thank you. All right, There's a couple concerns here and I'm going to loop these into a question as well. Some concerns that the future development of the site has already been determined that we've already made a decision that there will be a resort here. So I want to first address that point [Nigel 01:02:52], and then a follow up question is who determines the outcome of planning process, who is the decision maker, as well as the RFP who makes the final decision about which proposal is accepted?

Nigel:

Yeah. Thank you. I'll answer the second question first. And I'll bring in [Jami Hammond 01:03:15], one of our subject matter experts with the NEPA process and how we do the planning processes to give a sense of, you know, how decisional this is and how we can make sure we're conveying that's not where we are at this point. But the final decision for this process that we're undergoing is made by the regional director. I would expect the regional director because of the visibility of this project would also be briefing the Director of the National Park Service, but I'm expecting that once we get to our time period around January, 2023, we would've been able to go through all the options. We would've evaluated the data that's available. We would've gone back to the public. We would have a lot of information then to present to the regional director for a decision of whether we take an action or no action, whether we have no commercial activity or some level of commercial activity.

Nigel:

But [Jami 01:04:13], can you give us a sense of how, you know, we are giving a, a range of alternatives here. We really want to evaluate all of them. We are suggesting [inaudible 01:04:23] that one of them has our attention, but how do you, [inaudible 01:04:26] can you convey like this is not a decision that's already pre made.

Jami Hammond:

So that's a really good question in terms of our process and where we are right now. We are in what we were calling the pre NEPA process. So it's before we got into the National Environmental Policy Act process, and that's why we're doing this civic engagement that helps feed into that process. And once we get into that NEPA process, these preliminary alternatives will be formed into alternatives to consider in that NEPA process. So that's why your input is really important at this time. And, you know, focused input, specific comments, things that help build these alternatives help us build the alternatives for that NEPA process. The NEPA process involves environmental impact analysis. And so [Nigel 01:05:19] had gone earlier over the potential issues that we're looking at, things that we've identified early on. So I've noticed in some of the comments, some concerns about, you know, issues and, and resources at the park. So those are important for you to consider in your comments as well, because they will be considered impacts to those resources will be considered. And when we're looking at alternatives and potential alternatives going forward into selection.

Jami Hammond:

So once we get into that National Environmental Policy Act process, the NEPA process, we will actually put that document out to the public. So all of you will be able to see the alternatives. You'll be able to look at them and comment again, on those formed alternatives and the potential impacts that we anticipate could happen once those alternatives are implemented or, an alternative is implemented. And at the end of that process, once that environmental assessment has been prepared, and you have provided comments on that, and we've considered all of those and built those into what we hope to be a selected alternative. The regional director is a decision maker on that alternative. He is the final decision maker in terms of the alternatives that you'll be looking at in the future and that NEPA document. And then you know, [Gordy 01:06:46] has talked about, you know, the process with the leasing, potential leases and concessions. So that's a different process, but I'm building off of this NEPA process. So hopefully that's relatively clear.

Nigel:

Thank you, [Jamie 01:07:03]. So we're really early on. This is, you know, we're starting at the ground up and you're with us as we're start this. The alternatives that I've laid out, the no action and the three alternatives, we've shaped those directly off of the feedback that we received from the public back in April and May of last year. So hopefully you see some of the things that you contributed reflected in those options, and this was just the way for us to take that information and form it here so we can all see it again. So this is the check. This is for you to check us again and to give us any feedback, but yeah, we're way ahead of a decision at this point. So it's a great time to continue to give us feedback. Thank you.

Kelly Daigle:

Thanks [Nigel 01:07:47]. Okay, couple questions here. One, is whether or not the idea of an amphitheater or community space could be added to the no action alternative. And a follow up question is why the NPS would not be funding or facilitating that community space.

Nigel:

Thank you for the question. So the National Park Service does not have the funding for that community space. We also don't have the staffing at this point forward. So we have many examples in the park

service where we work really well with other partners to help design, through consultation, and to think about operations, and to think about ways to make sure you have a successful operation of something within a national park. There are multiple examples of that, and I've had some great experience with that at other parks that I've worked in. We've had success with the entire process, working with others. So it's effective because "A" it's not taking additional government resources. It is a type of public private partnership, where we're offering the space, offering the platform. And then in partnership with that organization, we can then build something that meets a public need. But it also does not burden the federal government with additional maintenance and operations for the years to come. Through that partnership, the maintenance is built in to the agreement with that organization to run and maintain that.

Nigel:

So again lots of success in other parts of the National Park. One of the things I think about most that comes to mind immediately is the Oconaluftee Visitor Center. This is on the Cherokee Indian side of the National Park Service on the North Carolina side. And that's a great example of a partner shift that's been successful with their cooperating association, the Great Smoky Mountains Association.

Nigel:

It's a beautiful facility, beautiful building. Has a museum on the inside of it, a space to have retail. And also there's a range of station there completely built by that partner organization. So great examples where there's non additional burden to the park service where we already have a lot of limitation and funds.

Nigel:

Does it mean that we could not consider having that with a different alternative? So once again, your feedback would be helpful if that's something you'd like to see, that's a suggestion, please offer it up.

Kelly Daigle:

Great. Thanks Nigel. All right, so I'm going to combine again a couple of questions here. A couple folks have asked if a new resort is built, will there be a cap on the number of rooms? And additionally, what will happen to the Scott Beach rooms since they're in the floodplain?

Nigel:

Yeah, these are great questions. That's a part of what we're going to evaluate during this time period. I would like to defer to Gordy again when it comes to the number of rooms and what type of rebuilding we could do. If we go with a rebuilding of the resort, if that's the option that goes forth, if we're looking at a potential lease opportunity for that, what type of limitations would there be for the number of rooms based upon our leasing regulations?

Gordy:

So Nigel, based on the leasing regulations, there would be... I think we need to look at this as two different types of opportunities, whether it be a concession opportunity or a leasing opportunity. I don't

see currently that there is a limitation. I know that there was some congressional intent and there's always been some desire to keep the number of rooms down at the facility at a certain level.

Gordy:

There's some considerations that we have to make to the historic landscape, to the historic structures that are already there. In our leasing options, we don't necessarily have the ability to construct new buildings necessarily or there are... It's more difficult. There are other restrictions placed on us. In a concessions contract, we can construct new pieces, but I think more importantly, we should focus on what the number of rooms that the community or that folks providing input think are appropriate.

Gordy:

I don't think that there is a hard and fast limitation, but I know that there's always been a concern that the resorts stay within a certain size. And I know that Congress had put that intent in the original legislation that allowed us to negotiate with the current holder of the RUE, CBIA.

Nigel:

Thank you for that Gordy.

Gordy:

Hopefully that answers your question.

Nigel:

Yeah, thank you. And so, since we are now looking at, we've taken a different approach here, we're looking at, if we go with a commercial option, we would have a competitive approach to do so. So I think the feedback that we get from you, our audience, in terms of what is appropriate, what you envision, what you like to see, what limitation, if there's limitation, on the number of rooms.

Nigel:

And I think what Gordy was also aiming to convey is that that will help drive what kind of mechanism we use too. There are some differences between a lease or a concession. So we're not being overly prescriptive there either. So depending on what types of uses and what type of overnight accommodations we move toward that may determine what mechanism we use, whether it be a lease or a concession.

Nigel:

So once again, your input, what you'd like to see, what you think is reasonable, what's going to be less burden on the land, but also provide a great visitor experience. That's the kind of feedback we'd love to hear from you.

Kelly Daigle:

Great, thanks. And I think this next question will probably call on Bill Stevens or Gordy again. So two questions in one. One, how will the resort be funded? And second can the community of St. John be

involved in the RFP process? So could folks be on the evaluation team or part of the selection team? So I'll maybe turn it over to Nigel, you first and then see if our subject matter experts want to jump in.

Nigel:

Yeah, no, thank you. I'll go ahead and pass this directly to Gordy and Bill.

Gordy:

Sure. This is Gordy. I'll take that. So the evaluation panel, I'm going to take the second part of this first, is actually prescribed in our regulations. And our regulations prescribed that it has to be a federal employee. It doesn't necessarily have to... And I'm a little bit vague, I'm a little bit fuzzy on the exact requirements under a concession contract.

Gordy:

I know that under a lease that they have to be federal employees. So that's really the evaluation process. And Kelly, can you please repeat the first part of that question?

Kelly Daigle:

Yeah, sure. The first part of the question is who would fund the redevelopment of the site should that be chosen?

Gordy:

So under a lease, it could be funded by the lessee. Under the concessions model, it could be funded by a concessioner. Or if the park service had the money, it could be funded by the park service. I think all of our anticipations is that it'll be funded by either whoever the developer is, whether it be a lessee or a concessioner or the proposer. So Nigel, do you have any thoughts on that?

Nigel:

No. Just to reemphasize what you've stated, in the event that we are moving toward a commercial option here, be it a lease or concessions, the process that we're looking at is having those facilities built by the awarded applicant. So those funds would then come from that developer or those developers that give the contract or the award.

Kelly Daigle:

Okay, great. I see a couple questions and comments here about cultural resources. So the first question is, will we be going through the Section 106 process since some of the buildings at the site are historic? And then likewise, could we please explain what happens in the event that human remains or archeological resources are discovered in the redevelopment of the property? So I'll begin with you Nigel, and then we do have Bill Hunter on the line as well to support us.

Nigel:

Yeah, thank you. And fortunately we've had some experience with these types of discoveries even recently here after the hurricanes with a lot of our redevelopment, and we work very closely with the

state historic preservation office here, the territorial state historic preservation office, on all of our projects.

Nigel:

And we've already engaged them even early on with our process here, so that they're aware of our redevelopment options, they see what we would do in event A, B, C or D. And so that engagement is really key. That's a part of that 106 process that was mentioned in the question. But Bill Hunter is one of our experts in this area.

Nigel:

So Bill, can you give a sense of what, very briefly what that consultation process is like? And also whenever we bump into really significant historical resources like burial sites, what are the actions that we take?

Bill Hunter:

Thank you, Nigel. Yes, the project's being developed through the national historic preservation Section 106 process which is sort of a company in the NEPA process, the Environmental Policy Act process. The Section 106 process is all about considering the effects of the different actions on historic properties.

Bill Hunter:

And as you all know, well Caneel Bay is a complex cultural environment. Historic properties there include archeological sites, colonial era ruins, post-colonial settlements, and of course, the mid-century architecture of the resort. So it's a complex and layered landscape. As Nigel mentioned, we are working in consultation with the state historic preservation office to kind of get our arms around the extent of the actions.

Bill Hunter:

We'll continue to consult with them, with local governments and individuals with a demonstrated interest in the history of the site to, one, identify historic properties, make sure we know what's there. And second, to be able to consider the effects of the alternatives on those actions. So as this federal land we are, and park land, is subject to a host of federal laws and regulations, including the Native American Graves Repatriation Act.

Bill Hunter:

And there's very specific protocols and procedures that we're required to follow in any event that we would encounter any type of human remain. So we're very lucky to have those policies and practices in place and with which the park is very familiar. Thank you Nigel.

Nigel:

Yeah, thank you. So we must follow the law when we find those and that's what we do in this case here.

Kelly Daigle:

Excellent, thank you. We have a couple questions about whether or not employee housing would be provided either through this process or on the site where the RUE currently is. So we'll start with you Nigel.

Nigel:

Yeah, we're early on. So we are not evaluating that at this moment. I think we need to see whether we're going to have the action no action. If we're going to have a commercial activity, we'll need to see what scale. Having a day use option or two at a couple of beaches is very different than having multiple concessions and a potential resort or various different day overnight experiences. So we are still early on.

Nigel:

We need to see what type of operation or operations we would have. So, that's sort of a next step. So thinking about the housing needs of any commercial activity, if we were to have it, would be something that we would move forward after we've determined if we're going to have a commercial activity. So it's a great question, and it's one that we will get to in the next subsequent step.

Kelly Daigle:

Okay, excellent. I do just want to do a time check. We've got about 10 minutes left. We still have so many excellent questions in here. I'm going to keep going, but a couple of minutes till the end of the hour. I do want to be mindful of everyone's evenings. I'll turn it back over to Superintendent Fields to give us a closing remark, but I'll keep going here with some of our questions.

Kelly Daigle:

Nigel, I think a good one, there's a lot here just about our type of outreach and why we are doing things virtually right now versus trying to host in-person meetings through this civic engagement comment period. Can you touch on that briefly?

Nigel:

Certainly I can. And this is something that in meeting with some of our local organizations here in St. John and in St. Thomas, we were all quite concerned about COVID safety and wanting to make sure that we had a way of getting material out to people and for people to be able to have conversations, but also do so in a way that is safe.

Nigel:

And when we were mapping all this out in December and January, you saw what was happening around the country. You saw the big impact to this Omicron variant tag. And so we weren't going to risk it. We weren't going to risk the safety of any of our folks coming in to meet with us. We weren't going to risk the safety of our staff, our employees coming in for those kinds of meetings.

Nigel:

So we want to make sure we can continue to have conversation and find ways to talk to one another and to hear from one another. This is one of the effective mechanisms. This is one way for us to do so.

With us extending the period now for public comment through March 5th, we'll continue to see if there's safe ways for us to congregate.

Nigel:

But our main priority was public safety and not wanting to put people in harm's way when we're in the right middle of the height of the Omicron variant.

Kelly Daigle:

Thank you, Nigel. I want to make note of a number of comments about access to the site. Quite a few of you have mentioned concerns about access to the site currently and previously. And Nigel, I wanted to see if you could talk about our intent for public access maybe under each of the different alternatives.

Kelly Daigle:

And some folks have also noted that Turtle Point is not in the RUE but has been difficult to access given the constraints of the resort over the last couple of years.

Nigel:

Yeah, thank you for the question. And I want to push our imagination beyond what has happened over the past 40 years, and certainly beyond what's happened over the past 18 to 15 years. We will be designing a very different type of opportunity, potentially, in terms of engagement and access.

Nigel:

Part of that is hearing from you in terms of what you expect so that we can envision what is going to be reasonable and where. So the input that you've provided thus far has been incredibly helpful for us to say, we will have improved access from what people have said they experience now. And through alternative A, we have designated areas that would be completely open to the public.

Nigel:

Whenever we're having something run by a park in sessions, they're operating on our behalf. So those areas that we outlined under alternative A do provide that additional public access. Does not mean though that we wouldn't have the opportunity to work with any potential resort operator to demonstrate where and how public access could be there. We're designing this for the future.

Nigel:

So your thoughts and your ideas about the type of access you would expect would be very helpful for us, especially if you can tie it to any particular reasons. Give us your justification for how access should be opened or access should be denied. We hear things from all corners in different people's perspectives and we welcome all of them. It's a great point about Turtle Point.

Nigel:

So I'm just going to go to the map here so people can all be on the same page with Turtle Point. Let's see, let's go to one that's in an alternative. I'll just say, let's go alternative B here. This area, Turtle Point, you're correct, this is not under the RUE as I understand it. And there is a trail that is here in this area.

Nigel:

And we would want to make sure regardless that in any scenario, that people have access to the trails. I'm a trail hiker. I enjoy the trails. People here on St. John's see me on them quite frequently. But I think we would make sure that no matter what, the park trails are accessible to the public.

Nigel:

So that's a part of our negotiation that we would have with any operator is to make sure that the areas that we're designating as public space areas, that those are maintained as being open to the public.

Kelly Daigle:

Okay, wonderful Nigel. So I still see a ton of questions and comments in here, and I do want to be mindful of the evenings that you all have. So rest assured, we will be entering all of these into PEPC. While we won't be responding individually to your questions at this time, what we will be doing is taking each of these questions and building clarity into this next round of public comment or public engagement when we come out with our environmental assessment.

Kelly Daigle:

So hoping to address a number of these as we build out that environmental assessment later this year. So with that Nigel, I'm going to turn it over to you. But thank you in advance everyone for allowing me to look at your questions and comments.

Nigel:

Yeah. Thank you, Kelly. First, let me thank you for the excellent moderating job that you've done tonight, being able to take all the various comments and find a way to interpret them for us so that people can hear their questions reflected back. Just to reiterate, all the things that we received will be a part of what we consider and look through.

Nigel:

It's all going to be recorded. I encourage you please to go to the PEPC site and turn some of your questions that you have, turn those into statements. Let those be the statements that you're providing us. That's going to help us the best, especially if you can give us some of the thoughts and the reasoning behind your comment.

Nigel:

I've been encouraged to hear people's interest in the historic structures, in the types of archeological resources that are here, the ecological resources and ways to make sure we're protecting them. Lots of interest in the commercial opportunities here. So I know that there are those that would like limited, some that would like quite a bit.

Nigel:

So we need to hear from you in terms of what is going to help us meet our mission best. So please, continue to share with us as you're having conversation, as you're looking over the material that's been

presented. Please take the time to make use of this extended period of time, now going to March 4th, to provide your comments.

Nigel:

We are going to see how we, here at the park service, could make ourselves also more available during this extended time period. Then encouraged to hear from some of our local organizations who want to also make use of this time to make sure we're reaching more people. So we encourage that. That's exactly what we're wanting from this time period as far as to make sure we're hearing from as many people as possible to help us shape the best decision possible.

Nigel:

So once again, this is going to be an impact on the landscape for many, many decades to come. And that's a benefit to us. We get a chance to participate with you in shaping what that future's going to be. So I thank you for your time this evening, and we look forward to hearing from you in the comments. And please everyone, please stay safe. Please stay safe with your families and within your larger community. Wishing everyone a pleasant evening. Goodbye.