



GOVERNMENT OF BERMUDA
Ministry of Home Affairs

Department of Environment and Natural Resources

MEMORANDUM

TO: Director of Planning
FROM: Terrestrial Conservation Section
DATE: 12th May 2023

REF: SDO-0001-23

SUBJECT: Proposed Fairmont Southampton Master Plan – Westend Properties Ltd.
Maximum 261 Unit Tourism/Residential Development
Comprising up to 114 Tourism and 147 Residential Units

1. Assessment

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources – Terrestrial Conservation Section has conducted a comprehensive physical site assessment and detailed desk based review of the “Environmental Impact Statement, Proposed Fairmont Southampton Master Plan” prepared by Bermuda Environmental Consultants and dated 4 April 2023”. These are the two primary, but not only, sources of information used to evaluate both conservation impacts and conservation gains so as to provide perspective and recommendations to the Planning Authority. Local knowledge and experience of the ‘total’ properties natural history also forms a cohesive foundation from which to assess the present proposal and future evolution of this extensive property.

2. Development areas and Protected Species

No permanent* protected species which are legislatively protected under either the Protected Species Act or Bird’s Act are found within any of the: phased development footprints; associated construction footprint; excavation or filling footprint; or, potential areas to be landscape that would be encompassed by development and modification works as represented, envisioned at final application stage or conceptualized for future inclusion or upgrade.

*However; please note that White Eyed Vireo’s (endemic – Level 1 Protected Species) and Blue Bird’s, Red Bird’s, Gray Cat Bird’s (native) as well as all song birds and migrants are protected under the Birds Act, especially during nesting periods.

3. Conservation Impact vs Gain

No specific identifiable 'Conservation Gains' are acknowledged by documents provided to the Planning Authority. DENR-TCS would note that 'all' (Special) Development Orders approved previously have had a relatively robust and clearly perceptible element of additional 'conservation (environmental) gains' than currently are perceived as associated with a properties existing or 'approved' environmental conditions.

The Environmental Impact Assessment / Statement (EIA/EIS) has identified impacts to existing conservation features from the proposed phased development which include the reduction of: currently wooded areas; landscaped managed formal garden locations and grassed lawn or golf related areas. The EIS has also identified that there will be an increase in total built structures and associated infrastructure, which will have a significant, and specific aesthetic impact over a large area; much of which is on ridgeline locations which are geological high-points of the Bermuda landscape. Structures to be developed will be particularly visible from the South Road, which is a "Tourist Sightseeing Route" that is heavily used by both visitors and local residence.

Our Sections view is that to quantify a development as 'sustainable' an element of the proposal should provide a benefiting and discernable conservation gain to offset actual, perceived or difficult to quantify 'total' impacts; of both short and long term.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources – Terrestrial Conservation Section (DENR-TCS) strongly recommends that specific conservation gains should be identified under the proposed development order (SDO) and proposes the following options; although not limited to these opportunities as represented:

- A) DENR-TCS recommends that in this regard the coastal hillside slope south of South Road, and peninsula south of Whaler Inn, be managed under a Conservation Management Plan (as identified in the below schematics as **Orange Areas**) that would remove all invasive plant species (identified as Level 1 and 2 in the Bermuda Plant Finder publication), implement a robust endemic and native replanting and augmentation plan and would designate the western portion as a nature reserve (as identified in the below schematics in **Purple Area**) with future associated management reflected in the Bermuda Plan zoning maps. (Please see representational schematic #1 below.)
 - This coastal area is the highest quality environment remaining on the Southampton Princess properties under current ownership. The area has nesting Longtails, complex geology and a significant quantity of quality vegetation. This area is the principle area where there would be a specific 'conservation gain' proposed under this project; it has high value biodiversity, aesthetics, and natural history value. Regrettably, if immediate action and

prolonged management is NOT undertaken in this area the relic endemic and native vegetation as well as the geology itself would be overwhelmed by invasive species. The existing quality environs would diminish and the potential opportunities for the reintroduction of endemic Rock Lizards (Skink), endemic snails, and land hermit crabs by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources in coordination with the recommended CMP; would be significantly diminished.

- The authors of the Environmental Impact Statement, page 279 state: *“Of more ecological interest and value is the Fairmont Southampton lot on the southern side of the South Road that leads down to the hotel beach area (Whaler Inn). Whilst also dominated in sections of invasive casuarinas, Mexican pepper and Beach naupaka, there are some large stands of bay grape as well as swathes of Bermuda snowberry. This area will not be impacted by the Master Plan development but it is noted as being the most interesting from a biodiversity perspective.”*

B) DENR-TCS recommends that the forested area north of Turtle Hill (as identified in the below schematic #2 as an **Orange Area**) be managed under a Conservation Management Plan that would remove all invasive plant species (identified as Level 1 and 2 in the Bermuda Plant Finder publication), implement a robust endemic and native replanting and augmentation plan and would designate the area as a ‘conservation protection area’ for use as a woodland park with future associated management reflected in the Bermuda Plan zoning maps. (Please see representational schematic #2 below.)

- This forested area utilized as an amenity woodland park for Turtle Hill residence and possibly hotel guests could be a valuable asset in respect of amenity space of different aesthetic value to that of coastal amenities and resort infrastructure. Additionally, this would form a quality buffer between neighboring high density residential areas to the east of the applicants property.

4. Endemic Bermuda Cedars

A few specimen older Bermuda Cedars exist as remaining feature trees around the golf course. Many are severely compromised by landscape management (strimming damage), hurricanes and/or invasive species impact. All existing mature specimen Cedars were considered as warranting their being replaced on a 12 to 1 ratio with at minimum a 3 gallon sizing as has been the standard request by this Department for over a decade.

5. Southampton Princess Blue Bird Trail

Biological surveys of the Fairmont property in the past continued to monitor the population of Eastern Bluebirds nesting on the property. Bluebirds are an uncommon native species of special importance and relevance to Bermuda, which is the only oceanic island in the world where it has a nesting population. The current population of Bluebirds on Bermuda is estimated to be 500-600 individuals (about 200-225 breeding pairs plus young or non-breeding birds), and it is now totally dependent on artificial nest boxes for breeding success. Its continued survival on Bermuda can only be guaranteed with human help.

The golf course on the Fairmont property is home to the second-largest managed Bluebird population in the Western Parishes of Bermuda, second only to the Port Royal Golf Course. It presently contains at least 13 artificial nest boxes, all of which are either already occupied by nesting Bluebirds which are incubating their first clutches of eggs for 2023, or are being prospected for nesting by new, young pairs of Bluebirds. Over the previous couple of years, the nests on this property have produced approximately 25-30 successfully fledging chicks per year, contributing significantly to the continued survival of the Bluebird on Bermuda. The fact that all present nest boxes are already being nested in or prospected indicates that the property and golf course could support a larger and more stable population.

- C) DENR-TCS recommends that the existing nest-box sites be formally maintained under a voluntary Conservation Management Plan and that this plan would include the instillation of an additional 8-10 nest boxes in appropriate locations. Although the additional development proposed for the property will have some impact on the potential population size (each nesting pair requires at least an acre of grassy lawns or fairways to survive), there is every reason to expect that a healthy robust population of Bluebirds will continue to survive on the golf course area with sympathetic management and purposeful human assistance (often done by sanctioned volunteers).

6. Additional Recommended Conservation Gains

- a) Robust Landscaping plans with the requirement of the majority of plants to be endemic or native (Tuckers Point SDO)
- b) The Bermuda Image as defined under the Bermuda Plan – Planning Statement to be a foundational and fundamental part of the built and landscape design process, so as to reduce the aesthetic/visual impact of the proposed development.
- c) All level 1 invasive plant species to be removed site wide with replanting as appropriate with endemic, native or quality ornamental species.
- d) Instillation of 22 alternative Longtail nesting boxes / igloos / bunkers along the entirety of the properties coastal area.

Sincerely;

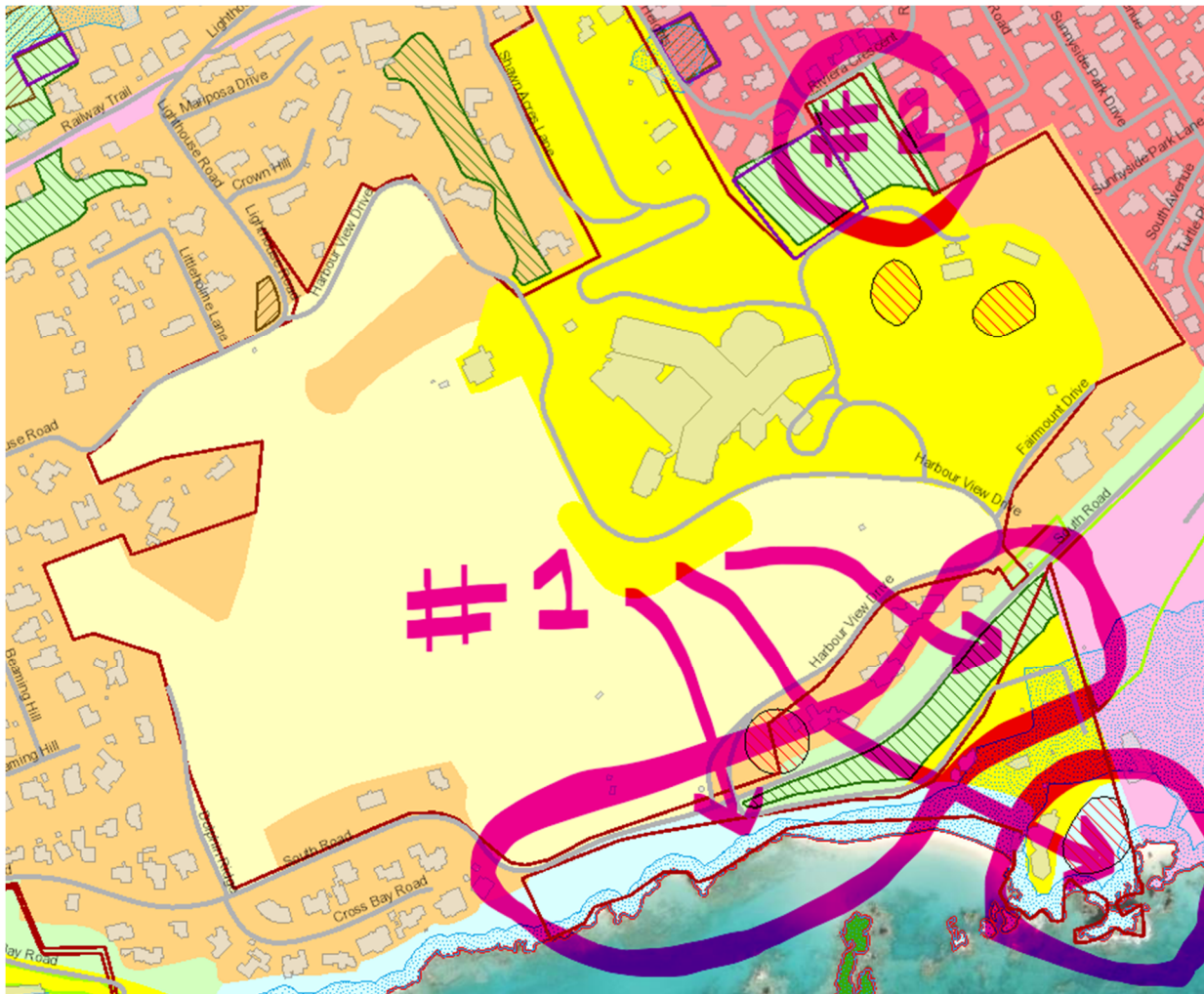
On behalf of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources - Terrestrial Conservation Section:



Peter Drew, BA, MA

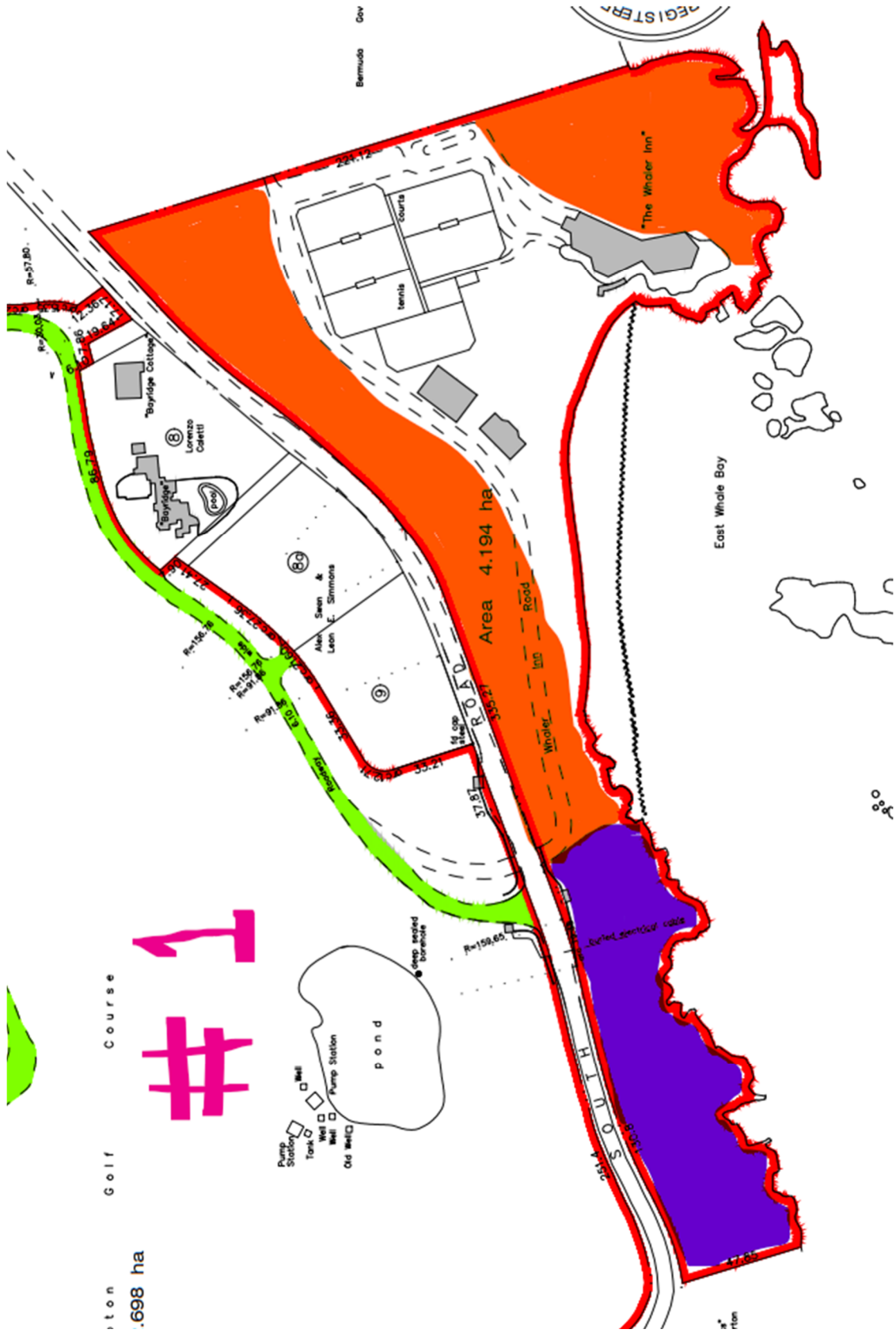
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On Behalf of The Government of Bermuda
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Location map of proposed areas in recommendation **A** and **B**; Schematic #1 and #2, respectively.

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