

PRESS RELEASE

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Port St. Maarten Not Building on the Beach. Parking part of Tourism Product Enhancement for the Economy

December 28, 2015 – Port St. Maarten Management would like to set the record straight where it concerns allegations made about building a parking lot on the public beach. The beaches are part and parcel of the stay-over/cruise tourism experience, and it wouldn't make any business sense to destroy or impede the visitor experience of the country's beaches.

The Walter Plantz Square (WPS) at Down Street has been constructed to enhance the Down Street area of Philipsburg. The promotion of the national heritage is part of Port St. Maarten's re-inventing cruise tourism and is essential to the new products and services that are being offered to cruise and stay-over visitors. This is very important in order for the country to maintain its position as a premiere matured cruise destination.

The WPS, an investment of approximately US\$2 million, comprises of seven small buildings constructed according to the traditional St. Maarten architectural ginger-bread design, to reflect the national heritage of the destination. The essence of the latest development in the Down Street area is to bring in the heritage value of the destination by showcasing the ginger bread homes of the past.

The square is strategically located next to the Walter Plantz Tender Jetty which connects to the boardwalk/beach promenade, Down Street and Front Street, and allows for a broader distribution flow of passengers, and is part and parcel of the total tourism product enhancement.

“With WPS now open and catering to residents and visitors, property values in the area have also increased and this is attracting business back to this particular area. Locals and visitors access the beach every day. There is nothing impeding them from using the public beach today or in the future.

“Port St. Maarten has reviewed other case studies in neighboring islands, and the development of the Down Street area is on the right track. Discussions are on-going with Ministry of Public Housing, Spatial Planning, Environment and Infrastructure (Ministry VROMI) with respect to the extension of the beach promenade which is part of Port St. Maarten's Great Bay Master Plan 2, and was already presented to Parliament.

“The extension of the beach promenade is also part of the development plan for Greater Philipsburg that reserves space for the extension of the beach promenade western side also referred to as the board walk. These discussions go back to 2013 and even before that. It also mentions the creation of an extra jetty west side, public parking, and the enhancement of the connection to historical Fort Amsterdam. The development plan is part of Governments zoning regulations to manage the spatial development of the country.

“We would like to thank Ministry VROMI for looking at the progress of the Down Street development, as it is not about individual enrichment or self-interest. It's about community interests and benefits for the total tourism product enhancement development of Down Street and creating opportunities for the Down Street people,” Port St. Maarten management pointed out on Monday.

The cruise passenger visitor experience is very important for a destination as this determines cruise ship itineraries. The Caribbean is the largest cruise destination in the world that attracts the largest number of cruise visitors annually – over 20 million cruise passengers visit the Caribbean. Cruise port destinations have to be cognizant all the time with respect to trends and developments in cruise passenger destination experiences.

As a mature cruise destination, all stakeholders have a responsibility to make sure that the visitor's destination experience is priority number one, as this assures long-term sustainability of the destination when it comes to stay-over and cruise tourism.

Port St. Maarten based on 50-years of cruise business experience is well aware of the requirements of the cruise sector and takes the necessary proactive approaches and measures where needed in order to maintain the country's position as a mature cruise destination in a sustainable manner.



PHOTO OUTLINE: Great Bay Master Plan 2 artist impression showing the public parking lot near the WPS and the extension of the famous beach promenade that covers the remaining section of Down Street towards the Sonesta Great Bay Beach Hotel.

For further questions, please contact: comments@portofstmaarten.com