

Marriott-linked Rocky Point project awaits approvals

SUPERIOR Hotels Group director John Aboud says the Marriott-branded hotel and property development at Rocky Point in Tobago, is still in the conceptual stage and may change significantly depending on regulatory approvals.

'There is no project to speak of at this stage,' Aboud told residents during a recent community meeting.

The proposal outlines a hotel, individual family homes, townhouses, villas, and weekend cabanas. Addressing concerns raised by a representative of IAMovement and resident about sedimentation and the need for specialised mitigation due to the project's location Aboud said, 'I can't comment about that now because I don't know if we have a project, but certainly the intention is to do everything that we have committed to do. And if that requires a specialised contractor to do certain things in the job, we will do that because it will be down to the long-term benefits of the project. So, we are not afraid of that.'

He added that qualified professionals will be engaged to ensure responsible implementation should the proposal receive official clearance.

'We don't have the answers now. We have shown you pictures of what we conceptually would like to do. After the EMA and Town and Country approvals, the project may be completely different. It may be half the size, I don't know. At the present time, the journey for approvals has just begun. This is the first level of approval before we even submit to Town and Country.'

Aboud also addressed questions about the land's valuation, which he said carries a net present value of approximately \$11 million, or \$5 to \$8 per square foot over a 99-year period.

'Every investor likes to maximise and makes no apologies about that. The question is whether or not – between the EMA, Town and Country, the Tobago House of Assembly (THA), and whoever else has to give approvals – what we will end up getting.'

On questions about financial transparency, he added, 'On the issue of the money, let's talk about that outside and let me tell you the facts of life.'

Environmental consultant Dr George Sammy, a specialist in Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs), responded to ecological concerns raised during the meeting. A representative of SOS Tobago highlighted potential risks to leatherback turtles and the removal of coastal vegetation, particularly near Little Back Bay.

Sammy stated that there were no plans to clear vegetation in that area and welcomed the suggestion

of a vegetation management plan. He noted that although it was not within the formal EIA scope, it would be strongly recommended to the client.

'The EIA is satisfying a specific scope of work. Between you and me, I have never seen so many management plans required in one EIA in all my years of preparing EIAs,' he said.

Despite his assurances, the resident who raised the concern said the response offered her no comfort.

The absence of EMA representatives at the meeting was also noted, with several attendees questioning the agency's commitment to public accountability. Sammy remarked that EMA's decision to not attend may have been strategic, as 'people could become aggressive' towards them.