



The Value and Necessity of The Pointe Sable Recreation Park (PSRP)

STDC Position Paper on the Enhancement, Expansion and Continuance of the PSRP

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It came as an alarming surprise to STDC (Southern Tourism Development Corporation) that a shopping mall was being considered for the Pointe Sable Recreation Park (PSRP) area. Since 2008 STDC has been proposing and advocating for a community recreation park in the Filao area where PSRP sits (Southern Tourism Development Corporation [STDC], 2008), and more recently Vyé-Fo Mouvman Ansanm has joined the advocacy for the official designation and establishment of PSRP in its current location. STDC has recently met with the Prime Minister and District Rep, Dr. Kenny Anthony, and with Invest St. Lucia's management team, during which STDC made the case for officially designating the Filao area a community recreation park, and transforming it into

a well-equipped and themed park. The prime minister was quite amenable to the concept and Invest St. Lucia indicated that in its land use plan the area was already so designated. At several different forums STDC has indicated its commitment to the establishment of social assets in Vieux Fort, including PSRP and this was included in its 2015 – 2016 work plan submitted to the Ministry of Tourism (provides broad oversight of STDC) of which the ministry approved. In recent years the Vieux Fort South Constituency Council (VFSCC) has done an excellent job of maintaining and enhancing the aesthetics of the Park, and partly as a result the Park is seeing increased usage. It is now home to Vyé-Fo Mouvman Ansanm's highly praised and successful annual Jazz Finale.

Vieux Fort Lands, a Disappearing Act

STDC would like to reiterate that PSRP in the Filao area is of great priority and importance to Vieux Fort and the south of the island. Recently, thanks to the prime minister, Independence Square, sitting in the center of Vieux Fort town, was renovated and modernized. But the square caters for quiet relaxation, serves as a venue for low impact and infrequent events, and for activities of a ceremonial nature. In 2001 Vieux Fort's Atlantic coastal strip, stretching from Moule-a-Chique to Bwa Shadon, and inclusive of Moule-a-Chique, Pointe Sable Beach and the Maria Islets, four square miles or 2565 acres in total, was declared a protected area and renamed the Pointe Sable Environmental Protection Area (PSEPA), and its management ceded to the St. Lucia Natural Trust, the official protector and conservator of the nation's natural and cultural heritage. PSEPA is a great initiative but for obvious reasons cannot serve as a community recreation park. With a public square and a Nature Reserve (PSEPA) in place, what remained to complete Vieux Fort's recreational mix was a low maintenance community recreation park that could accommodate events of any size and could serve as a place of general relaxation, physical exercise, and a children play ground, hence the PSRP.



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The fact that Vieux Fort may have the largest expanse of flat land of any of St. Lucia's 17 constituency districts, has apparently contributed to the misconception that the supply of accessible land in the district is limitless. But as Dr. Kenny Anthony who is no doubt a big proponent of green space has acknowledged, nothing can be further from the truth. As mentioned above, Vieux Fort's Atlantic coast is already designated a protected nature reserve and therefore is out of reach for any other purpose. Hewanorra International Airport occupies a significant portion of

the Vieux Fort Plains adjacent to the town; the strip of coastal land, some of which represents reclaimed land, along the Vieux Fort/Laborie Highway, between the American World War II Bridge and the Seroc (Canadian built) bridge, is already set aside for commercial and touristic development. The lands bounded by New Dock Road, the Bruceville Road, the Vieux Fort Castries Highway, and the American built road joining the highway with Bruceville is occupied by residences, schools, sporting facilities and a swampy area unsuited in its current state for a recreation park but which recently was selected as the site for a government administrative complex. This leaves the Filao area as one of the few, if not only area suited for a community recreation park in the vicinity of Vieux Fort town.

The Economic, Health, Environmental and Social Value of the PSRP

The value of green spaces and community recreation parks cannot be overstated. The American National Recreation and



Park Association (2010) explains that “Just as water, sewer, and public safety are considered essential public services, parks are vitally important to establishing and maintaining the quality of life in a community, ensuring the health of families and youth, and contributing to the economic and environmental well-being of a community and a region. There are no communities that pride themselves on their quality of life, promote themselves as a desirable location for businesses to relocate, or maintain that they are environmental stewards of their natural resources, without such communities having a robust, active system of parks and recreation programs for public use and enjoyment.”

As such PSRP, which some maybe taking for granted, is of significant economic, health, environmental and

social value. In terms of economic benefits, PSRP will generate indirect revenues for local residents from social, cultural and entertainment events. It is likely to cause private property values to increase, for it has been proven that people are willing to pay higher prices for properties in close proximity to parks. PSRP along with Pointe Sable Beach, Moule-a-Chique, Maria Islets, and Vieux Fort playgrounds and sporting facilities can help attract and keep businesses in Vieux Fort. For example, a US study indicated that quality parks and recreation was one of the top three reasons that businesses cited for relocating to a city. A Vieux Fort executive recently informed STDC that because of limited recreation and entertainment activities some executives of Vieux Fort-based firms were opting to live in the North and commuting daily, suggesting that still more (and not less) needs to be put in place to increase the attractiveness of Vieux Fort to businesses and homemakers.

PSRP can promote the health of residents. It provides a place for children and families to connect with nature and to interact and relax outdoors together, and it may encourage residents to exercise more regularly. A Penn State University study showed that reductions in stress, lowered blood pressure, and perceived physical health are positively related to the amount of time people spend in parks. Other studies have found that parks have a positive impact on childhood development.

PSRP is a source of identity for Vieux Fortians, and a link or reminder of Vieux Fort in the time of their growing up, when, save for the airport, Vieux Fort was an open plain interrupted by a few hills, by the American built Kai Planes and the vegetation that clothed Pointe Sable Beach. As such, PSRP is a source of pride to Vieux Fortians and it helps foster community togetherness and friendliness—a point of particular relevance since Vieux Fort residents have been described as unsus-



portive of each other and lacking a sense of community.

PSRP will encourage and facilitate the development of art and culture in the South, and with proper amenities and facilities, it can serve as a place of health and well-being accessible by persons of all ages and abilities. It provides a place for families and social groups to congregate, as well as for individuals of all ages and economic status, regardless of their ability to pay for access. It can reduce crime and juvenile delinquency and also promote the safety of the community, a problem plaguing most St. Lucian communities; urban centers in particular. Research by the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods showed that community involvement in neighborhood parks was associated with lower levels of crime and vandalism.

Jazz Finale has demonstrated how family and community oriented PSRP can be. Jazz Finale at PSRP is a pastoral, liberating scene: the open, grassy, tree-lined, gently rolling open space; the sound and salt laden breeze of the Atlantic in the background; children running about frolicking, horse rides on offer; the crowd milling about, mingling; the music sailing on the wings of the Atlantic breeze, suffusing the Park and beyond with warmth and excitement. It's a beautiful sight that cannot be replicated in any closed space, or for that matter in any other space or location. If this doesn't bring pride and a sense of community togetherness to Vieux Fortians, then what will?

The Role of the PSRP in STDC's Social, Economic and Touristic Vision for Vieux Fort

Recreation Park and other green and recreation spaces in Vieux Fort speak of part of what gives Vieux Fort a competitive advantage and hence are an essential cog in STDC's vision for the social, economic and touristic development of Vieux Fort.



Moule à Chique Lighthouse, Vieux Fort, St. Lucia.

STDC sees the district's mixture of natural, historical, and cultural attractions (NHCA), extended coastline, road infrastructure, airport and seaport facilities, accessible lands, as what will drive its development, with the NHCA playing just as big a role as the other factors. Pointe Sable Beach along with the Maria Islets and Moule-a-Chique with its famous lighthouse (said to be the second highest in the world) is arguably Vieux Fort's greatest visitor attraction, the main magnet that endears it to visitors. Probably because of population growth, an increased appetite for recreation, and the crowdedness of the northern corridor, Pointe Sable Beach is becoming increasingly crowded with recreationers from all over the island. So much so, that to avoid the crowd beach-goers are now starting to picnic at the adjacent PSRP, and recreationers are spilling over southwestward to the Il Pirata beach on Vieux Fort's Caribbean waterfront, with the parties and picnics sometimes continuing into the night.

A picture has emerged. Pointe Sable Beach, Bwa Chadon Beach, the Makote Mangrove, Maria Islets, and Moule-a-Chique combine to make Vieux Fort a compelling place to visit. Naturally, PSRP, which is immediately adjacent to Pointe Sable Beach, forms part of that picture. Any other social, cultural, or economic project/activity/initiative invariably needs to and will feed off this NHCA. Hence STDC is advocating for a calendar of cultural, sporting and entertainment events to complement the NHCA as visitor pull factors to Vieux Fort. Likewise, STDC is advocating for the establishment and development of such social and economic assets as a themed and well-equipped recreation park, modern and dedicated horse race and drag car race tracks, a marina



at Vieux Fort's Caribbean waterfront, and the establishment of museums, interpretation centers, concert halls, and convention centers, all of which interplay, go hand in hand with the NHCA, each drawing from and complementing the NHCA. This approach to tourism and economic development in the South is well in keeping with the recommendations of heritage tourism and sustainable development consultant, Sylvester Clauzel (2010). To ensure that Vieux Fort's NHCA reaches St. Lucia and the world, STDC is in the process of packaging and promoting it in the form of heritage tourism tours (Reynolds, 2015a). In his great wisdom the prime minister has been pushing Vieux Fort as a university center. Well, interestingly, part of Vieux Fort's selling point to these universities is its NHCA. Off course, the students complain that there is not enough to do in Vieux Fort in terms of entertainment,

nightlife and dining. But when, partly as a result of the magnate of the NHCA, a critical mass of activities becomes resident in Vieux Fort, the now missing entertainment milieu will come. In their Vieux Fort tourism concept paper, Cecile Wiltshire and Dr. Jolien Harmsen (2014), both members of STDC, argue that not only is the net economic impact of residential tourism (as represented by the medical schools) conceivably greater than that of short-term tourism (as represented by the hotels), but they cause fewer environmental, social, and cultural problems. For further elaboration on STDC's touristic and economic vision for Vieux Fort, please visit paper by Reynolds and James (2014).



The Restoration and Preservation of Vieux Fort's Natural Assets

Recognizing the central role that Vieux Fort's NHCA can play in its development, STDC isn't only advocating for PSRP and other green space, but it is actively involved in the preservation and conservation of this heritage. Pointe Sable Beach is a case in point. Under threat by both man and nature, the beach is rapidly deteriorating, so much so that STDC fears that in a decade or so the beach may become unrecognizable as what used to serve as the main allure of Vieux Fort. In its aftermath the 2014 Christmas Trough left unsightly, crater size holes in the sand; ill-conceived breakwaters intended to protect the shoreline and the highway from the bashing of waves are accelerating the very beach erosion they were meant to arrest; vehicular traffic on the beach is dam-

aging vegetation and sand dunes, making the beach more susceptible to erosion and adverse weather patterns; and the sand mining activities of poachers and motorized methods of clearing the beach of seaweed are denuding the beach of sand and damaging turtle nests. So in much the same way that STDC is advocating for the permanent establishment of PSRP and other green spaces, it is now seeking funding to conduct a Pointe Sable Beach assessment study and to take steps towards the restoration and preservation of the Beach (Reynolds, 2014b).

Therefore, based on the above discussion, STDC believes that it is imperative that the PRSP not only remains a community recreation park, but that it be enhanced and developed to increase its appeal and usefulness. Some of the improve-



ments may include toilet facilities, benches, a properly marked jogging trail, a permanent, covered stage capable of hosting entertainment of international standards, tree planting, controlled vehicular access and parking, children amusement and playground equipment and facilities. In fact, rather than entertaining an alternative use for the park, we would recommend expanding the space to include part of the area towards the Builder's Choice Complex, and across the Vieux Fort Highway on the lands fronting the highway, which will require that the planned government administrative complex be located further south, behind the extended Park. In addition to PSRP, STDC further recommends a search for other Vieux Fort lands that can be turned into green



spaces. In fact, STDC would like to recommend extending this green space and community recreation park concept throughout the island, and to redouble efforts to keep the island clean and environmentally pleasing. In the next few months STDC along with other stakeholders will prepare and present a PSRP enhancement and development proposal or concept paper.

And to ensure that PSRP and other designated green spaces in the Vieux Fort area remains so into perpetuity, STDC proposes the following course of action: (1) The demarcation of all the lands in the Vieux-Fort Area, including PSRP and other sections within the Pointe Sable /"Filao" area, that Invest St. Lucia has earmarked as green space/park in its Master Plan for Vieux-Fort Lands; (2) The transference of these lands, with the appropriate survey and other legal documents,

to the Vieux-Fort South Constituency Council which would hold such lands in trust on behalf of the residents of the District of Vieux-Fort and use such lands as a community park in perpetuity for the benefit of all residents of and visitors to the district; and (3) The creation of a Park Management Committee chaired/co-chaired by STDC/VFSCC and made up of a coalition of community leaders, to develop and implement a Parks Master Plan for Vieux-Fort that is compatible with the concept of green space/community park.

An Expanded Role for STDC

Much of Vieux Fort's prime real estate is under the custody of Invest St. Lucia, who is charged with the task of attracting domestic and foreign investment. This is an important and weighty responsibility, for economic data has revealed that

Foreign Direct Investment is a key source of St. Lucia's economic growth. However, attracting foreign capital is a daunting task because St. Lucia is in competition with not only the rest of the Caribbean but with the rest of the world. Recognizing and appreciating the important but challenging role of Invest St. Lucia, and to help spearhead the social and economic development of the South, STDC is happy to work closely with Invest St. Lucia and other government agencies to help attract businesses and investments to the South. The proposed marina is a case in point. STDC along with Invest St. Lucia and others have been advancing the concept of a marina in Vieux Fort, and so far considerable progress has been made in terms of generating investor interest (Reynolds, 2014a). In similar fashion STDC would be happy to work with the shopping mall developer and Invest



St. Lucia to identify other suitable lands for this and other such developments. For example, two locations that come to mind is (1) the area along the St. Jude's Highway between Windward and Leeward Brewery and the Contonement playing field going west to LUCELEC's power plant; and (2) the Beanfield area along the Vieux Fort-Castries Highway, between Coconut Bay and Skyway Inn, part of which maybe privately owned but for the right fee the owners may well entertain parting with their land.

It has been pointed out that there is a leadership vacuum in Vieux Fort and the South in terms of the oversight of the region's social and economic development (Reynolds, 2015b). It is to fill this void and to assist such national organizations as Invest St. Lucia and SLASPA in fulfilling their mandate, that besides encouraging and helping to spearhead touristic development in the South, STDC has expanded its mission to include helping to attract and keep businesses in the South; championing the establishment of such economic harbingers as a marina, informatics or hi-tech park, convention centers and related activities, home porting and cruise ship porting; helping to prepare a development plan for Vieux Fort and be actively involved in its layout and physical development, and serving as a clearing house for all development projects (private or public) in Vieux Fort (Southern Tourism Development Corporation [STDC], 2015).

With this expanded mandate, STDC would like to urge Invest St. Lucia, the Vieux Fort South Constituency Council, the District Rep, SLASPA, other government agencies, and other southern district constituency councils to keep it abreast of developments and business initiatives/investment targeted for the South and to include STDC right from the initial discussions so that STDC can provide guidance, and ensure that the interest of the community is adequately taken into consideration, and proper attention is paid to the environmental and social consequences of these initiatives.

STDC would also like to propose the establishment of a Vieux Fort Development Fund (VFDF), to which Invest St. Lucia,

SLASPA and large companies like LUCELEC, Coconut Bay Resort and Wilrock (that are beneficiaries of Vieux Fort's leased lands) would be required to contribute a certain percentage of their gross revenues. The fund can be managed by a committee that includes representatives of STDC, the Vieux Fort South Constituency Council, and the contributing companies and agencies.

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Authorship

An economist by profession, Dr. Anderson Reynolds is the president of STDC Board of Directors, managing director of Jako Productions and principal consultant at EconoTech Consulting Services. He is the author of two award winning books, the novel *Death by Fire*, and *The Struggle for Survival: an historical, political and socioeconomic perspective of St. Lucia*. Besides for his books, Dr. Reynolds has won awards for creative journalism. His third book, *The Stallkeeper*, a novel set in Vieux Fort, is forthcoming.

Established in 1998 under the St. Lucia Company's Act, STDC is a non-profit, membership based, private organization with the mission to stimulate and coordinate the development of tourism in the south of St. Lucia, stretching from Praslin to Choiseul.

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