



## ***Sustainable Cayman***

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **PRESS RELEASE**

#### **Housing Minister gives back mangroves for green open space**

According to data shared by the Department of Environment, between 1976 and 2018, 72% of the mangrove habitat in western Grand Cayman, spanning from Savannah to West Bay, have already been lost and the central mangrove wetlands of South Sound are at increasing threat of being added to this loss.

Earlier this year Sustainable Cayman presented their South Sound Mangrove Park & Tarpon Alley nature trail proposal<sup>1</sup> to the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure Minister Johany Ebanks to highlight development concerns and to discuss how these might possibly be mitigated. Part of this proposal included 24 acres of housing trust lands (20E213REM3) acquired by the government for development in 2019.

At a meet and greet of various environmental grassroots organisations<sup>2</sup> held on Friday, October 15th it was very encouraging to sit down and discuss the views and aims of the Minister and receive his feedback<sup>3</sup>. He was cognisant of the environmental concerns and the importance of climate change and the need to hear from both sides of the table so as to be inclusive to achieve compromise where needed.

The Minister had taken the time to consider the proposed project for the National Housing Development Trust ("NHDT") below Linford Pierson Highway and outlined his reasons for being hesitant to do anything with the property. He needed to consider the safety of the adjacent Randyke Gardens community, the cost perspective of building the project, the need for a natural stormwater basin and the environmental perspective given the lack of protection of wetlands in the South Sound basin.

He was optimistic, pending further consultation with the Chairman and the Board, that plans to proceed with the housing project could be shelved with a view to acquiring more suitable land in the Newlands area for the NHDT. The expectation is that the mangrove forest will therefore not be developed and could be returned to the Crown with the intention to leave it as green open space. Although this proposal is still to be regularized, the news was clearly well received by representatives from the community as well as the grassroots organisations.

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“It is very refreshing to be able to have open dialogue with the persons making decisions so as to allow for a greater understanding of what the people of the Cayman Islands feel needs to be done to protect and improve public spaces, preserve culture and heritage and ensure sustainable use of Cayman’s natural environment for future generations to address climate change” reported Melanie Carmichael.

Wetlands serve important water quality improvement functions within the landscape which is why these functions should be factored into stormwater management strategies. Mangrove forests also help to mitigate climate change, pulling massive amounts of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere and storing them in their soils — up to four times as much carbon as other tropical forests. Nature-based solutions for climate, biodiversity and people, especially mangrove wetlands, will be featured at COP26 UK which will be taking place next month in Glasgow.

### Notes for editors

1. South Sound Mangrove Park and Tarpon Alley Trail Proposal: <https://bit.ly/3DVWga4>
2. Other attendees were Shirley Roulstone of CPR Cayman, Martin Keeley and Haileigh Farrington of The Cayman Islands Mangrove Rangers, Chris Luijten of Mangrove Education Project, Kayla Young of Cayman Current, Emily DeCou of Amplify Cayman, Alric Lindsay NRA Chairman and Melanie Carmichael of Sustainable Cayman, apologies Heidi Webster of Save Barkers.
3. Other topics discussed were around reclaiming national park areas, updating of the National Development Plan and Coastal Setbacks, design of the East-West Arterial, Bike Lanes, Transport and Renewable Energy, Education and presentation of the Sustainability Charter.

### **About Sustainable Cayman**

Our vision for the Cayman Islands is a flourishing society blending modern environmental practices with a respectful and commonsense approach to its unique heritage to ensure a sustainable and prosperous future for all.

**Ends**

