



May 15, 2026

CLIMATE RESILIENCE & PLANNING COMMENTARY

Reference:

Planning Application P26-0158
LEGOLAND DEVELOPMENT

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Sustainable Cayman

preparing today for a better tomorrow

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Affordable Housing, Flood Resilience and Sustainable Development in Cayman

Executive Summary

The Cayman Islands is entering a period where decisions about housing, infrastructure, flooding, and environmental resilience are becoming increasingly interconnected.

As population growth, housing demand, and development pressure continue to increase, so too do concerns regarding infrastructure capacity, flooding vulnerability, and long-term environmental resilience.

Recent public discussion surrounding Cayman's housing shortage, rising property prices, and growing affordable housing waiting lists has further intensified pressure for rapid housing delivery across the islands. The increasing demand for smaller and more affordable rental accommodation forms part of this wider national context.

Planning Application P26-0158 has emerged within this broader national context.

The proposal involves a large-scale residential development within a low-lying coastal wetland system containing mangrove habitat and natural drainage functions adjacent to the East-West Arterial corridor and Prospect Point area.

Sustainable Cayman recognises that Cayman requires additional housing, including accommodation for workers and families contributing to the local economy. The purpose of this statement is not to oppose housing development, nor to argue who should or should not live within the community. The central question is whether developments of this scale are being designed in a manner that properly reflects Cayman's environmental conditions, infrastructure realities, and long-term climate resilience needs.

The application raises broader questions regarding how future housing development in the Cayman Islands can better integrate environmental resilience, infrastructure sustainability, and long-term climate adaptation.

The newly released Cayman Islands Public and Affordable Housing Policy and 10-Year Strategic Plan further reinforces the growing national importance of climate-resilient planning, environmental review, and climate-risk assessments for major housing developments.

This statement examines the application within the context of:

- the Cayman Islands Constitution
- the National Conservation Act
- long-term flood resilience

- sustainable development principles
- infrastructure sustainability
- evolving climate adaptation policy

The document also explores whether alternative planning approaches may better balance housing needs with environmental protection and future infrastructure sustainability.

The illustrations and conceptual overlays included within this document are intended solely to support discussion around sustainable development principles relevant to Cayman's future.

01 Why the Site Matters

Planning Application P26-0158 brings into focus two of the most significant challenges currently facing the Cayman Islands: the urgent demand for housing and the growing environmental and infrastructure pressures associated with development in vulnerable coastal areas.

This commentary does not question the need for housing. It examines whether developments within vulnerable coastal systems are being designed for Cayman's long-term environmental and infrastructure realities.

Across the Cayman Islands there is increasing concern that developments approved without sufficient resilience planning may create long-term public liabilities through flooding, drainage failures, infrastructure retrofits, environmental degradation, and rising maintenance burdens. There is increasing public concern regarding whether sufficient weight is being given to long-term environmental and infrastructure sustainability within vulnerable coastal areas.

Developments proposed within environmentally sensitive areas often argue that resilience measures and environmental retention significantly increase development cost. The broader planning question is whether Cayman can afford developments that do not adequately account for long-term environmental and infrastructure realities.

Mangroves, wetlands, drainage corridors, shade systems, and natural water retention areas are not simply landscape features. In small island environments they function as infrastructure. Once removed, the costs of replacing those systems are often transferred elsewhere through pumping systems, flooding mitigation, road upgrades, marine impacts, and public drainage burdens.

This application highlights the increasing importance of integrating climate resilience, natural infrastructure, renewable energy readiness, public transport access, and Caymanian climate-responsive design principles into future planning approaches.

The illustrations and concepts included within this document are conceptual only. They are intended to support discussion around sustainable development principles and alternative resilience-based planning approaches relevant to Cayman's future.

02 Legal and Planning Framework

Planning Application P26-0158 must also be considered within the broader constitutional and legal framework governing environmental protection and sustainable development in the Cayman Islands.

Section 18 of the Cayman Islands Constitution Order requires Government, in all of its decisions, to have due regard to environmental protection while promoting sustainable economic and social development.

The Constitution states:

“Government shall, in all its decisions, have due regard to the need to foster and protect an environment that is not harmful to present and future generations while promoting justifiable economic and social development.”

This principle is particularly relevant in the context of development proposed within low-lying coastal wetland systems that perform important environmental and drainage functions.

Affordable housing and environmental protection are not mutually exclusive objectives. Sustainable development requires balancing both interests in a manner that protects long-term public wellbeing and recognises that future generations inherit the consequences of present-day land use decisions.

The application must also be viewed within the framework of the National Conservation Act, which was enacted specifically to:

- protect biodiversity
- conserve endangered species
- protect wetlands and habitat systems
- promote the sustainable use of natural resources

Section 41 of the National Conservation Act requires consultation where development proposals may adversely affect the environment.

Mangroves are already subject to a Species Conservation Plan adopted under the Act due to their ecological importance and role within Cayman’s environmental systems.

The courts have also confirmed that environmental protections established under the National Conservation Act are legally binding upon Government decision-making bodies and must form part of the planning consideration process.

The legal framework therefore recognises that environmental systems such as mangroves, wetlands, and coastal habitat are not simply aesthetic features. They are part of the broader public interest and form part of Cayman’s natural infrastructure and environmental resilience obligations.

The application therefore engages constitutional, environmental, and land-use considerations regarding how sustainable development is interpreted within environmentally sensitive coastal areas.

03 The Site and Surrounding Area

The application site appears to include low-lying coastal wetland habitat containing existing mangrove systems and natural drainage functions. The surrounding area includes some of the most valuable coastal residential property in the Cayman Islands and forms part of a broader environmentally sensitive coastal corridor.

The site currently appears to function as part of a natural stormwater retention and water movement system connected to adjacent marine environments. Removal of these systems through extensive paving, building coverage, and land alteration has the potential to permanently change drainage patterns and increase dependence on engineered stormwater infrastructure.



The application therefore raises broader questions regarding how Cayman intends to approach development within environmentally sensitive coastal areas as flooding vulnerability, sea level rise, and infrastructure pressure continue to increase.

Connection to the Wider Prospect Coastal Basin

The application site should also be considered within the wider environmental context of the Prospect coastal basin system.

The remaining mangrove corridor associated with the site appears connected to a broader network of coastal wetland and marine edge environments that contribute to

stormwater buffering, groundwater interaction, coastal cooling, sediment retention, and ecological connectivity along the Prospect marine edge system.

While individual developments are often assessed on a site-by-site basis, cumulative fragmentation of coastal mangrove systems may progressively weaken the resilience and environmental health of the wider basin over time.

This is particularly relevant within low-lying coastal environments where mangroves and wetland systems function as part of interconnected hydrological and marine support systems rather than isolated landscape features.

As remaining coastal corridors become increasingly fragmented, concerns may also increase regarding:

- runoff pressure into marine environments
- declining natural water retention
- sediment and nutrient movement
- habitat connectivity
- long-term coastal resilience

The long-term health of the Prospect Coastal Basin is therefore relevant to broader planning discussions surrounding coastal development, infrastructure resilience, and environmental sustainability within the Cayman Islands.

04 Stormwater and Flood Risk

One of the central concerns arising from the application relates to stormwater management and long-term drainage resilience.

Developments constructed within low-lying coastal systems frequently require increasingly engineered drainage solutions over time. Once natural retention areas are removed, rainfall runoff accelerates, water storage capacity declines, and neighbouring areas can become increasingly vulnerable to flooding pressure.

In Cayman, there are already examples where developments later required pumping systems and ongoing mechanical drainage intervention to manage persistent water accumulation.

Recent flooding concerns raised by residents in areas such as Randyke Gardens in George Town and Mars Close in West Bay demonstrate growing public concern regarding cumulative drainage pressures and long-term stormwater management within low-lying developed areas. Those systems create continuing operational and maintenance costs while also introducing additional vulnerability during storms and power outages.

The wider concern is that developments approved without adequate natural drainage retention may eventually transfer future infrastructure burdens onto residents, neighbouring communities, strata corporations, or the public.

The application would benefit from comprehensive independent hydrological review addressing groundwater interaction, tidal influence, cumulative basin impacts, sea level rise projections, rainfall retention capacity, and long-term stormwater management obligations.

TWO MODELS. TWO OUTCOMES.

NATURAL SYSTEM

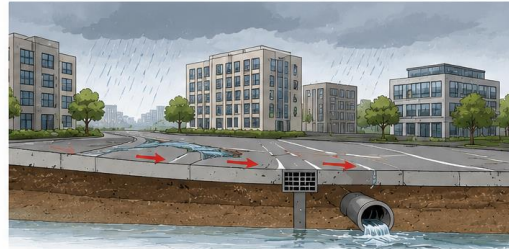
Mangroves + Wetlands = Natural Water Storage



- RAINFALL ABSORBED AND STORED
- SLOW RELEASE TO DOWNSTREAM
- REDUCED FLOODING PRESSURE
- SUPPORTS BIODIVERSITY AND ECOSYSTEMS
- HEALTHIER, MORE RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

CONVENTIONAL CLEARANCE MODEL

Concrete + Asphalt + Buildings = Rapid Runoff + Flooding Pressure



- RAINWATER CANNOT INFILTRATE
- RAPID RUNOFF TO DRAINS AND PIPES
- INCREASED FLOODING PRESSURE
- LOSS OF BIODIVERSITY AND ECOSYSTEM SERVICES
- HIGHER PUBLIC COSTS AND INFRASTRUCTURE BURDEN



POLICY CHOICE: Protect natural systems. Build resilient communities.

05 Long-Term Community Benefit

Affordable housing policy is often associated with creating stable long-term communities, supporting pathways toward ownership, and strengthening intergenerational security for Caymanian families. The current proposal is more characteristic of a high-density workforce accommodation model than a traditional family-oriented affordable housing community designed around long-term ownership and neighbourhood stability.

This distinction is important within the wider planning context.

The inclusion of shared operational facilities such as centralized laundromat infrastructure further suggests a development model designed primarily around rental efficiency rather than long-term residential ownership.

While workforce accommodation addresses a genuine housing demand, it creates different planning considerations regarding transportation, occupancy turnover, infrastructure pressure, parking demand, and long-term community integration.

The proposal therefore raises legitimate planning questions regarding the distinction between workforce accommodation and family-oriented affordable housing, particularly where environmentally sensitive land is being permanently altered.

The development may satisfy an accommodation need while providing comparatively limited opportunities for:

- long-term ownership
- resident equity creation

- stable neighbourhood formation
- broader stamp duty and ownership transfer benefits typically associated with traditional residential housing communities

These are planning considerations directly relevant to the long-term public benefit analysis associated with major development approvals.

06 Density and Infrastructure Pressure

The surrounding area is characterised primarily by lower-density coastal residential development, environmentally sensitive land, and limited transportation infrastructure

The proposed scale and density may introduce infrastructure and transportation pressures substantially different from the surrounding coastal residential pattern.

The site's location adjacent to one of Cayman's busiest road corridors further raises questions regarding long-term transportation integration and pedestrian safety. At present, the proposal appears heavily car-dependent despite the density being proposed.

Future planning approval should consider whether developments of this scale along major transportation corridors should incorporate:

- formal public transit integration
- dedicated bus stop infrastructure
- shaded pedestrian access
- future bicycle connectivity
- reduced interior heat exposure through parking design

Affordable housing planning and transportation planning should not occur independently of one another.

07 Building for Cayman's Climate

One of the recurring challenges in Cayman development approvals is the argument that climate resilience measures and sustainable infrastructure are financially prohibitive.

However, reducing resilience measures during construction does not eliminate long-term costs. It often transfers them elsewhere.

Those costs may later appear through flooding impacts, drainage retrofits, heat mitigation, marine degradation, infrastructure upgrades, or rising public maintenance obligations.

This application also highlights the growing importance of clearer climate-resilient planning guidance for development within coastal wetland systems. Available flood and

08 Caymanian Design & Identity

Traditional Caymanian architecture evolved in response to the island's environmental realities, including hurricanes, heat, flooding, and ventilation requirements.

Features such as elevated structures, metal roofing, shaded verandas, natural airflow, and raised building forms were developed because they functioned effectively within Cayman's climate.

As Cayman continues to urbanise, there is increasing concern that development patterns are becoming disconnected from the environmental conditions they must ultimately withstand.

Modern affordable housing does not need to abandon those resilience principles. Incorporating climate-responsive Caymanian design elements may improve:

- long-term durability
- heat resilience
- energy efficiency
- community identity
- storm resilience

while reducing future operational costs for residents.

09 Looking Ahead

Planning Application P26-0158 raises issues extending well beyond a single development site.

The application highlights broader national questions regarding:

- sustainable coastal development
- climate resilience
- long-term infrastructure burden
- workforce accommodation policy
- environmental valuation
- transportation integration
- affordable housing standards within vulnerable environments

As Cayman continues to address housing demand, developments within environmentally sensitive coastal systems may require increasingly careful consideration of flooding risk, infrastructure sustainability, transportation integration, and long-term environmental resilience.

This application also highlights the increasing importance of balancing housing delivery with environmental resilience and infrastructure sustainability within vulnerable coastal systems.

Considerations for Long-term Resilience

Sustainable Cayman recognises that many aspects of the current proposal may already comply with existing planning regulations and development standards.

However, Planning Application P26-0158 also highlights broader questions regarding how future housing developments within environmentally sensitive and climate-vulnerable areas may evolve as Cayman continues adapting to increasing flood risk, heat, infrastructure pressure, and environmental loss.

The application therefore presents an opportunity for the applicant and future developments of this nature to consider more integrated and climate-responsive approaches to site planning and community design.

Examples of resilience-based planning measures may include:

- drainage retention
- permeable and shaded parking
- elevated structures
- renewable energy readiness
- public transport integration
- shaded pedestrian access
- native landscaping
- climate-responsive design

The conceptual overlays included within this document are intended solely to demonstrate that alternative resilience-based planning approaches may exist within the same general development footprint.

As Cayman continues to urbanise, there may be increasing value in encouraging developments that not only address housing supply, but also strengthen long-term environmental resilience, infrastructure sustainability, and community integration.

As remaining coastal mangrove systems become increasingly fragmented across Grand Cayman, maintaining functional natural infrastructure within development sites may become increasingly important to future flood resilience and environmental stability.

Consideration should be given to retaining a substantial and functional portion of existing mangrove canopy and natural drainage systems within the final site layout to help support flood attenuation and reduce cumulative impacts on the wider Prospect coastal and marine environment.



Sustainable Cayman