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West Bay Street to be diverted through \$1bn 'resort campus'

WEST BAY STREET will be diverted "significantly south" of its current route once the proposed \$1 billion redevelopment of the Cable Beach strip goes ahead, with government offices, banks and the Straw Market opposite the resorts re-located to a purpose-built district.

Todd Hill, vice-president of EDAW (Atlanta), the urban planning company that has produced the master plan for revitalising the Cable Beach strip, said the consortium headed by Lyford Cay billionaire, Dikran Izmirlan, aimed to turn the destination into a bil-

Baha Mar consortium led by Dikran Izmirlan in talks with government on Heads of Agreement, sources say

lion dollar 'resort campus' featuring strong global brands. It would be designed around a Bahamian and broader Caribbean cultural context.

Mr Hill, during a presentation to the Rotary Club of East Nassau, outlined the concept and plans EDAW had pro-

duced for Mr Izmirlan's group, the Baha Mar Development consortium, which features top US and European investors.

"Job creation is a big driver for this project, both during and post construction," he said. "Cable Beach is an ambitious and exciting development in a

great location, and we embraced the opportunity of moving away from a strip resort, with a series of hotels along the roadway, and instead coming up with a plan that proposes a cohesive multi-resort campus."

Mr Hill said the plan calls for West Bay Street to be diverted south of its current route, extending Gladstone Road with a connection at John F Kennedy Drive. Government offices, which are likely to include the Cecil Wallace-Whitfield Centre, and the

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branches of British American, Commonwealth and Scotiabank, will be relocated to a well-placed high-end retail, entertainment and commercial district. The British American facilities at Cable Beach also include the bank's head office.

The realigned West Bay Street will feature lush landscaping along the verge and the median, and will include a new multi-use jogger's path designed to accommodate joggers and pedestrians.

The Tribune understands that representatives from Mr Izmirlan's Baha Mar consortium have been in discussions with the financial institutions that will be affected by their plans for the Cable Beach strip.

This newspaper previously revealed that Mr Izmirlan's group had reached agreements in principle with the Hotel Corporation of the Bahamas to purchase the Radisson Cable Beach Resort, and with US entrepreneur Philip Ruffin to acquire his Wyndham Nassau Resort and Crystal Palace casino, plus the Nassau Beach Hotel.

It is understood that Mr Izmirlan and his group are now into Heads of Agreement negotiations with the Government.

Mr Hill, a designer and land planner with EDAW since 1984, told Rotarians that Baha Mar had assessed the economic, land use and social development patterns impacting the sustainabili-

ty of its billion-dollar proposal, which is still under review by the Government.

He added: "EDAW has a strong philosophy about green development. That is, our plans are based on renewable resources; so construction and operations both incorporate environmentally sensitive designs from the start."

EDAW and Baha Mar representatives met with leading Bahamian cultural advocates, architects, historians and environmentalists to gain insight for the proposed design, Mr Hill explained, adding that presentations from these individuals, including Junkanoo enthusiast, Arlene Nash Ferguson, and BREEF Managing Director, Casuarina McKinney, during an intense 'Bahamas 101' seminar, providing awareness of Bahamian cultural celebrations and native marine life preservation respectively.

"These are all things that weigh in on what we're doing here, and I applaud the developers for allowing us to have that kind of interface with the experts in the country," Mr Hill said. "We're interested in authenticity - something that is based in reality and can be traced through some sort of natural cultural lineage."

"We're not going to create a resort environment based on a fantastical, theoretical place. The

campus will be based on Bahamian culture. Junkanoo will be celebrated here. The authenticity of the place will be key and will be featured through artisans, musicians, entertainment, cuisine, arts and craft, and the resort's architectural design."

The Cable Beach strip is EDAW's fourth project in the Bahamas. It has been contracted by the Government to design master plans for the redevelopment of Eleuthera and downtown Nassau, having previously been involved in Disney's Castaway Cay and Clifton Heritage Park.

"We are very fortunate to be part of the new direction by the Government in proactively planning the future of the country," Mr Hill said of the Bay Street and Eleuthera projects.

"We are creating a unified overall vision instead of taking an ad hoc approach; this makes it possible to lay the groundwork for future growth."

The EDAW intern proposal for Bay Street was compiled by top graduate students from around the world during a high level two-week workshop. EDAW representatives, at the time of the plan's unveiling in June, said one of the most important aims of the process was to inspire a sense of ownership and pride in the community through the complete refurbishment of Nassau's coast from the

western Arawak Cay to Fort Montagu in the east.

The interns delivered a preliminary conceptual plan labelled "tropical urbanism", which included options for relocating the commercial shipping headquarters, beautifying the east-west coastal route and ameliorating traffic congestion to create an attractive retail, municipal and touristic central business district that "engages the unique spirit of Junkanoo".

The estimated cost of implementing the plan has been put at about \$30-\$60 million, but Mr Hill said a series of "catalyst projects" could be addressed immediately and at minimal expense to jumpstart the total development process.

Separately, sources have told The Tribune that Arawak Cay has been more or less disregarded as a location where current downtown Nassau commercial shipping operations could be switched to.

The two options being considered are an offshore port, with a transportation causeway linking it to mainland New Providence, or dredging a channel for shipping from near Clifton Pier, where the deep water between this island and Andros starts, to a site near Coral Harbour. The landfill that is dredged will be used to reclaim land from the sea and create a new harbour, sources said.