

# Council

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## 'bypassed'

### on Guana Cay development

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Tribune Business Editor

THE former Hope Town District Council complained to Government that it was being "bypassed" in the process of giving approvals and permits to developers of the controversial \$175 million Guana Cay project, saying "there are so many unknowns" preventing it from reaching decisions on the development.

### Suffered

Walter Sweeting, the former chief councillor, in a letter addressed to Captain Anthony Allens at the Port Authority, also complained that the council had suffered "great embarrassment" and been made to "feel totally ineffectual" when a fax — sent by Mr Allens' agency — approving construction of the Temporary Dock at the \$175 million Baker's Bay Golf & Ocean Club, arrived in the middle of a council meeting that was discussing whether to give the go-ahead to the same project.

Mr Sweeting's letter, which was copied to the Prime Minister and other government

ministers, said the District Council meeting on May 19, 2005, was discussing approval of the Temporary Dock with the Baker's Bay developers, Discovery Land Company, when the fax arrived from Mr Allens' office.

### Approval

The fax said "approval had also been granted by the Minister of Transport and Aviation, and that Passerine (the developers) should now proceed to get a building permit for the project".

Mr Sweeting wrote on May 23: "All Council members at our meeting were appalled that such a letter should appear with no prior notice to our Council....."

"Even with your letter, the Council, in all good conscience, was unable to grant a permit. As you are well aware, this project is a very controversial one here on Abaco. For us to grant a permit simply upon your direction would cause endless difficulties for both Council members and all Abaco local

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government personnel.”

Mr Sweeting's letter is likely to reignite debate about how much central government should involve local government and consult with local people when assessing large-scale investment projects.

Fred Smith, attorney for the Save Guana Cay Reef Association which is opposing the Baker's Bay project, yesterday told *The Tribune* that apart from the Port Authority, no other government ministry was providing information on how the developers were getting their approvals.

He said this was defeating the Association's "intent" to challenge all permits and approvals given to the Discovery Land Company in court.

However, there is nothing to suggest that Discovery Land Company has done anything

wrong with regard to the approvals process.

Steve Adelson, a partner in Discovery Land Company and vice-president of development

ment or whether that is local government.

“We've studied the process- es, and had all our Bahamian attorneys look at it to make

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— *Walter Sweeting*

for Baker's Bay, previously told *The Tribune*: “Every permit we have obtained has gone through the proper channels, whether that is central govern-

sure we are following them....” In his letter to Captain Allens, Mr Sweeting said that when dealing with investment projects, local government had

previously been asked to accept the developers' plans, study whether the project was right for the area and then make recommendations. Their recommendations would be sent to the Port Authority, which would “pass final judgment”, and permits would then be issued by the council when they received a favourable response.

“In this case, this local council seemed to have been bypassed in the initial presentation of this project. Was this the result of an administrative error, a directive from some central government agency, or a change in general procedure?” Mr Sweeting wrote.

And in a follow-up letter sent on May 24 to Abaco's chief administrator, Revis Rolle, Mr Sweeting said that because “there are so many unknowns

involving this project, we find ourselves unable to make sound decisions simply because of a lack of information”.

He added that most residents of Great Guana Cay were “vehemently against” the Baker's Bay project and did not want a golf course or marina of the size proposed by the developers.

“In our experience with this project, all major decisions seem to have been made and are still being made by our rep-

resentatives of central government with absolutely no knowledge or consultation with our council,” Mr Sweeting wrote.

“The letter from the Port Authority made it very clear to all council members at our last meeting that all decisions regarding this project have already been made elsewhere, and any involvement with our Council is purely an unsatisfactory attempt to pacify dissidents.”