

Victor Somme III

Newcomers to Submerged Lands Issues: A First-Hand Experience

Biography



Mr. Victor Somme III was appointed as the Director of the Division of Coastal Zone Management (CZM) on June 1, 2004. In the short time that he has served at CZM, he has found it to be a constant, stimulating, and rewarding challenge; no day has been the same!

Mr. Somme greets his tasks at CZM with a "can do" spirit and deems them as great learning experiences. He believes that the challenges at CZM must be met head on and proactively with an effective and coordinated approach for the management of our coastal resources for ourselves, our children and our future. He strives tirelessly to lessen the negative impacts on our coastal zone and its resources.

Mr. Somme graduated from Northern Michigan University in August 1990 with a Bachelor of Science degree. In 1993 and 1996 he was selected and honored as the John H. Woodson Teacher of the Year. Mr. Somme is a 1996-1997 Morris F. de Castro Fellow and near completion of a Master of Arts degree in Education from the University of the Virgin Islands.

In April 1999, at the request of a new, democratic administration, Mr. Somme accepted the call to become the Director of Energy for the Virgin Islands Energy Office (VIEO). While there, he catapulted the VIEO into an agency that "did more with less" to achieve innovative methods for heightened energy efficiency and renewable energy. A glaring example of this was the VIEO's receipt of the national award as the "State Program of the Year" by the National Energy Education Development Project under his leadership and talent.

Prior to joining the VIEO, Mr. Somme was an assistant administrator at the University of the Virgin Islands. His academic and intellectual work includes his co-authorship of "**Indigenous Peoples in Caribbean Pre-history**", a supplementary curriculum for Virgin Islands teachers. He is especially proud of his research and authorship of, "**The Need for an Upward Bound Program in the United States Virgin Islands**" that resulted in a \$350,000 grant from United States Department of Education for continued funding of the Upward Bound Program at the University of the Virgin Islands.

Mr. Somme is blessed with a beautiful and fiercely independent daughter, Xari O'Shai Somme. His life's goal is to lead and champion the cause of education, whether it is energy, history, coastal zone issues/management, etc. His philosophy is reflected in a quote from Rabbi Hillel: "If I am not for myself, who is for me? Being only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?" Carpe Diem!

Abstract

"I had no idea that they (Senators of the Twenty-sixth Legislature of the Virgin Islands) would focus on a labor issue concerning the renewal of a major water permit for a dock of a major St. Thomas hotel. Counsel and I were floored by this turn of events!"

This presentation will focus on what a newcomer to submerged land developments/issues may face unexpectedly. A hearing of the Legislature of the Virgin Islands, Committee on Economic Development, Environmental Protection, and Planning, for the ratification of a major water permit, will serve as the leaping point of the presentation. In so doing I will present a unique insight into the process of submerged lands development in the Virgin Islands: the interactivity of the executive and legislative branches of government.

As all water permits, minor and major, require the approval of the Governor of the Virgin Islands and ratification by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands, the presentation will morph into a discussion on the two tier system of the Virgin Islands Coastal Zone, how submerged lands are legally defined in the Virgin Islands and how the Government of the Virgin Islands came into being the Trustee of submerged lands, and the process of permitting developments in submerged lands. The presentation will also discuss what recent efforts/approaches are being undertaken to address property management of submerged lands structures that are not in compliance (invalid leases/permits) with the laws of the Virgin Islands.

The presentation will also discuss the challenges of attempting to balance economic and social development verses environmental protection and historic and cultural preservation. Some highlights will include mention of recent and proposed submerged land developments: dredging of the Frederiksted Pier, the planned Estate William and Punch Resort (inland marina), and the proposed Gallows Bay Marina.