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Montana

By VERNON CLEMENT JONES, Guardian Business Editor,
vernon@nasguard.com

The development company behind a Rum Cay project the fate of which even the government has begun to question is conceding delays while maintaining its commitment to press on.

"I have been assured that there is actually some very positive news," says Diane Phillips, a spokeswoman for Montana Holdings, referring to the first of two project sites on the small cay. "Despite the tight financing market, funding has been secured and certain plans are in the approval process right now."

"If everything is approved as submitted and all goes according to plan, you should see activity well before the end of September."

Islanders have been anticipating that kind of action along with the permanent employment it is supposed to create.

Right now at the site of what has been billed as luxury mixed-use resort work is largely limited to the construction of three management houses, with workmen "now erecting viewing platforms". Phillips also points to "green clearing, retaining and protecting valuable trees while preparing some 40 lots that are part of the Founder Member Program."

The most tangible evidence of the resort development to come — one promised since the signing of a 2004 heads of agreement — may be excavation work for a marina on that site.

But according to Phillips, the development company is also focused on moving ahead with work on a neighboring site, Sumner Point, with plans to build another second-home project around its existing marina.

Regarding "Sumner Point Marina, Montana Holdings is in the midst of the closing now," she said last Friday, referencing the need to win government approvals. "What delayed it slightly was that Montana Holdings had to secure various land options surrounding Sumner Point for it to be a cohesive development."

"They have completed securing all of the required land options, paving the way for the re-development of Sumner Point Marina to proceed."

Phillips is also suggesting additional excavation work for its boating center is 90 percent complete.

Earlier this year, the now-former COO for the development, Michael Farrant, maintained construction on the second site would begin by year's end.

Last week, Environment Minister Earl Deveaux told Guardian Business the Prime Minister himself was now eager to learn from Montana where exactly the project, so many had pinned hopes on, stood.

The minister is also now prepared to look into concerns about any environmental fallout from the current state of the excavation site for the first marina, that one attached to the 2004 heads of agreement.

As late as last month the head of the development company, John Mittens, lauded the government's announcement of a tax incentives package for those building in the Family Islands over the next five years.

He argued the legislation would reduce his building costs by a third, at the same time calling it a move with long-term, far-ranging impact.

That notwithstanding, the current global credit crisis and increasing reluctance on the part of financiers to back resort development may limit the ability of Out Island developers to grab at that dangling carrot now being dangled before them. Second-home buyers have also deferred purchases here and in the U.S., something likely to frustrate sales efforts on Rum Cay.

Nevertheless, Montana's assertion it now has funding in place for its first project suggests it may have bucked those trends, although last week details on how much money and for which components — the 100-plus residential lots, the airport, the beachfront condos, etc. — were not forthcoming.

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