

/10/11

It would appear that those who support Representative Stanley T. Torres' casino gambling bill have developed a clique that intends to go to all the public hearings on the bill and make their point, over and over and over again. At least, that's what happened at the Tanapag hearing earlier this week. One attendee noted, for the record, that he had come all the way from Susupe to give testimony, even though a hearing is scheduled for next week at the multi-purpose center in Susupe. Tanapag residents, in contrast, were few and far between. Fortunately, Representative Ray Yumul, who presided, had the good sense to declare that anyone who had spoken on the bill at the two previous hearings would not be given time at the Tanapag hearing. After all, he said, their testimony was already in the record. One Tanapag resident asked how soon it was expected that a casino would materialize, should the bill pass. Torres said the bill's intent was to provide an opportunity to investors, but there was no time table. Yet in a letter to the editor that appeared in both papers this week, Torres wrote that "We can start right away and be earning income from our new "job," the casino gaming industry, within just a few months." He has yet to explain how he expects that to occur. Torres asked that the record show that most people in attendance at the Tanapag hearing supported the bill. Yumul responded that the hearing was not a debate, but an information-gathering event.

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**The last chance to testify on Torres' casino gambling bill, House Local Bill 17-44, will be Monday night, June 13, at 6:00 p.m. at the multi-purpose center in Susupe.** According to a story in the *Marianas Variety*, Representative Joseph M. Palacios noted that "the small turn-out makes them [the legislators] think that most people may no longer oppose a Saipan casino." It is all the more urgent, then, that even those who testified in earlier rounds of this battle, come out once again and voice their protest against casino gambling on Saipan. Apparently, the legislators have short memories, and it is necessary to remind them, yet again, that gambling is not only a destructive addiction, but also a costly one. The demand for food stamps, the need for other family support services - which government must pay for - increases significantly as family income is eaten up by existing poker machines, and will get eaten up by the casino. In the long run, such costs far outweigh any revenue that might be expected. Though the premise is that only tourists will go to the casinos, it is hard to imagine how anyone can keep local residents out. Not to mention the fact that most tourists come to Saipan not for gambling, but for its tropical beauty, its historic importance, its friendly ambience. Come to the Susupe hearing on Monday! Bring your friends! Speak out against the casino!

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Not well attended either are the hearings being held by the Zoning Board on House Local Bill 17-26, Torres' proposed amendments to the zoning law. Will the legislators interpret this, as well, as indicating that no one objects to the massive changes being proposed to Saipan's landscape?

The problem has been that the bill encompasses too much. It is also very difficult to comprehend, with its many citations to particular land lots and various map pages. Who knows where lot# 360-3

or TR 22796-7, or Tract #21950 are? How many have computer access, or the time to track down the various cites to specific roads on the many zoning maps? And then to prepare testimony, and attend the hearings?

The zoning board has tried its best to get the information out, but there's just too much, and it would cost too much to do the full-blown public information campaign (more, more comprehensible ads in the paper, brochures, more detailed accounts/press releases in the papers, more tv and radio exposure, appearances at Chamber and Rotary and other organization meetings) that is required to make everyone aware of what is at issue, and to make it all understandable to those who will be affected - particularly in light of the fact that it is the local legislative delegation that should be holding the hearings to begin with, not the zoning board. Thank goodness, the two most egregious (conspicuously bad or offensive, according to the 4th edition of the *American Heritage College Dictionary*) changes have been separated out and are scheduled for a separate hearing on June 30th at 6:00 p.m. at the Zoning Board office in the JoeTen building in Dandan. One would re-zone 600 feet on either side of 21 major roads on Saipan as commercial. The other would permit most commercial activities even in rural zones. The Zoning Board has issued an excellent, brief summary of the proposed changes at: < <http://www.zoning.gov.mp> >. (Click on HLB 17-26 and then on "Summary....")

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Though no one has yet publicly expressed concern at the large clearing taking place on the road to Capitol Hill, it looks like it's about time someone did. It's a huge site that is being cleared, prone to all sorts of erosion and stormwater damage. The developer has not revealed what use will be made of the cleared land - except to say it will please tourists.

Query indicates that while the zoning board may have signed off on the developer's earth-moving application, there is no zoning permit application on file. The Division of Environmental Quality reports that while its non-commercial earth-moving application - which is what the developer submitted - requires that the developer submit a site development plan and building floor plans, none have been received. It seems clear, in fact, that the developer does not qualify for a non-commercial earth-moving application, but should have applied for a commercial one - which has the same requirement: that a site development plan and building floor plans be submitted.

The clearing isn't quite as disturbing as the Marpi pole brou-ha, not only because of the difference in the nature of the activity, but also because the Capitol Hill project is not on public land, whereas the Marpi one is. The Capitol Hill clearing does not affect tourism. It does not affect historic sites. It does not affect other's views or vistas. So far, at least, it has not introduced commercialism at its ugliest into a scenic setting. It does not involve waste of government funds. And presumably, thanks to the zoning law, whatever does get built there will not be inappropriate to the surroundings - unless a variance is requested, at which point, under present law, a hearing would have to be held.....

Nonetheless, the circumstances surrounding the clearing, and its very size, would seem to warrant closer scrutiny.

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On a more positive note: members of four local government agencies have put together a model public relations campaign in support of an essential component of sustainability of local marine resources. There are ads and stories in the paper, there are posters and brochures, there's a neat new web page, and numerous public events are scheduled as well.

It's all about making sure that future fishermen will still be able to catch full-grown fish in local waters, instead of being able to find only smaller and smaller ones as the larger ones get fished out, or having to go farther and farther out to sea.

The campaign, "Size Matters," urges fishermen to take only fish that have reached maturity - that have grown enough to lay eggs - so that when they are caught, more are still left out there to be caught. If caught too young, fish will not have reproduced, leaving no replacements for future fishermen to catch. The very attractive and effective web site is: <

[www.sizemattersblogspot.com](http://www.sizemattersblogspot.com) > .

The campaign was designed by Aric Bickel, Coral Management Fellow with the Division of Environmental Quality working with Lisa Huynh Eller, federal programs coordinator of DEQ's CNMI Coral Reef Initiative Outreach and Publications, Richard Semen from DFW, and Steve McKagan, NOAA field representative.