

BY JAMES GARDNER — MAY 13, 2016

## Liberty Medical Tells EDC It's Ready to Promote Medical Tourism

A healthcare company seeking benefits from the Economic Development Commission told EDC board members at a meeting Thursday that establishing a surgical center on St. Croix would help develop a medical tourism business that would allow patients from across the world to come to the territory for care.

Liberty Medical Development is a subsidiary of Comprehensive Orthopaedic Global, established more than eight years ago on St. Thomas by Dr. Brian Bacot. Liberty Medical's general counsel, Richard Bourne-Vanneck, told EDC board members Thursday that the company is able to accelerate its proposed project by about three years by recently signing a memorandum of intent to take over three fourths of the Innovative building at Sunny Isles on St. Croix, which he said would be vacant at the end of the month.

Medical tourism, he said, is defined as the movement of people traveling across a border to obtain medical treatment. The industry is a growing sector of the modern economy. By 2014 approximately 11 million people traveled globally from one country to another for medical treatment, all spending upwards of \$3,000 a trip.

"The industry has a growth rate of 17 percent annually, and to enter into the sector and even have a small percentage of that would represent a tremendous amount of money," Bourne-Vanneck said.

While Puerto Rico and Barbados have already gotten into the game, language barriers and a focus on specific services – such as fertility treatments – have narrowed the competitive field, giving the territory an advantage, he added.

Liberty Medical's plan is to develop a surgical center with three functioning operating rooms and an entire campus of supportive services, including clinical, rehabilitation and imagery offices to give patients the opportunity to get all their treatment within one area. The territory offers private sector investment in healthcare infrastructure – COG developed facilities on St.

Thomas and St. Croix, along with the BVI and Anguilla – along with a tourism infrastructure with hotels and airports, and a “gold standard for health care” by operating in a location that is under the United States flag, Bourne-Vanneck said.

The center would offer services in orthopedics, ophthalmology, ear, nose and throat, pain management, urology, general surgery, gastroenterology, and reconstructive surgery, among other things, and would also have a medical tourism division that would connect patients with hotels, villas, limo services, restaurants, and chefs for private dining.

“It’s like when you go to a major city with a family, and you say, I want to go see a play, or we want to go to the zoo, those are concierge services that you associate with a quality place that you go to,” Bourne-Vanneck said. “We’re not talking about a pipe dream, we’re here today because we’re ready to move ahead.”

The facility would be ready by January 2017 and employ nine surgeons, a total of 14 employees, and summer interns with opportunities for “competitive salaries,” representatives said.

EDC board members said the proposal represents something the territory currently does not have, but sought more information on the structure of the company, its patients, services and other areas.

Later in the meeting, the board also convened in executive session to make a decision on a benefits request from Carambola Golf Club, LLC. While the details of the package were not made available, the EDC did say that members had decided to vacate a decision it had made last month on the request and approve instead an amended benefits package that would decrease Carambola’s income tax exemption from 81 percent to 80 percent.

All other terms and conditions of the Golf Club’s benefits package will remain in effect, the board reported.

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