

A Serious Look at The Future of Dominica from a Planner's Perspective

by

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Now that we are into the new century, it is time for all citizens of the Commonwealth of Dominica to take a serious look at our future if we are going to be an active player in the global economy. Our rapidly changing society puts us at risk of falling further behind the other Caribbean Islands and the world in many areas. Over the next several decades, our population will double. With an increasing population will come greater demands for public and private services. This growth should be planned and directed. The key word is infrastructure that includes roads, water, sewage, schools, parks, and libraries, green-space and other public buildings. Where do we construct these vital resources and how do we finance them? We have a Catch-22 situation here. With the current infrastructure, we cannot attract the high-end housing and business construction that will produce sufficient property taxes. And without considerably more revenue, it will be difficult to build the necessary infrastructure. The Commonwealth of Dominica has a combination of rural, agricultural and low-end residential community.

A planned and directed infrastructure will address the need for schools, roadways, churches, work, more law enforcement, fire trucks and ambulances to assure safety and parks to provide safe places for our children to play. The taxes yielded by development will finance only a fraction of the cost of these services. Our farm areas must be taxed at the lowest possible rate or farmers would be driven off the land. The tax rates now charged are a serious burden to most farm operations. Clearly, increasing revenue by collecting more property taxes on homes and farms is not the answer. The other primary source of revenue for the country is the sales tax. Here too we have a problem. The country has the least developed economy in the region. The majority of our citizens are forced to go outside the country to find work and reside. As a result, taxes are not paid to the government but to other countries. Unless the government finds a formula that redirects these citizens back to our country, we will continue to lose tax revenue and our best citizens. The government of the Commonwealth of Dominica, regardless of political affiliations, should consider:

- Establishing a Board of Education, Industrial Authority, Planning & Development, Zoning and/or Districts.
- A Citizen Advisory Board/Committee, and others who must work closely together with the government to find ways to rapidly build our infrastructure in order to attract high-end housing and quality businesses that can generate tax revenues to pay for them.
- They will have to seek out every available grant or low-interest loan.

- They will have to be careful to fully collect the user fees where available.
- They will have to carefully control their budgets to be sure that the country receives the greatest possible value for tax money spent.
- The government will have, and must seriously consider reconciliation and downsizing of its own cabinet portfolios; reducing and eliminating the duplication of multiple agencies and boards that do the same thing.
- They should consider the utilization of voluntary boards that can do the job hence, costing the taxpayers nothing in terms of expense. The people will have a sense for respect and integrity in the system because they are involved in the process and their country's development.

The next few years will be critical for the Commonwealth of Dominica.

- We need elected officials who will devote their energies to solving these and many other problems.
- We do not need elected officials wasting their energy and our money in partisan fighting!
- We need to have building/architectural standards, landscaping standards, uniform codes and life-safety regulations.
- We need to develop our country in an environmental sound manner by taking a concentrated effort towards achieving these goals.
- The establishment of marina districts, resorts, hotels, natural parks, recreational facilities, even the international airport at sometime, industrial technology park districts, business park districts, just to name a few.

The Commonwealth of Dominica at one time was very proud of its water resources and boast of having a river and/or stream for every day in the year. Unfortunately, we have since lost that claim and will continue to if we do not start planning for the future. We need legislation for the establishment of water basin, watersheds, streamline, erosion and sediment control and storm water regulations. We need to seriously examine the present state of our resources and attempt to protect such natural uniqueness at the same time encouraging smart growth in the country. We can not accomplish that with the continuing partisan fighting and political appointments. We must have the right individuals to do the job, be it whatever political party and more importantly a person or persons who have no political interest in any political party would be more capable of doing the job without prejudices. If we plan properly and smart we can all move Dominica forward.

Another serious problem is public education. This needs to be addressed and the crisis of Aids and HIV in the country is cause for serious concerns. From a planning perspective, this will put an increasing demand on health services. Hence, the need for more health facilities, utilities, emergency services, burial site developmental plans to be reviewed, more medical professionals, medical supplies, and the list goes on. The government must invest money into public service announcement on the illness and train and educate its people.

My prayer for the new century is that we the people of the Commonwealth of Dominica will come together as a united community to build the kind of future our children deserves. It will take the best effort of all of us to get the job done. [UP](#)

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