

**SPEECH BY THE HONOURABLE D. KURT TIBBETTS, OBE, JP,
MINISTER FOR PLANNING, LANDS, AGRICULTURE, HOUSING & INFRASTRUCTURE**

**TO THE
THE CAYMAN ISLANDS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

THE GEORGE TOWN REVITALIZATION PLAN

Honourable Premier, Honourable Members of Cabinet & colleagues from George Town, President Barry Bodden & CEO Wil Pineau, friends and members of the Chamber- Good Afternoon;

Thank you for such a hearty showing here today! This tells me that, at the least, there is a keen interest in the George Town Revitalisation Project; and of course, as an optimist, that some of you wonderful people here are also keen to put your money where your mouths are, and join us in this public private partnership.

So what is the George Town Revitalisation Project? Who does it concern, who will it affect, and how will it be implemented? All good questions that my Ministry staff will deal with shortly but suffice it to say, it involves all of us! This is not just a facelift or a beautification project. It is meant to be a true restoration of our Capital, into a bustling, mixed-used neighbourhood for businesses,

residents and tourists that visit our shores. It is a long-term strategy that recognises the relationship of downtown to the rest of the island, while also becoming sustainable on its own.

Some you will have heard me in the LA just recently, as I gave an outline of this Government's proposed infrastructure works over the coming years. Those plans were a direct result of careful forward planning by the Ministry and the NRA to link Downtown, the proposed Cruise Berthing Facility and the redevelopment of the Owen Roberts Airport with a network that had capacity to allow for efficient traffic flow, and spur growth and development in our Capital. And while I don't want to delve into too much detail, let me just quickly point to the works on Godfrey Nixon Way that have now commenced and the upcoming Smith Rd widening as evidence that we are indeed serious about this rebirth. When Godfrey is completed, it will have 3 lanes- 2 directional and a centre 'turn' lane. Immediately after that, we will turn our attention to Smith Rd, where we have similar plans. You will see in the upcoming presentation that these are integral to our overall scheme, and that we are indeed working to a plan that results in greater interconnectivity. We will bring about amendments to the planning law and regulations on how to treat our urban area, from both a planning and architectural perspective, recognising that land use comes at a premium, but that our built environment influences us physically and emotionally.

Other plans are being drawn up as well; from the sale and redevelopment of the Central Police Station, to a new Courts Facility, to more public green spaces, government is working hard to see George Town become a more pleasant and enticing environment for businesses and the public to enjoy. The New Farmers Market at the Cricket Grounds will also add flavour to the revitalization of our capital. My Ministry is working closely with the Ministry of Tourism to ensure that the rebirth of our Capital also gives extra oomph to our Tourism product.

As a result, we hope to see George Town come alive, not just from 8am to 5pm, but on evenings with dining and leisurely walks along the waterfront, on weekends with shopping by locals and tourists, and with festivals and events on occasion such as this upcoming weekend. While I won't 'jump the gun' so to speak, I'd ask you all to watch out as plans are also being drawn up for an event next weekend as well.

So, as you can hear, we are working with all sectors of the economy to encourage this growth, and this commitment is paying off. It has inspired investment from developers locally and around the world, which will bring about good, sustainable jobs for our people. I need only cite the GT boardwalk project, spearheaded by our local young architect, Mr. Robert Johnson, and wholeheartedly supported

by my Ministry. The concept was simple really- the need to recognise the pedestrian along a strip that previously wasn't very accommodating. From the Royal Watler Terminal north to the Fish Shack, Robert worked with private developers to facilitate the boardwalk, which we now hope will be expanded upon in the near future.

Coincidentally, today, I also have the pleasure of announcing that the anchor to the GTRP will be a world class entertainment facility, The Cayman Ice Palace.

(TCIP Slide Presentation)

The Cayman Ice Palace will be a multi-purpose hub for both the community and for our tourism product. With over 6300 seats for concerts and other similar events, the building will boast the ability to also host conventions, trade shows, hockey, skating, boxing, basketball and more. It will feature a unique cirque de soleil ice show with Olympic and World Champion skaters that will amaze both tourists and residents. A myriad of performers featuring A-List concert talent will be a constant focus for The Ice Palace; thus, separating Cayman from any other country in the Caribbean.

Indeed I dare say, this will be a unique project unlike no other in the region.

Local contractors Arch and Godfrey have been commissioned to construct the building which was designed by Robert Andrus, in conjunction with the Green Tech Group, Cayman Ltd. The project will rely on sustainable energy from 160,000 sq ft solar panel roof which will highlight the construction and resemble to scale, the shell of our Cayman Green Turtle.

Government has had sight of the plans, and the Canadian based company, Hard Set Sports & Entertainment expects construction to commence shortly hereafter. A date for the official ground-breaking will be announced in the upcoming weeks. This Government is thrilled to be working with such a consortium, and will continue to work with others to bring life back into our small metropolis.

We can feel investors' confidence growing daily and I can feel it in my bones that we are poised for a spurt of growth. The key is to manage this growth in a sustainable fashion and ensure that Caymanians benefit by way of long term employment and investments.

But now, ladies and gentlemen, we've got to keep the momentum going! This is not just a government project; No, this is a project for all of us to get involved in. We have all watched the steady drain of life from George Town, and it's time that we all had a hand in bringing it back. I want you all to be optimistic like myself and my colleagues here, and see how exciting this rebirth can be! We are certainly willing to do our share, and to developers in this room that have projects in the works- come work with us; we will certainly work with you and facilitate wherever we can to make this partnership a success.

Lastly, I want to recognise my colleagues in government for supporting my Ministry with these plans. I must admit, sometimes they (*the plans that is*) may have been a bit grandiose, but as Tristan Hydes, my Ministry DCO & architect reminds me, "Dream big...!" I also want to recognise our in-house graphic designer, Ms. Kara Coe, who works out of GIS, for such a fitting logo! We asked Ms. Coe to find something that not only recognises our past but embraces the future; I think she's hit the nail on the head!

Finally, I also want to thank the Chamber- its past and current leadership, along with their CEO, for being an advocate for you all and, of course, the project itself. They too have seen the potential of this project, which will lead to growth and jobs within our economy.

Now, before I turn you over to Tristan & Kenneth for the GTRP presentation, I just want to add that...

The plan you will see here today is by no means final. This is a base from which to begin the discussion- to spark our (*meaning you & me*) interest, our imagination, and to gain your perspective on where you want to go. I look forward to it.

Thank you very much