



Ministerial Statement
By
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Minister of Public Works
Introduction to the Municipalities

3 July 2020

Good Morning **Mr. Speaker**, on June 5th I assumed responsibility for both municipalities, the Corporation of Hamilton and the Corporation of St George. My usual approach to any new department, quango and now municipalities – once under my remit – is to do a *meet and greet* with the leadership shortly thereafter.

Notwithstanding, as the government was navigating its way through the phases of the Covid-19 Pandemic, I did not have that luxury on this occasion. However, as soon as we were able, the Permanent Secretary and I carved out time to meet with the Mayors and their Secretaries/Chief Operating Officers. Those meetings occurred on the 17th and 18th of June respectively.

Mr. Speaker, the meetings were fruitful and provided the respective Mayors the opportunity to share with us a few of their objectives for the next year as well as provide a snapshot of any outstanding matters – which we could assist them with. For both Municipalities, I committed to advancing a number of Exchange of Land Agreements between them and private landowners for the purpose of enhancing public sidewalk access, as in the case of the Corporation of Hamilton, to swapping a parcel of land for a nominal fee for the Corporation of St George – which logistically made sense.

Both Mayors were advised these Agreements were passed by the Cabinet on Tuesday of this week – and it is my intention to advance these Agreements to this Honourable House before we prorogue for the summer.

Mr. Speaker, I had no preconceived thoughts heading into these meetings. So for me, this was somewhat of an educational exercise – and I soon learned that these two Municipalities are quite different.

On the one hand you have the Corporation of Hamilton that has quite a large facility with a human resource, finance and engineering section – to ensure the effective operation of the capital city.

While on the other hand, you have the Corporation of St. George that has just under 20 staff in total – with these staff serving in many capacities (willingly I might add) all in an effort to ensure the Town of St. George’s functions daily – albeit at a much slower pace.

Mr. Speaker, we are well aware of the construction of the new St. Regis Hotel in St. George’s. Hotelco Bermuda has remained true to its commitment to bring to Bermuda the first new hotel in over 30 years. Concurrent with that activity is the upgrade works ongoing at the St. Georges Club which, similar to the St. Regis project, is scheduled to come on line in April of 2021.

Mr. Speaker, everyone in Bermuda likes to travel. So now that the airport is officially reopened, I am certain residents will be looking for the first thing smoking to get them off the rock. The expectation of landing at their desired travel destination brings with it the ability to have access to comfortable accommodations, good shopping, dining options, souvenir stores, to local entertainment. So if we can expect a certain level of service offerings while traveling, surely we must provide the same for our visitors.

Mr. Speaker, I have never been one to mince my words – so I took the liberty of reminding the team of the Corporation of St George that they must “up their game” and be ready for when the visitors descend on their town in ten months. No longer does anyone want to hear “St. George’s used to be this or used to be that.”

I challenged the team to *get with the program* as none of us want visitors landing on our beautiful island only to complain that St. Georges was a “sleepy ole town” with nothing to do. That would not be fair to the investment made by the developers in the east, and it would not bode well for Bermuda’s reputation as a vibrant tourism destination.

Mr. Speaker, I was equally disappointed to learn that there are over 55 shops in St. George’s with less than 10 of them open on a good day. I also heard, whether anecdotally or factual, that if you are not from St. George’s, it’s an uphill battle for an outsider trying to make a go with their business.

I met this week with the area MPs, Mr. Kim Swan, JP MP and Mrs. Renee Ming, JP MP, who have both pledged their commitment to working with the Ministry and the Corporation to make the Town of St. George's the vibrant place it can be.

I reiterated to the area MPs the same message of that to the Corporation of St George and that was – we have to bring some life back to the Town which could include the once popular historic tours of the Town, reenactments, to the use of any other assets.

You have to forgive me **Mr. Speaker** but I am not from St. George's so my recommendations were somewhat general in nature. But on that same note, the East Enders have to be creative as the modern traveler is looking for an experience that they cannot find elsewhere. So this has to be an “all hands on deck” approach as April 2021 will be here sooner than we think. I have invited the Corporation of St George to collaborate with the Departments in the Ministry, especially the Quangos, for advice, resources and support.

A good example of reviving a product is what has been done by the West End Development Corporation at the opposite end of the island. I won't go into detail as we know that product speaks for itself.

Mr. Speaker, I am convinced that the people of St. George can rise to the occasion and make their town the vibrant but still historic metropolis that we all know it can be. This government stands ready to work with them to make that happen.

Mr. Speaker, as for the Corporation of Hamilton, therein lies the elephant in the room – that being the municipality reform legislation that was tabled in this House last year. It is no secret that it was the then Ministers intention, who had responsibility for Municipalities, to bring this legislation back to the House after the summer break – he was carrying out a government initiative and I can see no reason why I would change course now that I have assumed this responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, on an island as small as ours, I simply cannot understand why there are three separate “governments”. In the case of the Corporation of Hamilton we have to consider economies of scale – more so in this post Covid environment. You have the Government on the one hand collecting garbage, providing engineering services, managing waste and sewerage, while the Corporation of Hamilton provides the exact same services, only delineated by the invisible line in the sand. This is but one example of duplication of effort and we must have the serious conversation as the island is only 21 miles long – and in most jurisdictions, the municipality has a larger footprint.

Mr. Speaker, I realize that many have their views on this. But what I can say is that the former Administration had a similar view – however, this Administration is not afraid to take this on hence the tabling of the legislation.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Permanent Secretary and I had the privilege of being accompanied by one of our outstanding summer students, Mr. Dimitrius Richardson, on a site visit to the Corporation of Hamilton's Works Depot on Laffan Street. Also accompanying me was the Mayor of Hamilton, Mr. Charles Gosling, the Chief Operating Officer, Mr. Dwayne Caines, and the City Engineer, Mr. Patrick Cooper. This visit included a tour of the various areas from the maintenance and stores facilities, the sign painting shop, the electrical and carpentry shops, to the Human Resource area.

It was also evident that the Corporation has taken to heart the government's Covid-19 policies as adequate signage, sanitization stations, social distancing and mask protocols were being followed. **Mr. Speaker**, this visit also supported my thought process in that truly there could be some form of consolidation to achieve economies of scale and reduce expenditure. However, what this consolidation looks like has yet to be determined, but this visit did provide me food for thought.

So **Mr. Speaker**, I will close with this. Not everyone likes change. Not everyone understands change....or why it is necessary. But what I will say is this – this Administration will effect change by doing what we believe is best for the people of this country.....despite the back seat drivers telling us where they think we should go. In the case of both Corporations - the discussions were frank and honest in both directions, but we all agreed to work collaboratively for the benefit of our joint constituents - the people of Bermuda.

Thank you **Mr. Speaker**.