

Savvy on the Bay: Does the Government Actually Value Local Bajan Businesses?



When Allan Kinch first opened Savvy on the Bay, he probably never imagined he'd be fighting tooth and nail just to keep his doors open. Not against competition, not against rising costs, but against his own government.

The story of Savvy on the Bay isn't just about one businessman's struggle: it's a mirror reflecting a much bigger question that's been weighing heavy on the minds of local entrepreneurs across Barbados: **Does the government actually care about homegrown businesses, or are we just placeholders until something bigger and foreign comes along?**

The Battle That Won't Die

Back in 2023, many of us watched in disbelief as the government made its first move to acquire the prime real estate where Savvy on the Bay sits. The official reason? Public parking and beach access. Sounds reasonable enough, right?

But here's where things get murky. Allan Kinch, the local businessman who's poured his heart and soul into this venture, had already put forward his own proposals for public parking and beach access. He wasn't some greedy landlord trying to hoard beachfront property: he was willing to work with the community and government to find solutions that benefited everyone.



The government's response? A \$4 million offer for land that's clearly worth significantly more, especially in today's booming tourism market. To put that in perspective, we're talking about prime beachfront real estate that could easily command double or triple that amount in the current market.

The move would have displaced 13 tenants: local people running local businesses, employing local workers, contributing to the local economy. When word got out, the backlash from ordinary Bajans was swift and fierce. People understood what was really at stake here.

A Temporary Victory That Wasn't So Temporary

The public outcry worked. The government backed down, the acquisition talks went quiet, and for a while, it seemed like common sense had prevailed. Local businesses could breathe easy, and Allan Kinch could get back to what he does best: running a successful Bajan enterprise.

But if you thought that was the end of the story, you'd be wrong.

Here we are in 2026, and like a bad penny, this issue has come back. The government is once again eyeing Savvy on the Bay, and this time, the whispers are getting louder about what might really be driving this persistent interest in acquiring the property.

The Foreign Factor

Let's talk about the elephant in the room. While the government publicly speaks about public parking and beach access, there are growing concerns that the real plan involves handing over this prime real estate to foreign tourism interests. Think along the lines of major hotel chains or international developers who can write much bigger checks than any local businessman ever could.

This isn't paranoia: it's pattern recognition. We've seen it happen before with Ross University, where attempts were made to sell local properties to foreign entities. The precedent is there, and the concern is real.



When you look at the bigger picture, it starts to feel like a classic case of "make room for the big guys." Local businesses get squeezed out under the guise of public interest, only to have the land eventually end up in the hands of foreign investors who promise jobs and economic growth but often deliver profits that flow right back out of the country.

What This Says About Government Priorities

Now, to be fair, the government has rolled out various initiatives that sound great on paper. There's the Innovation Growth Market 200 Programme with its US\$350,000 grant to help SMEs access investment capital. There are trust loans, collateral registries, and electronic single windows designed to make business easier for local entrepreneurs.

But here's the thing: you can't talk about supporting small businesses while simultaneously trying to bulldoze successful local enterprises to make way for foreign competition. It's like saying you support local farming while paving over the best agricultural land for shopping malls.

The Savvy on the Bay situation exposes a fundamental contradiction in government policy. On one hand, there are programs and frameworks designed to help local businesses thrive. On the other hand, when push comes to shove and there's a choice between supporting a successful local entrepreneur and accommodating foreign interests, which way does the government lean?



The Real Cost of These Decisions

Let's break down what's really at stake here beyond just one business:

Economic Impact: Allan Kinch employs local people. His business sources goods and services from other local businesses. The 13 tenants on the property create a micro-ecosystem of economic activity that benefits the entire community.

Message to Entrepreneurs: Every local business owner is watching this situation closely. If the government can steamroll a successful operation like Savvy on the Bay, what does that say about the security of their own investments and hard work?

Community Trust: When residents see their government prioritizing foreign interests over local success stories, it erodes the fundamental trust that's essential for a healthy democracy and economy.

Tourism Authenticity: Tourists don't come to Barbados to experience another generic international hotel chain. They come for authentic Bajan experiences: exactly what local businesses like Savvy on the Bay provide.

A Pattern We Can't Ignore

The persistence of this issue tells us something important. This isn't just about parking spaces or beach access: if it were, Allan Kinch's original proposals would have been enough to solve the problem. The fact that the government keeps coming back suggests there are other motivations at play.

When you combine this with the historically low \$4 million offer and the pattern of foreign entities circling local properties, it's hard not to see this as part of a larger trend where local businesses are viewed as temporary tenants rather than permanent stakeholders in Barbados' economic future.



What Local Business Owners Are Really Asking For

The entrepreneurs watching this unfold aren't asking for handouts or special treatment. They're asking for something much simpler and more fundamental: **respect for their contributions and protection of their legitimate business interests.**

Allan Kinch has proven he can run a successful operation. He's willing to work with the government on public access issues. He's employing local people and contributing to the tax base. What more does a local business owner need to do to earn the right to operate without constant threat of government seizure?

Local businesses want to know that when they invest their time, money, and energy into building something meaningful, their government will have their back: or at the very least, not actively work against them.

Looking Forward: What Needs to Change

The Savvy on the Bay situation presents the government with a clear opportunity to demonstrate its true commitment to local business. Here's what needs to happen:

Transparent Communication: If there are legitimate public interest reasons for acquiring the property, lay them out clearly and explain why working with the current owner isn't sufficient.

Fair Valuation: If acquisition is truly necessary, offer fair market value: not a lowball figure that insults both the property owner and public intelligence.

Local-First Policies: Develop clear policies that give local businesses first priority when it comes to tourism and development opportunities.

Long-term Thinking: Consider the message these actions send to current and future entrepreneurs who might be thinking about starting businesses in Barbados.

The truth is, countries that prioritize authentic local businesses over foreign chains tend to have more sustainable tourism industries, stronger local economies, and more resilient communities. Barbados has the opportunity to be a leader in this approach: but only if the government starts walking the walk, not just talking the talk.

The Bottom Line

The Savvy on the Bay saga isn't really about one property or one businessman. It's about what kind of economy and society Barbados wants to be. Do we want to be a place where local entrepreneurs can build sustainable businesses with confidence, or do we want to be a place where local success is always vulnerable to foreign interests with deeper pockets?

The government's actions in this case will send a message that goes far beyond Allan Kinch and his business. Every current and potential business owner in Barbados is watching to see whether their government truly values local enterprise or if all the programs and policies are just window dressing on a system that fundamentally favors outside interests.

The choice is clear, and the time to make it is now.