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'Tear It Up': Procurement Pressured to Revise St. Thomas Rescue Lease for Better Terms

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Liston Thomas - President, St. Thomas Rescue. By. JAMAL POTTER AND BARRY LEERDAM, LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS.

Members of the Senate Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance convened on Tuesday, with a primary focus on providing a more favorable lease to St. Thomas Rescue Incorporated (STR Inc.), an all-volunteer group that offers trained emergency service response.

The lease in question was for a one-story building in Sub Base Number 6 in South Side Quarter, St. Thomas, intended as STR Inc.'s long-term headquarters and training facility.

Senator Novelle Francis voiced his concerns about the lease's proposed cost, stating, “St. Thomas

Rescue has provided service to this community second to none and saved this government hundreds of thousands of dollars over the years.” Advocating for the group, he deemed the \$1200 annual rate excessive and proposed a symbolic \$1 per year instead. This sentiment found support from Senator Dwayne DeGraff, who was even more direct in his response. “First of all, Rescue’s contract? Tear it up,” DeGraff said, emphasizing the need to discard the current lease due to its challenging conditions, particularly the burdensome renovation clause.

Adding to the lease's complexity, STR Inc. President Liston Thomas informed the committee that the previously secured funding for the proposed renovations was no longer available. This revelation underscored the urgency for lease amendments.

Upon hearing the senators' concerns and understanding the organization's predicament, Department of Property and Procurement Deputy Commissioner Vincent Richards assured the committee of his commitment to a resolution. “This is the first time I have learned their previous funding sources evaporated,” Richards admitted, continuing, “I’m very proud to have helped them find a home and we will do whatever we can do to amend the lease to make sure it works for them.”

In the broader context of the meeting, the committee also discussed several other government property leases. However, given the depth of the discussions surrounding STR Inc., Bill 35-0077, which pertained to the leases, was held back to allow for the necessary amendments by the Department of Property and Procurement.

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