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Gittens to Challenge HPC Power: New Legislation Aims to Redefine Downtown Historic Boundaries

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Nelcia Charlemagne **September 25, 2023**

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The "I Love STT" sign at Vendors Plaza in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas. By. GOV'T HOUSE

The Historic Preservation Committee came under scathing criticism from Senator Kenneth Gittens, who questioned the HPC's power, particularly as it related to the recent decision to remove the "I Love St Thomas" sign from the historic Vendor's Plaza in Charlotte Amalie. Gittens announced his intention to introduce legislation aiming to redefine the HPC's scope and limit its current authoritative reach.

"Who leave them in charge to tell us they cannot put up an "I Love St. Thomas" sign where it's at?" Sen. Gittens questioned on Friday, during a debate on rezoning applications.

The HPC decision regarding the sign was [met with disappointment](#) by Governor Albert Bryan who opined that “these actions are indicative of how individuals continue to use this committee as a vehicle to hinder efforts and initiatives aimed at revitalizing our territory’s towns.” The concordance between the governor and senator comes in stark contrast to the several disagreements between the pair on policy. Following Governor Bryan's State of the Territory address in January, Mr. Gittens had some [sharp critique](#) regarding several initiatives he felt had been overlooked. However, the two seem to have found common ground on matters relating to the HPC. “While I understand the duties and responsibilities of the Historic Preservation Commission, I believe at times that they go overboard,” said Mr. Gittens on Friday.

He was expressing particular support for Bill No. 35-0134 which involves the redevelopment of the old Outrigger Hotel on Hospital Road in Christiansted Town and the reinstating of the marina that once existed along the waterfront. During his remarks, Mr. Gittens said he was saddened by the lack of development in some abandoned buildings in St. Croix.

The senator suggested that the Historic Preservation Committee is being “too restrictive” as it relates to developing downtown areas. “...Remember our downtown areas are our economic drivers, and as we drive these areas, especially Christiansted and Frederiksted - it’s too dilapidated — we have to address the historic preservation restrictions,” said Gittens. The HPC, however, has denied claims that they are prohibitive to development, stating that they approve [most of the applications](#) that come before them.

Having previously been [accused of lacking solutions](#) by Governor Bryan, Mr. Gittens announced forthcoming legislation, saying he intends to “push the measure where [the HPC] will be required to identify particular structures in our downtown historic districts of Christiansted, Frederiksted, Charlotte Amalie and Cruz Bay, to identify those specific structures that have significance to the history of these islands, and preserve those. The other buildings within the downtown area should be released from the strict preservation”. He suggested that all other buildings simply be required to conduct regular upkeep on their facades to prevent the towns from looking “wayward”.

For Senator Gittens, the HPC is “hindering economic progress” in downtown areas, an issue he says he will be addressing at the “appropriate time.”