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# Bryan's 15-Page Derelict and Abandoned Buildings Bill Now Available as Community is Given Until Nov. 24 to Comment on Latest Draft

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Governor Albert Bryan is moving forward with his push to rid the territory's towns of derelict and abandoned buildings, with Government House on Monday announcing that the public has until November 24 to comment on the latest draft of Mr. Bryan's proposed bill.

Government House has circulated the 15-page proposal, which reportedly incorporates the feedback generated by two [town hall meetings on the issue in August](#).

Like all legislation, the document begins with a glossary, defining terms such as “abandoned property”, “competent entity”, “conservator” and “developer”. It then goes on to specify how the system would work: a petitioner could approach the court to declare a particular property derelict

or abandoned, and order that a conservator be appointed to rehabilitate the building for the benefit of the owner.

In making its determination, the court must assess the property against a list of criteria, all of which must be met. These criteria include the lack of any foreclosure action, the lack of good faith efforts to sell the building, and the absence of legal occupation for at least five years prior to the petition, among others. The court will also ascertain that the current owner acquired the building more than a year ago, and that there are no current efforts to repair the property in a timely manner.

Initial feedback from the public included deep concern that the measure could be used by unscrupulous developers to dispossess struggling Virgin Islanders from valuable property. The draft legislation makes several attempts to calm those fears. First, property owners are explicitly entitled to legal representation during conservatorship petition hearings, with the court directed to appoint counsel for those who cannot afford their own attorneys. Secondly, several provisions in the measure prevent conservators or developers from placing new liens on the property; financing for redevelopment work cannot be secured using the property as collateral. Sale or transfer of ownership will only be able to be effected with the express consent of the property owner on record.

Conservators can recover fees, costs, and certain expenses by applying to the court. These will be paid from a Conservatorship Fund, maintained by the Treasury and kept topped up with a \$5 million minimum balance, capitalized with at least 1% of real property taxes annually.

Many people at the earlier public meetings urged the government to lead the charge against abandoned and derelict buildings by first addressing the several dilapidated properties it owns, but under this current draft of the proposed legislation, properties held by the government are exempt from the provisions of the bill – only privately-owned property can be held under conservatorship.

After reading through the legislative proposal (available [here](#)), members of the public can submit feedback to [comments@go.vi.gov](mailto:comments@go.vi.gov). Printed copies are also available from the Office of the Administrator in each island.