

logo not found or type unknown

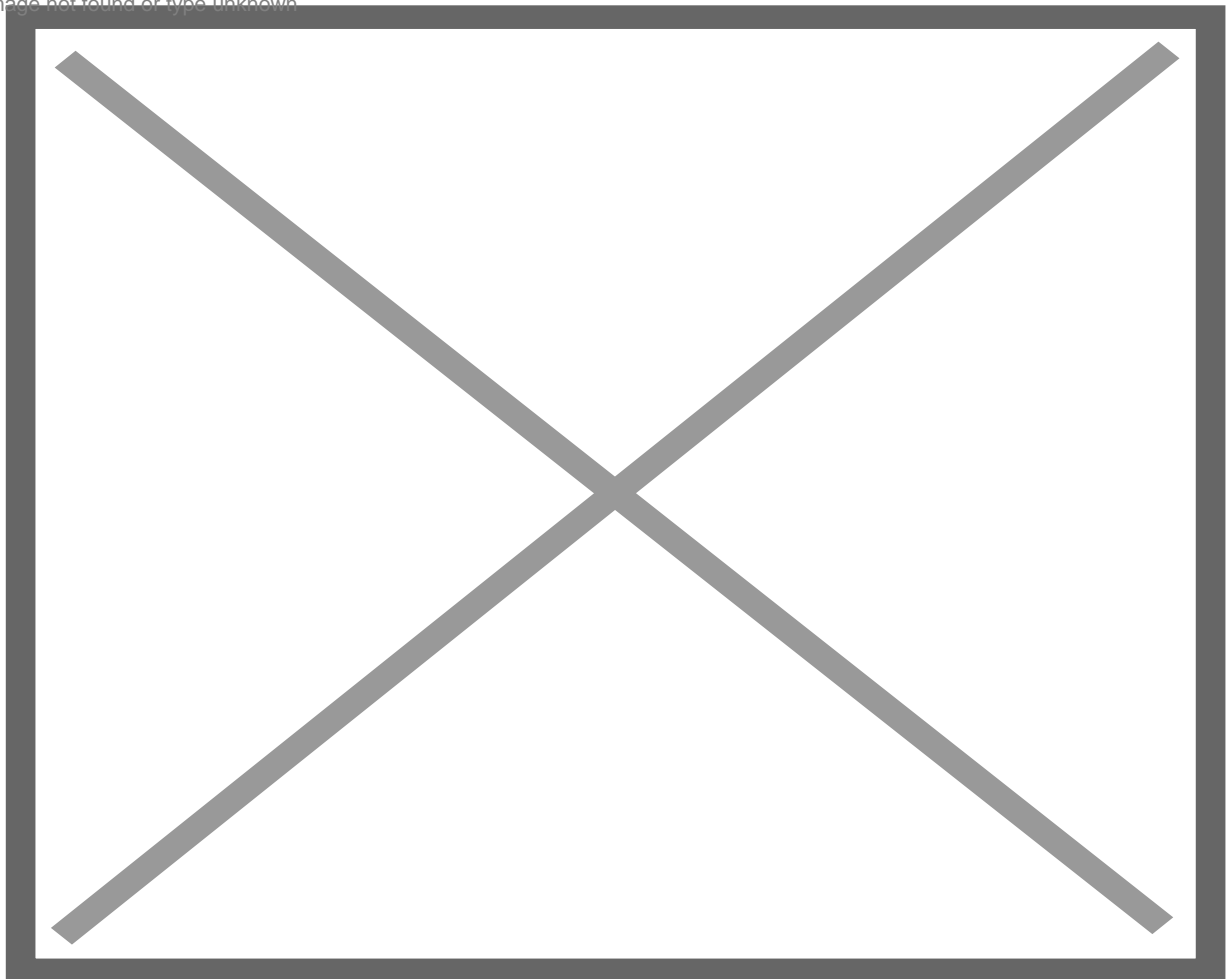
## VIPA Board Approves \$55K for Electrical Repairs Due to WAPA's Wrong Transformer Installation

Port Authority board member calls WAPA "a bad actor."

Business / **Published On December 21, 2023 06:53 AM /**

Janeke Simon **December 21, 2023**

Image not found or type unknown



VI Port Authority board of directors recently approved over \$55,000 to fix electrical damage to the Gordon A. Finch molasses cargo building caused by the V.I. Water and Power Authority's installation of incorrect equipment at the site.

Tafari Nelson, a mechanical engineer at VIPA told directors during Wednesday's board meeting that last November, WAPA installed a transformer at the cargo building as part of their electricity undergrounding project. "The required transformer that was submitted to VIPA for confirmation and approval was a 150 KVa...transformer. What was installed was a 300 KVa...transformer," Mr. Nelson disclosed. WAPA contractors reportedly only noticed the error after the transformer was powered on and the generator did not shut off.

Once the transformer was turned off again, a series of damage assessments were conducted, and a finance report was submitted to VIPA and shared with WAPA on November 18, 2022. A quote for repairs in the sum of \$55,626 was also shared, "and it was determined internally that VIPA will pay for the work upfront while working on recouping the funds from WAPA," Mr. Nelson told directors.

According to VIPA CEO Carlton Dowe, waiting for WAPA to pay for the damage caused would introduce unacceptable delays. "We know that if we were to wait for all that stuff to go through, we wouldn't be to the top of the food chain – that project would continue to be hindered," he said.

WAPA has acknowledged that the wrong transformer was installed, but it was not immediately clear whether VIPA had informed the utility company of its intention to fund the electrical repairs with the expectation of reimbursement.

The state of affairs prompted board member Celestino White to express serious doubts about WAPA's commitment and/or willingness to remit the money back to VIPA. "WAPA is a bad actor," Mr. White declared vehemently. "You're chasing a mirage in a desert."

He reminded directors that WAPA has had a debt of approximately \$200,000 owed to VIPA for "close to four years going on five," for rental space at the Nisky Center. The irate board member expressed frustration that WAPA's mistake is causing VIPA delays and additional financial expenditure which may not be able to be recouped in a timely manner. Mr. White noted that VIPA must keep current on its debts to WAPA because otherwise, Mr. Dowe quipped, "We would have been in darkness."

Mr. Dowe informed the board that previous attempts to offset VIPA's power bills against WAPA's substantial debt have been rejected by the utility company. "We were trying to do something similar with a transformer on St. Thomas and we couldn't do it," he noted.

Despite the challenges with the lingering debts owed by WAPA, Mr. Dowe emphasized that the Port Authority was not going to write off the money owed. "I've already instructed our legal people as to our course of action with WAPA – the courts will ultimately have to deal with it...we're not throwing up our hands."

Board members voted 5 - 1 in favor of approving the requested change order to VIPA's contract with AT Construction LLC in an amount not to exceed \$55,646.20, so that the necessary electrical repairs to the Gordon A Finch Molasses Cargo Building can be made. Mr. White cast the sole dissenting vote.