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# Businesses in Downtown Charlotte Amalie Grapple With Growing Homelessness Problem

## Calls for government action as homeless encampments affect local businesses

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During a meeting of the St. Thomas/St. John Historical Preservation Committee, one applicant vented about how increasing numbers of homeless people is causing a growing headache for property owners in the area.

Dilsa Capdeville was seeking approval to repaint one of the buildings on 5 & 6 Kongens Gade, which houses Paradise Essential Rentals among other tenants. After a discussion about colors for the main portion, trim and wall, a comment by Sean Krigger, director of the State Historic Preservation Office, about power washing the steps in front of the building led Ms. Capdeville to mention a growing problem she and others in the area have been experiencing.

“A challenge we are having on Kongens Gade...is that a lot of homeless individuals reside there at night,” she told HPC members. They leave behind debris including dirty clothing and other items she was reluctant to name. The steps of her building and others in the area sometimes serve as a toilet, she noted, saying that property owners are the ones who must clean things up when the sun rises. “My daughter Lisa and I have gotten there in the mornings...urine, diarrhea, everything coming down the steps,” she said.

Drawing on a relationship previously established with the VIPD through an agency she had run, Ms. Capdeville decided to approach the police department with a win-win proposal. “Their SWAT Unit comes once a week...to have their training on the property,” she said, noting that the numbers of unhoused people around the property subsequently decreased.

Despite this intervention, it remains an issue beyond her individual capacity to address. “But we’re trying also to find out who in the government we should talk with. I know homelessness is a real grave problem we’re having, but a lot of property owners are suffering as a result of that.”

She mentioned a recent fire in nearby property owned by the family of a former senator. “A couple months ago [a homeless person] had gotten in there and had built a fire” which got out of control, Ms. Capdeville said. The owner of a nearby bar spotted it and summoned the fire department in time to avoid major disaster, she noted.

The problem is not just limited to Kongens Gade, however. Mr. Krigger, empathizing with Ms. Capdeville’s plight, recounted a similar issue being faced by a property owner on the waterfront. “He called me and he was venting because of the level of frustration. He’s actually at his breaking point,” the SHIPO director noted.

While he tried to reassure Ms. Capdeville that “the government is addressing this from a comprehensive standpoint,” Mr. Krigger acknowledged that “unfortunately, it’s not a round the corner kind of thing.” He suggested additional lighting to illuminate the steps could provide an extra deterrent effect.

Whatever long term solutions the government may be considering, Ms. Capdeville made it clear that business owners are suffering in the here and now. “I’m used to gathering forces and canvassing the whole area,” she remarked. “Legal Services is also one of our neighbors and they have it very bad as well. I try and say let’s work together....It’s very problematic for us because we as a community are doing our best.”

Ms. Capdeville’s application to repaint her building was approved.