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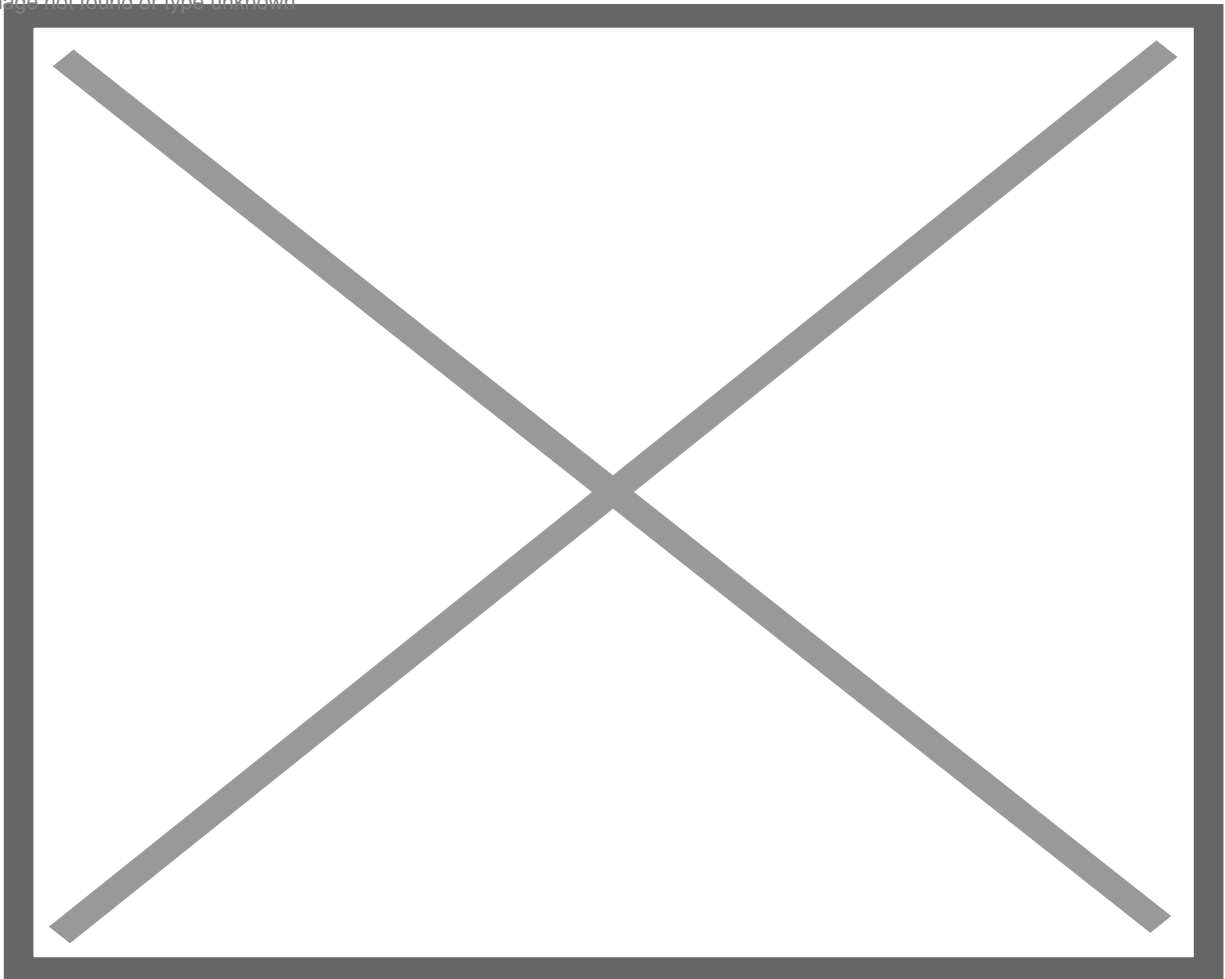
Public Finance Authority Reviews Progress in Hurricane Restoration

Efforts underway to fortify communication hubs and enhance storm resilience across the territory

Disaster Recovery / **Published On April 17, 2024 07:03 AM /**

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Homes in St. Thomas damaged by Hurricane Irma in 2017. By. REEMY-REEMZ PHOTOGRAPHY

Six years since hurricanes Irma and Maria struck the territory in September 2017, causing widespread devastation, the USVI continues its rebuilding process. At Monday's meeting of the Public Finance Authority, several agencies provided updates on ongoing recovery efforts.

The Office of Disaster Recovery, which is overseeing the billions of dollars in federal funding allocated to recovery projects, reported that as of February, over \$3.2 billion had been expended

out of the \$10 billion in projects that have been obligated.

The agency's goal is to have all remaining Federal Emergency Management Agency projects obligated by the end of this year, to ensure that the territory benefits from more generous matching funds requirements that will [expire in the coming months](#). Among the major projects that are currently underway or have been recently completed, according to ODR's update, is the Charles "Tappy" Seales Fire Station and Multipurpose Center, which [broke ground days ago](#).

Meanwhile, V.I. Next Generation Network CEO Stephan Adams said progress on hurricane restoration projects, while a priority for the agency, is challenged by the availability of funds. "We prioritize the grants ...and move them forward based upon operational cash flow since there's uncertainty on where the match will come from," he told PFA members during his update. One key area of concern for Mr. Adams is the fortification of the points where the agency's inter-island fiber optic cables come ashore.

"Our fiber access landing points [are] very critical. If those are damaged, the entire island of St. Thomas actually goes down if we have a break or storm damage on St. Croix," Mr. Adams explained. "So that's a high priority project. Regardless of the match, we will use operating funds to be able to get that project done," he continued.

A more generalized hurricane restoration project is also well underway, Mr. Adams told PFA members. "Those are 24 little buildings that you'll see on the side of the roads that holds our communication gear. We're hardening those, replacing the generators, and making them much more resilient for future storm events," he said, outlining an ambitious target for viNGN when it comes to its recovery projects. "Our goal is to build to get the majority if not all of our FEMA work done this year," Mr. Adams said.

PFA members also learned that cruise arrivals at the West Indian Company, despite a significant rebound in 2023 compared to the previous pandemic-impacted years, are still below pre-hurricane levels due to the loss of some cruise lines from the port. WICO CEO Anthony Ottley anticipates that arrival numbers will reach "normal averages" next year. WICO is also looking forward to the commencement of dredging work to deepen the harbor, which will allow larger cruise ships to visit. Work on the harbor is expected to begin in 2025, [pending federal approvals](#).