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Christiansted's Old Barracks Set for Revival with Humanities in Place Grant

The Mellon Foundation's \$200,000 grant aids VIAC in developing a dynamic cultural and educational center in Christiansted

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Old Barracks property on Hospital Street, Christiansted By. VIAC

The V.I. Architecture Center for Built Heritage and Crafts (VIAC) has secured additional funding to advance their project to transform the Old Barracks property on Hospital Street, Christiansted into an educational center dedicated to built heritage, historic preservation, architecture, and the building arts.

On Thursday, the VIAC announced that it had been awarded a \$200,000 Humanities in Place Grant from the Mellon Foundation. This grant, which according to the foundation supports “a

fuller, more complex telling of American histories and lived experiences”, will be used in strategic planning and design for the project. When complete, the Old Barracks property is expected to hold several spaces for community and cultural heritage displays and activities, in alignment with the Humanities in Place goal of encouraging innovative approaches to understanding and celebrating diverse histories.

“With this grant, our first from a private foundation, we begin to plan for and develop the content that will be featured in our exhibit, studio, auditorium, and library/archive that are part of our proposed development of the site,” said VIAC Board Chair Mary Dema. “This, according to our business plan, creates a cultural center in Christiansted that can become an attraction for residents and visitors as well.”

The project planning team, VIAC says, will now begin to engage with local stakeholders and experts for their input into the process.

Earlier this year, VIAC was tapped to receive \$850,000 in community project funding from the federal government for the Old Barracks project, a result of [successful community funding requests](#) from Congresswoman Stacey Plaskett that were included in the Consolidated Appropriations Act 2024. “The requests reflect the great priority my office places on the need for ...community development and to provide more economic opportunities in our most vulnerable populations,” Ms. Plaskett said at the time.

The Center was also able to attract funding to ensure that the history of the 256-year-old property is thoroughly researched and documented. A \$25,000 grant from the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands through the National Endowment for the Humanities is powering VIAC’s Storytelling project, which is currently gathering historical material with which to develop a curriculum, and conducting interviews for an eventual documentary.

VIAC was also recently able to create long-term security for the project with a [50-year lease](#) from the Virgin Islands government. “We are thankful to Governor Bryan, the 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands, and the Department of Property and Procurement for facilitating the acquisition of the lease, which is vital to our development efforts,” said Ms. Dema.