

DPNR Needs \$7 Million to Construct Archives at Charles Turnbull Library; Digitization Efforts Continue

While residents express concern for the territory's archives currently at Fort Christian in St. Thomas, DPNR Commissioner Jean-Pierre Oriol dismissed any fear of the archives "blowing away".

Government / **Published On June 04, 2024 06:01 AM /**

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Safeguarding the history of any one country is crucial to the preservation of culture and traditions. Unfortunately, the Department of Planning and Natural Resources continues to face challenges in archiving and digitizing artifacts and other materials.?

The matter was first raised by Senator Milton Potter who chaired Monday's meeting of the Committee on Disaster Recovery, Infrastructure and Planning. He reminded DPNR's commissioner Jean Pierre Oriol that the law mandates that the territory's archives be housed at the Enid Baa Library on St. Thomas. The legislator requested clarity on the department's "vision" for

a robust archival program.

Chief among DPNR's challenges, lawmakers learned, is the absence of a territorial archivist on staff. It's a hurdle that Mr. Oriol says they're actively trying to overcome. Conversations with former archivist Susan Lugo are currently underway, as DPNR attempts to design a request for proposals for the digitization of the archives. "Her knowledge of the archives is second to none," he declared. "During that process, we hope that we can be able to bring on board a territorial archivist so that that knowledge is then passed on to somebody [else]."?

Ms. Lugo's "level of expertise" he said, is necessary to carefully detail the role of the winning bidder. Among their responsibilities will be encoding the necessary metadata to make easy work of locating archived material.?

In 2014, the Enid Baa Library was identified as a home for the archives thanks in great part to its sturdiness. However, Mr. Oriol noted that prior to that decision, some \$2.5 million had been set aside to create an archival wing on the ground floor of the Charles W. Turnbull Regional Library on St. Thomas. A recent revisit of that library's plans revealed designs for a 3,000 square foot annex to the library—intended to serve as a physical archive—the cost of which would dwarf the allocated budget.

"That 3,000 square foot building would cost us approximately \$7 million," he revealed. "I don't know how I'm going to do it." Despite feeling some despair, Mr. Oriol reported that DPNR continues to work on ways to secure funding for the "shovel-ready project" based on an understanding that "archives need to be housed in a safe manner."

The archives once housed at the Enid Baa Library now sit at the fire station portion of Fort Christian in St. Thomas where concerns about their safety abound. "People have this fear that it's going to blow away," said Mr. Oriol, who dismissed that concern.

Nonetheless, the need for a dedicated archive remains. "We could see that building built within two years if we had \$7 million," he stated.