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Bill to Fund Pre-Construction of Charlotte Amalie Dredging Advances

Despite initial miscommunication, legislation securing \$1.4 million moves forward, paving the way for crucial harbor upgrades

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The Charlotte Amalie Harbor. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM

Bill No. 35-0262, a measure that seeks to appropriate \$1.4 million for pre-construction soft cost funding to prepare for the dredging of the Charlotte Amalie Harbor, was finally voted upon Thursday in the Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance after [miscommunication](#) caused it to be removed from the agenda of its originally scheduled hearing.

The governor's financial team who failed to attend the meeting later told committee chair Senator Donna Frett-Gregory that they mistakenly believed the bill would not be presented, as another

item requiring their presence was also removed from the agenda. Despite the presence of Port Authority officials, Ms. Frett-Gregory explained that she was “not inclined to proceed...absent of the representatives of the government that have to speak to whether the \$1,434,950 is in fact available to be expended from the Community Facilities Trust Fund.”

At the time, the delay frustrated Carlton Dowe, executive director of the V.I. Port Authority. Now, however, the VIPA team can breathe a sigh of relief as the measure easily moved forward to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary following brief assurances from V.I. Public Finance Authority Director, Nathan Simmonds.

“We support the appropriation of the \$1.4 million for the soft costs,” Mr. Simmonds said. Though the amount of money in the fund available for appropriations is only \$1.1 million, the PFA director explained that the “cash balance in the fund is over \$15 million. “We believe that there are substantial appropriations that will not be expended in the remainder of this fiscal year.” Additionally, the PFA expects that another \$3.4 million from the rum tax cover will be contributed to the fund. “Clearly, we can fund this appropriation,” was his guarantee.

?The \$1.4 million allocation is expected to fund permits and other action items relevant to the commencement of the dredging work in the Charlotte Amalie Harbor. Authorities have explained that dredging the harbor is necessary to maintain its capacity and [accommodate larger classes of cruise ships](#). The dredging project has been described as a means of ensuring a competitive advantage over other regional tourism destinations.