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Comprehensive Preparatory Work Underway for 70th St. John Celebration Festivities

Agencies across the board, from health to security, collaborate to ensure a world-class event filled with safety and splendor

Carnival / **Published On June 14, 2024 08:18 PM /**

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Opening of St. John Carnival in 2022.

The Division of Festivals is pressing full speed ahead in preparing for what they have described as a “world-class 70th [St. John] Celebration. The event is less than one month away, and collaborating stakeholders are working to make the celebration a resounding success. On Tuesday, they shared updates on preparatory efforts and safety considerations ahead of the event.?”

Ian Turnbull, director of the Division of Festivals told members of the Committee on Homeland Security, Justice and Public Affairs on Tuesday that their focus has been on “event logistics,

community, health and safety and location preservation for all Division of Festival-led events.” These include the Prince, Princess and Queen show, the boat race, the food fair, and the Fourth of July parade. Mr. Turnbull assured prospective patrons that his Division will continue working to “foster a seamless celebration.”

For the V.I. Police Department, safety and security are a top priority. Steven Phillips, chief of Police for the St. Thomas/St. John district, shared his observation that the celebration is a “significant contributor to our local economy” requiring “utmost efficiency and top-notch security.” Though hesitant to divulge specifics of their operational plans, Mr. Phillips assured lawmakers that VIPD strategies are “comprehensive [and] innovative.”?

“Our strategy of blending boots on the ground with digital surveillance has proven to be effective,” said Mr. Phillips. The VIPD is looking forward to utilizing the Centralized Real-Time Information Center, which allows for “instantaneous response and access to real-time surveillance of the celebration venues.”

Meanwhile, the V.I. Department of Health has already met with booth operators to discuss food safety protocols. The department is responsible for managing environmental health, safety and sanitation, overseeing food vendor inspection, monitoring waste management, permitting requirements and environmental assessments and cleanups. During the festivities on St. John, DOH enforcement officers will be primarily concerned with “insurance, safe food handling, preparation and compliance with time and temperature control measures.” According to Ruben Molloy, DOH assistant commissioner, “the Division of Environmental Health is committed to ensuring the safety, cleanliness and regulatory compliance of the upcoming St John's celebration.”?

DOH will work in tandem with the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs, who will ensure that vendors are “properly licensed or permitted and adhere strictly to the terms of their agreements.” DLCA Assistant Commissioner Horace Graham explained that their enforcement officers will “tackle the prevention of unauthorized or illicit commercial activities.” DLCA is also “intensifying efforts to ensure all entities involved in the production and or sale of alcoholic beverages comply with rigorous licensing and labeling standards.” The potential sale of alcohol to minors will be strictly monitored and is heavily discouraged.?

Patrons and individuals participating in J’Ouvert can expect a smoother celebration as the Department of Public Works plans to “repair potholes along the parade route in the upcoming weeks.” DPW will also provide barricades and construct the Governor’s review stand.

Effective waste management is another critical area. The Waste Management Authority will make large receptacles available to booth operators for waste disposal and clean the festival area in time for the following working day. A \$1,000 citation will be assessed for illegal dumping in and around the Celebration grounds by booth owners.

During Tuesday’s hearing, lawmakers seemed largely satisfied with preparations thus far. A comment by VIPD’s Steven Phillips that individuals with licensed firearms traveling to St. John for the celebration should keep them at home caught the attention of several senators. While Mr. Phillips clarified that it was merely a suggestion, the practice of bringing a gun to a public activity remains heavily discouraged as police officers work to prevent possible incidents. “When individuals are drinking and smoking, it’s a bad mixture and they don't have common sense sometimes,” the police chief said.?

The current rolling power outages affecting consumers on St. John also concerned legislators, who wondered about the potential disruptions to the festivities. The Division of Festivals, said Mr. Turnbull, has begun procuring backup lights and generators “because we do know that there is an issue with our power grid.” Extra lights are expected to be installed near the ferry boarding area “to at least get people to the boat.” Lawmakers also made repeated calls for additional lights and VIPD presence in the area designated for children.

Officials are also developing comprehensive crowd control measures, something that concerned Senator Novelle Francis Jr. During St. Croix’s Christmas Festival, when [several people were injured](#) following a stampede triggered by a loud noise.

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