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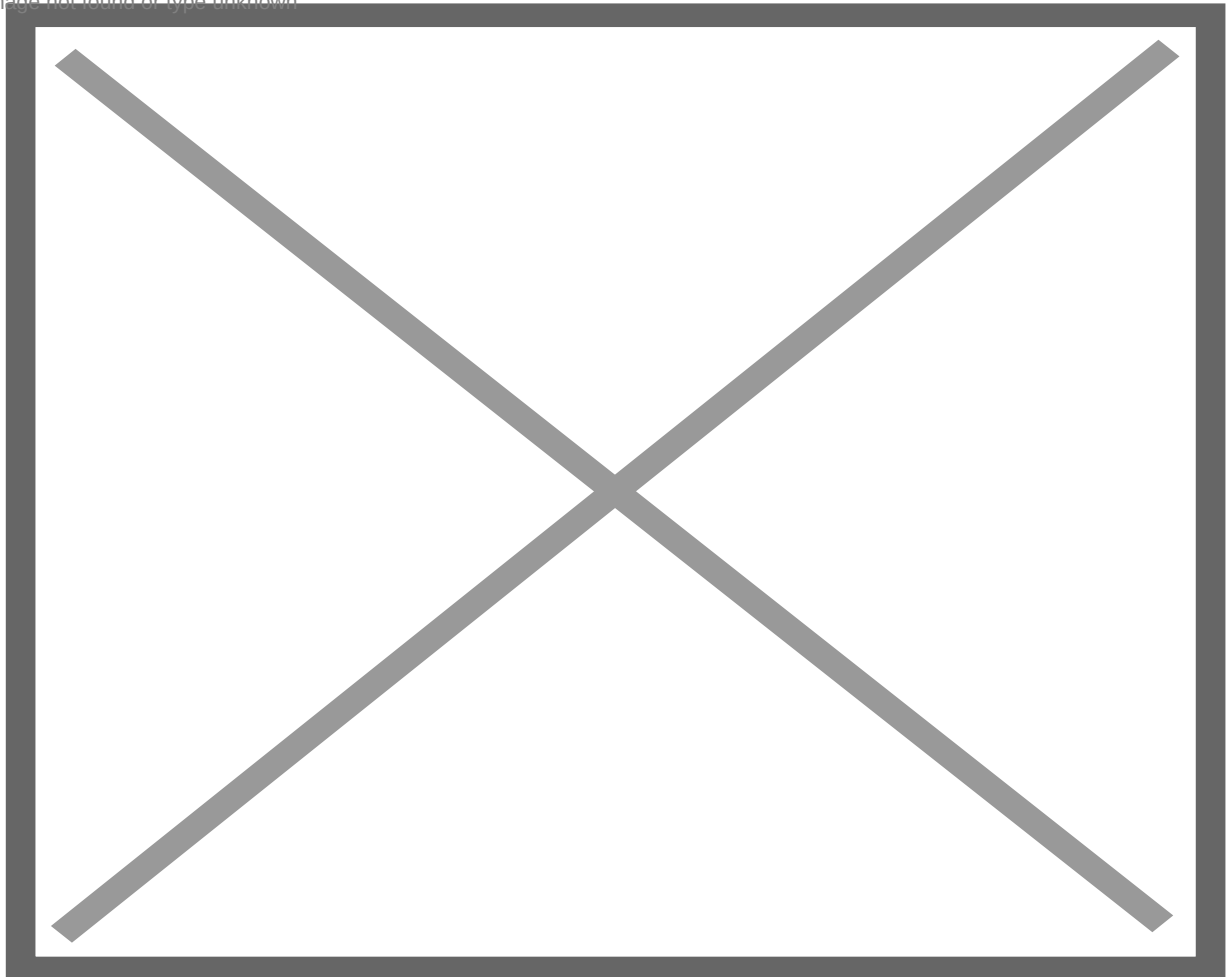
Public Works To Embark on Major Flood Mitigation Project: Cleaning and Rebuilding Swales in Historic Charlotte Amalie

Major drainage project by V.I. Department of Public Works to clean and rebuild historic swales, aiming to significantly reduce flooding in Charlotte Amalie

Development / **Published On July 10, 2024 06:02 AM /**

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The historic town of Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas on June 24, 2024 By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

“Hooray! Hippy hippy hooray!” State Historic Preservation Office Director Sean Krigger exclaimed, overjoyed to receive an application from the V.I. Department of Public Works for the cleaning and rebuilding of swales throughout the historic district.

HPC-26-2024 was presented at Tuesday's meeting of the St. Thomas/St. John Historic Preservation Committee by Paul Ferreras. Ferreras, who is working for Public Works via Island Roads and Custom Builders, told committee members, "Our project is to improve the drainage in town, and we're going to do that by means of cleaning out the swales." He noted that many of the rubble stone swales in the historic district of Charlotte Amalie are clogged. After clearing them, several swales will be rebuilt.

The swales on Back Street, and Garden Street will be addressed, as will those on several streets behind Market Square. "We're going to just rebuild them to improve drainage, to get rid of all the flooding problems in town," Mr. Ferreras noted. Cleaned and repaired, they will then be able to fulfill their function of routing water "downhill into the major catchment areas and out to the harbor," he said. Major work will also be done on rebuilding the culverts "behind the ball field," but because that location is outside the historic district, the aspect of the project was not covered in Tuesday's application.?

Within the historic district, Mr. Ferreras said that the swales currently below the sidewalks would be cleaned out with a high pressure hose, with sidewalks taken apart and rebuilt "if necessary to clean blockage." Those swales which had been filled in to accommodate vehicular traffics would be restored with bridges to facilitate driving, while allowing water to run underneath unimpeded.?

Mr. Ferreras indicated that the project team was "ready to go right now," only awaiting the relevant permits from the Department of Planning and Natural Resources to be able to "jump on this right away." The work is expected to take 12 to 18 months to complete.

Mr. Krigger expressed profound gratitude to DPW for deciding to move forward with the project which he said "has been a long time coming." According to him, SHPO and HPC officials "have been advocating and advocating for this project to take place." He recommended that the project begin with a "good, deep, general cleaning of all our historic gutters and swales," asserting that just that initial step would "significantly improve the drainage of our streets, our ghuts and so forth." He explained that the gutters in the street connect back to the larger ghuts, and when clogged, "backs up and causes the flooding that we've been experiencing for a number of years now, because this water can't get from the streets to those major ghuts."

Mr. Ferreras further noted that the project team will also have to relocate water meters that have been installed in some of the street gutters. "We're going to do the best we can to get them out of the direct flow of the gutter, because the point of the whole project is to allow the water to run down the swale uninterrupted," Mr. Ferreras noted. Any relocations would be done on a case by case basis in consultation with Mr. Krigger, board members and Mr. Ferreras agreed.?

To facilitate the work, Mr. Krigger offered to show Mr. Ferreras documents from the Danish National Archives which depict the original layout and placement of the historic street gutters. "I am truly excited and thankful for this job," he concluded – a sentiment that was echoed by St. Thomas HPC Chair Akil Petersen. "It means a lot to the district," he said, chuckling at Mr. Krigger's animated reaction.