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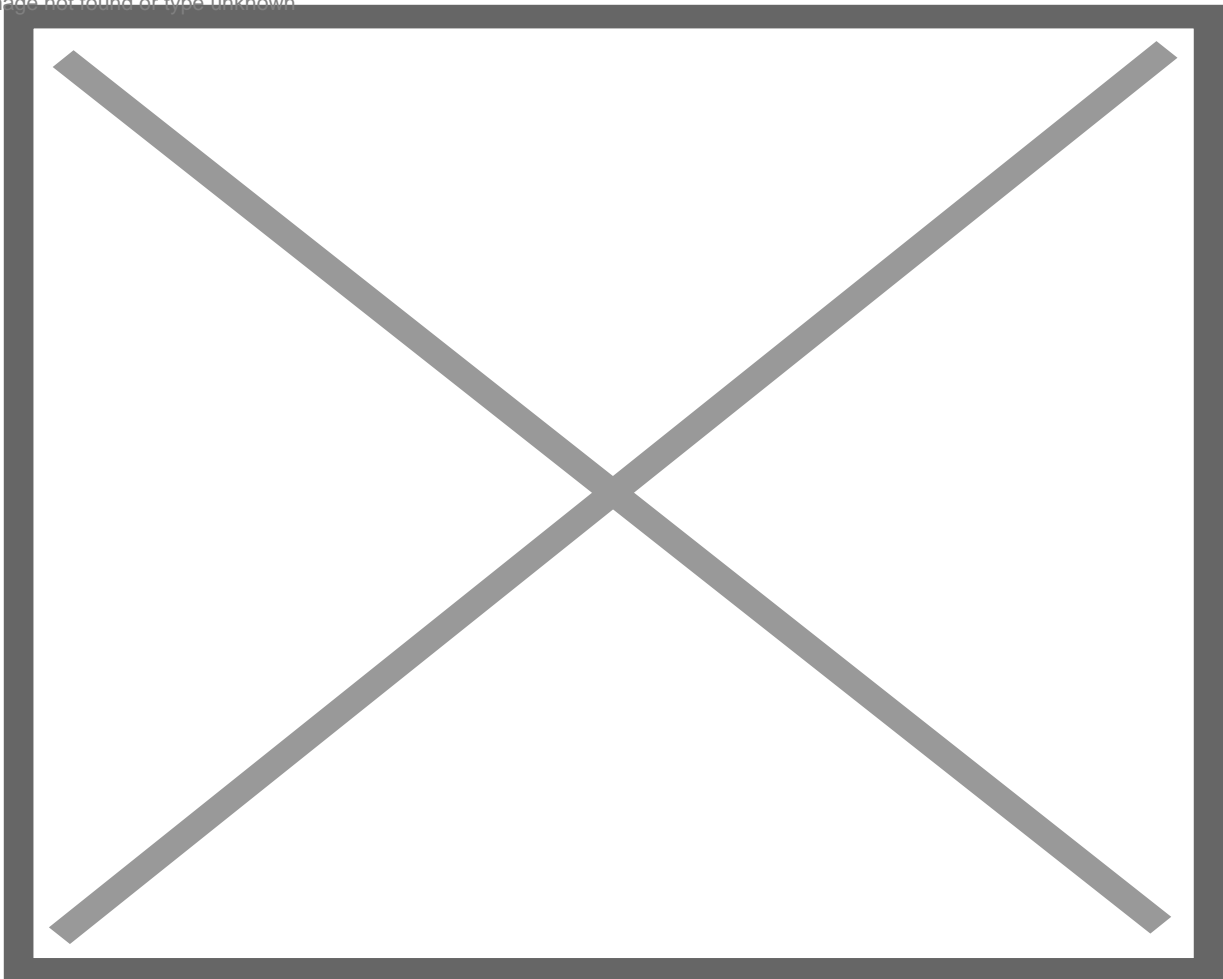
Lawmakers Approve Rezoning for \$14 Million Alva A. Swan Correctional Annex Rebuild

New facility will replace the one destroyed by hurricanes Irma and Maria, expanding from 80 to 207 beds, with plans to relocate neighboring businesses.

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Lawmakers have voted to rezone several parcels of land in Estate Nisky, St. Thomas, that will allow the Bureau of Corrections to undertake a \$14 million, [federally funded replacement project](#) of the Alva A. Swan Correctional Annex. The Annex was destroyed by hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017.

Before moving ahead with the demolition and rebuild, several parcels of land in the Subbase area would need to be rezoned from commercial to public. Territorial Planner Leia LaPlace-Matthew at the Department of Planning and Natural Resources testified before the Committee of the Whole

on Monday evening that it is necessary to bring the property to “zoning conformity.” Previously, an 80-bed facility, the new Annex is expected to “increase in building footprint” by encompassing six properties and will expand to become a 207-bed facility.

According to Ms. LaPlace-Matthew, “the rebuilt, expanded facility will allow for the return of 139 inmates who are housed in various out-of-territory facilities.” During their [budget presentation](#), the Bureau of Correctional provided details on a large number of Virgin Islanders housed on the mainland at a cheaper cost than those housed locally.

The BOC was represented by Assistant Director of Support Services, Peter Abrahams. He told lawmakers that the rezoning is not just a technical amendment, but “a critical step towards aligning our community's development with strategic goals of the Government of the Virgin Islands.” The Annex, once replaced, will be used to house individuals who have committed minor crimes, as well as detainees awaiting trial in St. Thomas. According to Mr. Abrahams, separate requests for proposals for the demolition and construction of the project are expected to be published later this year, with construction beginning at the end of 2025. The demolition and rebuild is expected to take 2 to 3 years.

“The system takes time,” said Mr. Abrahams to Senator Angel Bolques Jr., who remarked that the building had been “derelict for God knows how long.” The BOC is currently working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency on the technical processes related to the project. “We're seeing light now at the end of the tunnel.” Nevertheless, Mr. Bolques encouraged the Bureau to “try to speed up the process.”

Of 14 present senators, two would ultimately abstain from the vote, while Senators Dwayne DeGraff and Franklin Johnson voted against the rezoning measure. Earlier, Mr. Johnson had accused the BOC of being disingenuous. “You said to us that the cost to have a prisoner in the Virgin Islands was so exorbitant that you had to send them to the mainland,” he reminded Mr. Abrahams. It was based on this information that he questioned the statements made by Ms. LaPlace Matthew that overseas inmates would be housed locally.

“Don't come to the Senate telling us one thing, one time, and then come back asking us to do something different. It just doesn't add up,” he declared. He plainly stated, “I personally don't believe it costs us that \$300 a day” to house prisoners locally. He accused the BOC of inflating figures “to have all our prisoners in the mainland, away from their family and loved ones.” For him, constructing a “magnificent building” and subsequently relocating overseas inmates would simply raise costs?.

In the end, the bill was passed by the majority of legislators and will proceed to the governor's desk pending further action. Though there were no objections to the project during public hearings, there is a need to relocate individuals occupying some of the properties in question - including a woodwork shop. Lawmakers learned that none of the individuals in question had leases for the government-owned property, but efforts are being made to relocate them. Several lawmakers urged the government to be considerate when relocating the neighboring businesses, including the woodwork shop and an auto repair shop.