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VIPA Moves Forward with Charlotte Amalie Dredging After Public Meeting, Project to Launch in 2025

During a public hearing, VIPA CEO Carlton Dowe emphasized the necessity of the dredging project to maintain cruise traffic and ensure long-term growth, with new fees in St. Thomas/St. John beginning in 2025 to fund the two-year initiative

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

A request for proposals for the Charlotte Amalie harbor dredging project should be issued by the end of the month, with a bid awarded in January. That's according to V.I. Port Authority Chief Executive Officer Carlton Dowe, who was speaking on Tuesday evening at a public hearing to discuss the [additional fees and tariffs](#) that will partially fund the project.

Once the bid had been awarded, the project is expected to begin in the second quarter of 2025, and will likely take about two years to complete. “We have to also remind folks that there are all kinds of mitigating factors, world events, different things that can occur that could impact the scheduling as we go,” advised Mr. Dowe. However, day-to-day harbor operations would be worked around so as not to introduce inordinate delays.

As previously reported, port dues will increase by \$3, from \$6.84 to \$9.84, while wharfage fees will rise by \$0.44 from the current \$7.80 to \$8.24. The increase in wharfage fees will impact ships berthing at the WICO dock in Havensight from January 1, 2025, while VIPA itself will begin charging the new wharfage and port fees from April, but only in St. Thomas/St. John.

“The St. Croix district, there will be no change,” Mr. Dowe noted, explaining that total fees will remain at \$7 per passenger.

Mr. Dowe said the USVI, unlike many other ports with similar levels of commercial activity, must fund upkeep and maintenance out of pocket “Right next door in Puerto Rico, they just got through doing a 50-odd million dollar dredging at the San Juan harbor, all paid for by the Army Corps of Engineers, because that harbor is a federalized harbor,” Mr. Dowe said.

He disclosed that government officials “want to begin the process” of federalizing the Charlotte Amalie harbor as well, but noted that it could take “approximately about 10 to 12 years before it happens.” In the interim, “the needs of the community in terms of the dredging or maintenance...don’t go away.” Thus, the new fees are meant to help VIPA afford the work that will need to be done.

Even when [lawmakers appropriated \\$17 million](#) for the project almost a year ago, it was understood that VIPA would need additional funds to complete the work to the required specifications.

Asked about the risk that the higher fees might encourage ships to avoid Charlotte Amalie in favor of more inexpensive destinations, Mr. Dowe said “the risk of not doing it is greater than the risk that we are embarking on,” referring to the dredging project. He noted that Royal Caribbean, a major cruise partner for the territory, is onboard with the project. “They are not pushing back.” The cruise lines understand the necessity of the project, Mr. Dowe noted.