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\$900,000 Approved for Horse Training Facility on St. Croix

The 35th Legislature has allocated funds from the Communities Facilities Trust to construct a state-of-the-art equestrian training center in Estate Body Slob, focusing on jockey training, stable management, and veterinary programs

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The 35th Legislature has voted to appropriate a sum of \$900,000 to the Department of Sports, Parks, and Recreation to construct an equestrian training facility at Estate Body Slob in St. Croix. The affirmative vote comes at the close of a term marked by major concerns from lawmakers over the state of the territory's finances and appropriations not tied to the annual budget cycle.

Bill 35-0205 was special-ordered to the legislative floor by Senator Javan James during Wednesday's session to approve nominations, leases, and bills already passed in their various committees of jurisdiction. The funding source for the project is listed as the Communities Facilities Trust, which holds monies that can be used for "community and/or sports facilities or urban redevelopment projects . . . which projects shall be recommended by the Governor and subject to approval by the Legislature." According to the draft bill, a November 7th letter from Governor Albert Bryan Jr. "endorsed the appropriation of \$900,000" to DPSR.

The training facility seeks to create "opportunities for our young men and women to be able to learn about horse racing on a professional level," said Sen. James to his colleagues. It will focus on jockey training, an equestrian trainer program, stable hand and groom training, a veterinarian training program, and a breeding and genetics program. Construction is expected to take six months, followed by a pilot phase for the facility. DPSR will receive the funding in two tranches of \$450,000 each.

"We're going to make sure it's something good and is a win-win for the territory. This is something very new to the territory," noted Sen. James, [who did not run for re-election](#) and who will leave the legislature when his current term expires.

The proposed bill was welcomed by colleagues of the departing lawmaker, who considered it a means to develop the territory's equestrian industry, despite St. Croix's lack of a functioning horse race track. The Randall "Doc" James Racetrack continues to [face major construction delays](#).

"As we see horse racing and the facilities start to [come]back, I think it's a definite plus that we put in place the tools and the mechanisms for our horsemen," remarked Senator Alma Francis Heyliger. She applauded the decision to "invest in our people." Senator Franklin Johnson also found the establishment of such a facility necessary and timely. "We have produced some top jockeys in this territory without any kind of training," he noted.

Senator Angel Bolques Jr., who signed onto the bill as a co-sponsor, recalled observing children as young as eleven years old participating in the informal equestrian industry on St. Croix. "It keeps them doing something that they love. They have a passion for it," he stated. "It gives all of those young people an opportunity to learn the actual craft," Sen. Bolques said. Similarly, Senator Milton Potter considered it a "positive and constructive outlet."

"We really need to provide opportunities for our horse lovers to train their horses and to take care of their horses," added Senator Carla Joseph. Senate President Novelle Francis, for his part, suggested that the facility be named after the horse trainer Walter Macedon who "brought in over 30 horses to this territory over a long period of time...I think that would be a good way to recognize his contribution to horse racing."

The bill has now advanced to the governor's desk for final approval.

It will join a series of other bills and leases approved by the 35th Legislature. Among them is Amendment 35-1090 to non-germane bill 35-0412, which appropriates \$3,150,000 from the General Fund treasury of the Virgin Island to the Waste Management Authority "to pay the outstanding balance owed to United Resource Limited in the matter of Case No. SC 2020 CV 00493." That amendment was made by Senator Donna Frett-Gregory, and provides WMA with the funds to settle a payment dispute between the parties that stemmed from haulage services rendered in the aftermath of hurricanes Irma and Maria.

The Legislature also approved the nominations of [Dr. Kyza Callwood](#) to the UVI Research and Technology (RT) Park and [Julio Rhymer](#) as the new director of the Office of Management and Budget.

Several leases, including [Bill 35-0385](#) for land in Estate Nazareth to construct a FIFA-regulation soccer facility, also successfully passed Wednesday's legislative session.

Honors, including that of deceased VIFEMS Director Daryl A "Mousy" George Sr., and basketball coach Arthur "Gutu" Solomon, were also greenlighted.

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