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Renovated Walter I.M. Hodge Pavilion Unveiled After Four Years of Work

Public-private partnership delivers 248 affordable housing units in St. Croix, boosting the territory's housing inventory and providing relief to families in need

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The Walter I.M. Hodge Pavilion on Thursday, Dec. 12, 2024. By. GOV'T HOUSE

“Today we have transformed this pavilion into a beacon of hope and progress for our island,” said Emmanuella Perez-Cassius, director of Resident Wellness and Empowerment at the Walter I.M. Hodge Pavilion, under the patronage of the housing community's namesake.

Ms. Perez-Cassius was speaking at the grand opening of the affordable housing community on Thursday, celebrating what was described as “the power of partnership and collaboration in

building and rebuilding our beloved Virgin Islands.”

Started four years ago, the Walter I.M. Hodge renovation and rehabilitation was conducted in phases, with the first 82 units becoming [available for occupancy](#) last October. “This has been the most difficult and most rewarding project that I have ever worked on,” said Catherine Levinson, Senior Development Project Manager at MDG Design + Construction. Part of the complexity, she explained, came from managing the significant regulatory obligations to ensure a smooth flow of funding from federal partners including FEMA and HUD, along with coordinating efforts with local agencies including the V.I. Housing Authority and the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority.

James Benton of James Benton Construction, and Adrienne Williams-Octalien, Director of the Office of Disaster Recovery, underscored Ms Levinson's remarks about the complexity of the project. Mr. Benton noted the construction team of over 450 workers, as well as more than 200 vendors, all of whom had to be coordinated to deliver the product on time – actually two days ahead of schedule, he pointed out. Ms. Williams-Octalien spoke about the vast effort it took to review each of the 140 change orders that represented upgrades and improvements to the original project design. “I need everybody to join me and thank all the people behind the scenes that took this very, very complicated project and made it look like a piece of cake,” she urged.

“This community represents some of the best of what we can do with respect to affordable housing for members of our community,” said Noreen Michael, Commissioner of the Virgin Islands Housing Authority Board, noting that “housing is one of the social determinants of health.” Senate President Novelle Francis Jr. remarked that “today's grand opening shows us what is possible through the power of public-private partnerships.” He noted that having the Pavilion's 248 units fully completed “will give a critical boost to our housing inventory and bring much-needed relief to our territory's housing crisis.” Senator Francis called the new Walter I.M. Hodge Pavilion “the future of public housing in the territory.”

Referring to his recent trip to Washington, D.C., Governor Albert Bryan Jr. quipped that “there's nothing like coming home to your house and sleeping in your own bed.” For the families that will occupy the new units of the Pavilion, he predicted that “when they pull up to their house and they walk in, they're going to feel so good about themselves.”

However, “it's not only about creating that sensation,” Governor Bryan continued. “It's about stringing together a series of events and policies and agendas that will create successful Virgin Islanders.” He highlighted the confluence of factors that he believes will lead to the residents of “Safaralli”, as it is known, to embody that successful ideal, including the energy-efficient lighting that will lead to savings on electricity, the territorial parkland that abuts the property, the recreational pool that will be on site, the library under construction in downtown Frederiksted, and the Arthur Richards Elementary school that will serve the community's needs, among others. “All of those things linked together will produce self-sustaining Virgin Islanders,” he proclaimed.

Like other speakers before him, Governor Bryan made sure to salute the late Robert Graham, former executive director of the VIHA, who championed the project and poured significant energy into getting it off the ground. “I know he's smiling from somewhere when he looks down here,” the governor remarked.