

Fonseca's Attempt to Redraw Historic District Boundaries Rejected Over Allegations of Self-Interest

Lawmakers shot down Fonseca's proposal to remove several Charlotte Amalie properties from laws that govern the historic district, arguing the measure primarily served his interests as a property owner.

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Senator Ray Fonseca. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

An attempt by Senator Ray Fonseca to exclude several properties in Charlotte Amalie from the jurisdiction of the Charlotte Amalie Historic and Architectural Control District failed “miserably,” a descriptor ascribed by Senate President Novelle Francis.

On Wednesday, Mr. Fonseca moved amendment 35-1123 to Bill 35-0428, identified as the bill for non-germane amendments during the Legislative session. The amendment called for the exclusion of the properties beginning at the intersection of Borger Gade and Prindsesse Gade, proceeding east to Torvet Strade and continuing east to the intersection of Wimmelskafts Gade and Nye Gade. “This exclusion applies to all properties located on the northside of Prindsesse Gade and Torvet Strade,” explained Mr. Fonseca.

The motion was immediately objected to by Senator Carla Joseph. “It is changing the boundary line for the historical district in St. Thomas. We haven't had any feedback from the Historical Commission on this very substantive amendment,” she argued. Fonseca rebutted, telling his colleague that “this amendment will clarify the current historic boundary.” He maintained that the amendment “supports new development in our downtown area” and reminded lawmakers that a difference exists between “old and historic.”

“Historic means something significant happened in that location,” Fonseca argued. He tried to convince fellow lawmakers that his amendment would “prevent gentrification,” expounding that “gentrification is when the rich people come and buy up the poor people's homes and land because they are poor and don't have the money to develop it immediately.”

“There is blight and a bunch of old dilapidated buildings in unsanitary conditions. Many lack indoor plumbing. Many are falling down. The wood is old and rotting. The electrical wiring is a fire hazard,” the lawmaker lamented. He shared that currently, the cost to renovate buildings in these locations is as much as \$700 per square foot. “By eliminating the burdensome requirements...the owners will save approximately \$200 per square foot,” Fonseca claimed.

His colleagues were not convinced. Senator Dwayne DeGraff also voiced strong objection to Mr. Fonseca's request. The area, he said, “encompasses all the property in the historic preservation area. You can't just take out a part of it.” His skepticism was supported by Ms. Joseph, who was “interested in knowing the listing of all of the land owners in that area that we are going to be excluding...We can't do things that are just for some. We have to work with things for all.”

Comments from DeGraff seemed to suggest that Mr. Fonseca himself was one of those property owners. “Borger Gade encompasses my land. Your property is on the back street where you're making it a special interest. Don't do it,” the lawmaker warned. Indeed, in 2023, Fonseca was identified as a [property owner in violation](#) of the Historic Preservation Committee's rules, with a property owned by the senator painted in an unauthorized color.

At roll call, all lawmakers on the floor except Fonseca voted against his bid to exempt several properties from the jurisdiction of the HPC. After witnessing his eleven colleagues vote against the measure, the defeated lawmaker changed his affirmative vote to “nay”. Senators Diane Capehart, Javan James, and Franklin Johnson were absent at the time of the vote.

“The motion fails – miserably,” announced Senate President Novelle Francis while dismissing the amendment.