

The Virgin Islands Consortium

WAPA's Fifth Undergrounding Project Moves Forward in Christiansted's Historic District

The St. Croix HPC has given the green light for WAPA's latest undergrounding initiative, which includes burying power lines and installing 25 decorative streetlights. An archaeologist will be on-site to ensure historical artifacts are preserved.

WAPA / **Published On January 30, 2025 10:26 AM /**

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ST. CROIX — On Tuesday, a portion of the Water and Power Authority's ongoing efforts to move overhead electrical distribution lines underground received the green light from the St. Croix Historical Preservation Committee.

Peter Bonnes, president of FXB Engineering, presented the project to HPC on behalf of WAPA, detailing the fifth undergrounding initiative under WAPA's Hazard Mitigation Program. According to Bonnes, the project will involve burying distribution lines, transformers, and other electrical infrastructure along sections of Queen, Market, Company, King Cross, and Church Streets in Christiansted. Additionally, 25 decorative streetlights will be installed on poles throughout the area.

"The construction timeline is approximately 12 months, with a tentative start date of September 2025," Bonnes stated.

Because the project is being executed in a historic district, some extra considerations will be put in place, Mr. Bonnes noted. An archaeologist will be involved in the project, he told HPC members. "They will provide a scope of work, and they will also be on site during excavation," he said. A historic bridge within the project area would also be carefully bypassed so as not to affect the structure.

Concerns were raised about the decorative street lights that would be installed. Placement of the poles was an issue, with complaints that current utility poles installed on the sidewalk impede the passage of pedestrians, particularly those using wheelchairs. Meeting attendees also highlighted condemned poles that haven't been completely removed, expressing concerns that the installation of additional poles would only clutter the town further. Some questioned why, instead of on poles, the street lights could not be installed on buildings as they historically had been. "We could look at that," Mr. Bonnes said. "I certainly don't think there'd be any pushback from the funding sources, because it's actually going to be less money."

Archeologist Dr. Alexandra Jones wondered whether the 12-month timeline was too ambitious, given the likelihood of delays due to encountering historic and archeological finds during the excavation process. Mr. Bonnes admitted that the time estimate did not account for "any potential long term delays." However, both he and Sean Krieger, director of the State Historical Preservation Office, assured Ms. Jones that all due care would be taken to ensure that any archeological artifacts discovered would be handled appropriately. "We have a good track record of how we will deal with those in terms on contingencies," Mr. Krieger noted.

At the end of the discussion, all committee members present voted to approve WAPA's application.