

Additional Renovation Work and New Hotel Rooms Approved For Blackbeard's Castle by HPC

The St. Thomas/St. John HPC gave the green light to several applications, including new decking and hotel rooms at Blackbeard's Castle and a lighting upgrade for Bredgade Step Street, signaling continued momentum in local preservation efforts.

Development / **Published On May 14, 2025 05:54 AM /**

Janeke Simon **May 14, 2025**

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Blackbeard's Castle in St. Thomas, USVI.

On Tuesday, the St. Thomas/St. John Historic Preservation Commission approved renovation plans for Blackbeard's Castle, and the Bredgade Step Street, among others.

The St. Thomas Historical Trust has been working to restore the Bredgade Step Street for a number of years, said representative Kevin Qualls. Thus far, significant progress has been made

on repairing the stonework that makes up the steps. “Now you can walk the whole length up and down without any broken stones or holes or anything,” Mr. Qualls noted. Tuesday's application was for lighting.

Street lights along the step street no longer work, Mr. Qualls indicated. The Trust has therefore come up with a plan to run conduit through landscaping planters to install lighting at each landing along the way.

“I'm very pleased with the work and the progress made thus far,” said State Historical Preservation Office Director Sean Krigger. Asked to provide feedback, Mr. Krigger observed that the proposed lighting “is more on the modern take,” but said that in the context of the design, it would be quite unobtrusive. “Is it the intention of the Trust to pursue getting those street lights repaired,” he inquired?

Mr. Qualls was not optimistic. “We're trying our hardest,” he responded. “Anyone who knows anyone at WAPA is welcome to help.” The lights have been non-functional since prior to the 2017 hurricanes, he told HPC members.

The Water & Power Authority should ideally be the entity providing power to the new lighting that will be installed as well, committee members advised Mr. Qualls. While the offer of a connection from a private business was seen as a kind gesture, liability issues made that prospect a non-starter. “I think that it's a public street and therefore completely should be WAPA's responsibility,” said acting HPC chair Enrique Rodriguez.

Meanwhile, the work on Blackbeard's Castle would entail the addition of decking, the continuation of glass railing to the side of the hotel, a new stone staircase, and two additional hotel rooms. With no objections from Mr. Krigger, board members easily approved the application.

The application from the St. Thomas Historical Trust, as well as from five other individuals desiring to make repairs or improvements to their historic-area properties, were also approved with little issue.

Towards the end of the meeting, Mr. Rodriguez highlighted the raft of approvals, saying that he would “like to break that perception that we are anti-development or anti-progress.”

“We continually show that the St. Thomas/St. John Historic Preservation Commission is very forward thinking and looking to develop our town.”