

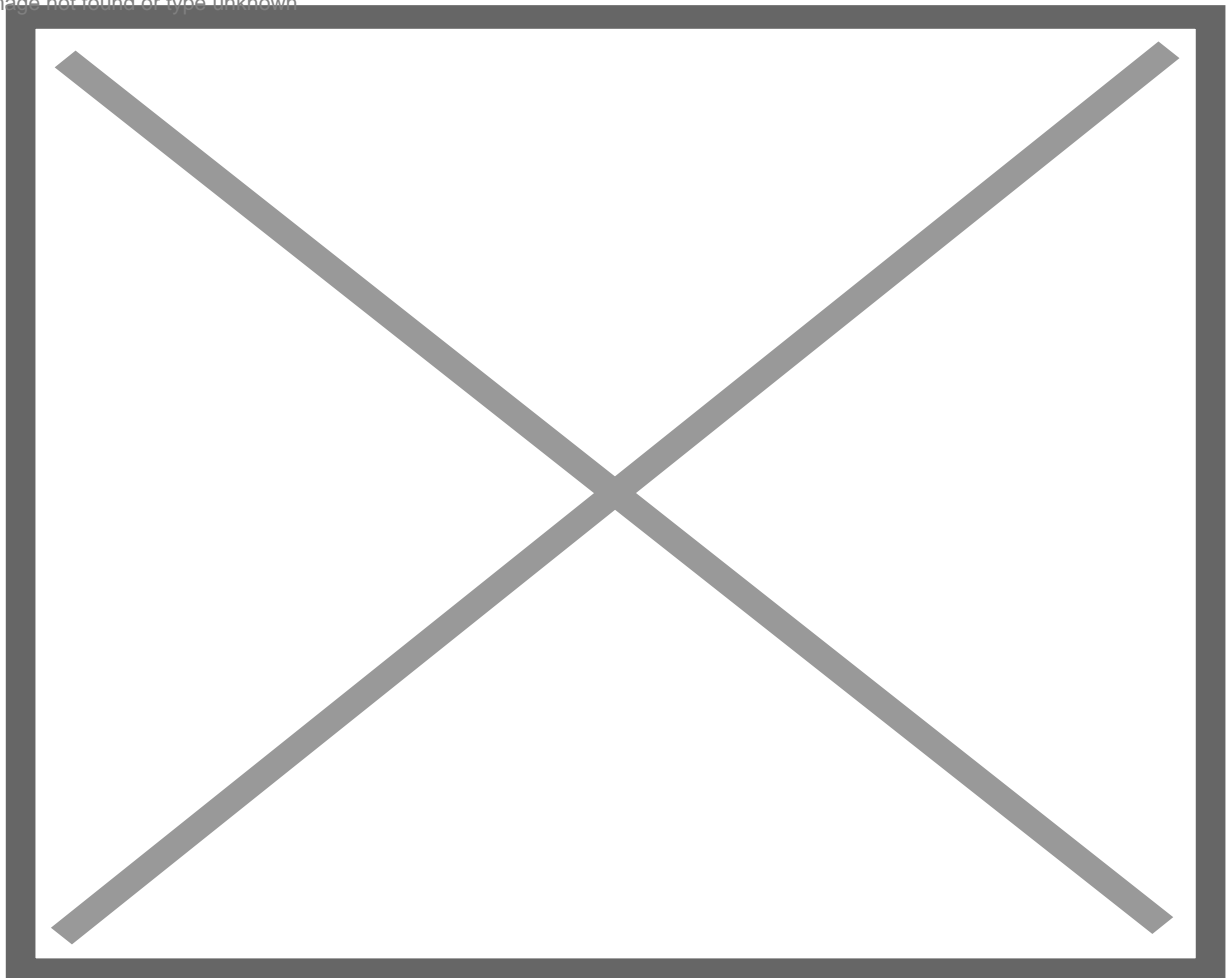
Waste Management Bets on New \$180 Annual Waste Fee and St. Thomas Service Shift to Balance FY2026 Budget

To close budget gaps, WMA plans to implement a \$180 annual waste fee via property tax bills starting this month, aiming to raise \$6.8M in year one as it shifts St. Thomas to house-to-house collection, fills staff vacancies, and curbs rising service costs.

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The board of the Waste Management Authority met on Tuesday to approve their annual budget for fiscal year 2026, ahead of the legislative budget cycle scheduled to begin next week.

Board chair Derek Gabriel began by commending interim CEO Darryl Griffith for presenting the figures in a timely manner. “This is the earliest that we've received a budget submission since I've

been on the board,” he noted.

According to Mr. Griffith, “the biggest difference between this budget and last year's is the true price of garbage collection services.” He noted that collection on St. Croix cost the authority almost \$6 million: \$3.5 million for house-to-house collection, \$1.3 million for bin sites, \$500,000 for green waste disposal and \$585,000 for government agencies and public housing.

In St. Thomas, house-to-house garbage collection is currently limited and costs the Waste Management Authority just \$147,000 annually. However, Executive Director Nigel Griffith told board members that WMA plans to shift away from its current reliance on bin sites by significantly expanding house-to-house collection. “I want to start increasing the house-to-house garbage collection and reducing the number of bin sites that we have,” he said.

To support this transition, WMA is planning a pilot program that uses smaller vehicles to navigate narrow roadways and collect waste directly from homes. These vehicles will then transfer the trash to larger trucks stationed on main roads. If the strategy proves effective, the agency will begin phasing out many of the more than 40 existing bin sites across St. Thomas. Currently, WMA spends \$2.6 million on bin site collection alone, compared to just \$147,000 for house-to-house service. With additional costs including \$250,000 for a convenience center, \$500,000 for green waste, and \$203,000 for government and public housing collection, St. Thomas’s total waste collection budget stands at \$3.6 million.

On St. John, Mr. Griffith said that the total was \$2.8 million – \$1.9 million to remove bins, \$812,000 for barge services, and \$35,000 for port fees.

Across all three islands, WMA spent \$12.4 million on garbage collection. “Before, Waste Management never truly covered the cost for doing this, which was always my issue,” Mr. Griffith declared.

In response, WMA is gearing up to implement a fee for solid waste collection, disposal and maintenance. “The Authority is going to start advertising this fee for the public starting this month,” Mr. Griffith disclosed. It is anticipated that the fee – \$180 per year charged to property taxes – will bring in revenues of over \$6.8 million in the first year, rising to \$9.8 million in subsequent years. “This will allow us to take a bite out of the garbage collection fee,” Mr. Griffith said, noting that only about half the requisite amount will be covered. Nevertheless, “it's going to give us the first leg,” he said.

Wastewater disposal services were another major cost center for the WMA, a \$5 million annual expense. The majority of that expenditure is to conduct emergency repairs on broken waste water lines. Complicating matters, Mr. Griffith noted that disbursements from the Sewer Wastewater Fund have been zero for the year to date despite a balance of over \$1.8 million. “We're going to need help from the Senate and from the board...to get to finance so that those funds can make their way to Waste Management,” Mr. Griffith said.

Other major budgetary expenses for WMA include repair and maintenance at \$1.3 million, landfill services at \$5.9 million, and personnel at \$20 million, the agency's biggest expense. Part of that sum is allocated for the 48 vacant positions that the interim CEO says WMA is “desperately trying to fill right now.”

Altogether, Mr. Griffith – employed as the agency's chief financial officer in his substantive role – was confident that he and his team was able to put together “a true balanced budget this year, which will be the first time that I'll be able to present the true budget to the Legislature that we're

also presenting to the Board of Directors.”

Board members were generally complimentary of the work that went into the timely preparation of the budget figures. Conn Davis Jr., said that he wanted to see a comprehensive listing of all WMA assets and their current condition, so that “we can kind of close that chapter and understand what we have.”

Jean-Pierre Oriol, commissioner of the Department of Planning and Natural Resources, noted that the budget, having only accounted for half of the funds required for garbage collection on St. Croix, could not fairly be called “balanced.” He also suggested that estimates for collection of the new fee were optimistic. He was also concerned that there was duplication of efforts between WMA staff and contractors, given the similar amounts spent on personnel and professional services. He suggested exploring whether the need for at least some of the 46 vacancies might be eliminated by an internal restructuring exercise. “I think there needs to be an exercise in reviewing your existing staff and whether or not people can be repurposed,” he said. “There is some rebalancing that has to be done,” Mr. Griffith agreed.

At the end of the discussion, board members unanimously approved the WMA's \$53.6 million budget for Fiscal Year 2026.