

Hogensborg Solar Farm Goes Live, Giving St. Croix Capacity to Generate Over Half of Island's Energy

St. Croix now ranks among the world's top solar adopters per capita, with the new 12-megawatt facility pushing renewable energy capacity to 26 megawatts—enough to meet more than half of the island's typical 45-megawatt peak demand.

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A portion of the Estate Hogensborg Solar Farm. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM.

St. Croix's newest sustainable energy facility officially opened on Friday, as government officials and Water and Power Authority representatives gathered at VI Electron's 12-megawatt solar farm in Estate Hogensborg—located just off the first right turn heading west after the Williams Delight

traffic lights.

This brings solar capacity on the Big Island to 26 megawatts, WAPA Chief Executive Officer Karl Knight said. With a peak energy load of 45 megawatts, solar power can now comprise over half of the energy generated daily for St. Croix.

“We are dawning a new era here at WAPA, and you are here to witness that here today,” said Mr. Knight at the ribbon cutting event. “This is not your father's power company.”

Despite the strides represented by Friday's ribbon-cutting ceremony, Mr. Knight insisted that the utility was not yet ready to pass on savings to the consumer. “I owe everybody under the sun,” he said, referring to WAPA's financial position. Deferred maintenance on equipment was also a challenge to be overcome. The [mandated rate cut by the Public Services Commission](#) “puts me in an awkward position,” Mr. Knight admitted. Nevertheless, “the fact that we are having a public debate on what to do with fuel savings for WAPA, that's progress.” He later told the Consortium that WAPA expects to be ready in about a year to begin passing savings on to ratepayers. In the meantime, the utility plans to meet with the PSC to urge a reconsideration of the timing. If that effort fails, the matter may ultimately need to be resolved in court, Mr. Knight indicated.

Mr. Knight vowed to press on with renewable energy progress, stating that the next solar facility to come online will be in Estate Fortuna in St. Thomas. “We're taking the road show to St. Thomas next,” he declared.

According to VI Electron CEO Christian Loranger, the U.S. Virgin Islands is adding “more low cost and renewable energy on the grid per capita than almost any other place on earth.” The territory, he said, “is building 11 times more kilowatts per person than the United States of America mainland, nine times more kilowatts per person than China, and 33 times more kilowatts per person than Australia.” He expressed his gratitude to the multitude of people who co-ordinated their efforts to ensure the success of this and previous solar projects, and reminded those listening that “when all of the projects are done, these projects will get transferred back over to the Virgin Islands, where they truly belong.”

Donald Cole, a board representative of the V.I. Renewable and Affordable Power Corporation (VIRAPC), took attendees through a brief history of failed energy projects stretching back over four decades. “What was different with Christian and the myriad of people who come here to turn trash into energy, is that Christian had his own land,” Mr. Cole said. “He had the capacity. He had built these things out,” he continued. Mr. Cole said he joined the VIRAPC after having retired from government service, “because I wanted to see the people of the Virgin Islands get affordable and reliable energy.” The official ribbon cutting of the Hogansborg solar facility is one step closer to that dream.

Representing the 36th Legislature, Senator Carla Joseph commended Mr. Loranger for being able to successfully navigate an often-grueling approvals process with the PSC. She also heaped praise on WAPA CEO Karl Knight and his team, “because you are making things happen.”

The tenacity of Mr. Loranger in seeing the project through was also noted by Governor Albert Bryan Jr. in his remarks, who joked that the VI Electron logo should be a mule. “Christian is the stubbornest person I ever met, and [it's] not an idle stubbornness. He's convicted to make things happen.” Governor Bryan admitted to being initially skeptical that Mr. Loranger's lofty plans could come to fruition, but said that he ultimately decided that the potential reward for the territory was worth the risk. The ultimate success of the solar projects thus far, he said, is “an

opportunity to teach our children that hard work pays...it's an opportunity to learn that partnership with new friends is okay, and partnerships with the government and private [sector] work really well.”

Referencing [an interview](#) with the Consortium earlier in the week, Governor Bryan declared that “if there is to be a legacy, I want my legacy to be that I have told Virgin Islanders that sacrifice and hard work, determination, collaboration, trust is what is going to bring us forward.”

With that, all that was left to say were a few words of prayerful gratitude before the territory's latest solar project was officially energized for the first time.

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