

Senators Express Shock Over \$2 Million Bathhouse Cost as Magens Bay Projects Move Forward

During budget hearings, Magens Bay Authority said its \$2M bathhouse project stems from RFP bids approved by FEMA. Lawmakers remained skeptical, but officials noted the figure covers construction, consulting, paperwork, and storm resiliency.

Senate / **Published On August 20, 2025 05:25 AM /**

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An aerial shot of Magens Bay beach in St. Thomas, boasting 1.5 million visitors annually.

ST. THOMAS — Senators expressed shock during a budget hearing Monday after learning that the planned reconstruction of a bathhouse at Magens Bay will cost the Magens Bay Authority \$2 million.

The project, listed among the Authority's FY2026 facility improvements, will rebuild Bathhouse #1, which suffered "extensive damage" during the 2017 hurricanes. General Manager Monique Simon explained that the new bathhouse will be modern, ADA-compliant, and designed to withstand coastal conditions.

Committee Chair Senator Novelle Francis appeared stunned by the figure, repeating the \$2 million amount several times. "Did I misunderstand you?" he asked. "I just can't fathom \$2 million for a bathhouse."

Ms. Simon responded that the project went through a formal RFP process, with several bidders submitting proposals. She said the final estimate was reviewed and approved by FEMA, which accounted not only for construction costs but also for permits, consulting, paperwork, and other associated expenses.

Still, senators remained unconvinced. Senator Hubert Frederick echoed the concern, telling Ms. Simon, "I'm not bright enough to figure out why you would need a \$2 million bathroom." He asked whether the project included unique features. Ms. Simon repeated that every line item was vetted through FEMA's review process, adding that a comparable facility in Smith Bay carried a similar price.

In addition to the bathhouse, the Authority plans to renovate Shed #1, improve a pedestrian bridge, and upgrade the septic system at Bathhouse #2.

The Magens Bay Authority, which is financially self-sufficient, projects operating expenses of \$3,646,021 for Magens Bay and Smith Bay Park in FY2026. Roughly 63 percent of that total will cover payroll for 53 employees and 37 part-time staff. The Authority also reported eight vacancies, including three lifeguard positions. Projected revenue for the year is \$4.68 million.

While the additional projects drew little objection, the \$2 million bathhouse figure dominated the discussion. Senators Francis and Frederick pressed Ms. Simon for more justification, while she maintained that the RFP process and FEMA's approval validated the estimate.