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Walter I.M. Hodge Pavilion Honored with Two National Awards for Excellence in Affordable Housing Revitalization

The Virgin Islands Housing Authority and MDG Design & Construction have received two national awards recognizing the Walter I.M. Hodge Pavilion redevelopment on St. Croix, hailed as a model of resilience, innovation, and partnership in affordable housing.

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The Walter I.M. Hodge Pavilion.

The V.I. Housing Authority and MDG Design & Construction have announced that the Walter I.M. Hodge Pavilion has earned two major national recognitions — the 2025 Rural Community Impact Development of Distinction from the Novogradac Journal of Tax Credits and a 2025

Affordable Housing Award of Merit from the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO).

The honors celebrate the success of the pavilion's large-scale revitalization, which has transformed the Frederiksted housing community through innovation, sustainability, and strong local partnerships.

Completed between 2022 and 2024, the project marked the first phase of VIHA's long-term plan to modernize its public housing portfolio across the U.S. Virgin Islands. The redevelopment of Walter I.M. Hodge Pavilion used a creative funding structure to complete comprehensive updates that preserve long-term affordability while enhancing quality of life, resiliency, and operational efficiency for residents.

"These two prestigious awards highlight the transformative impact of public-private partnerships and the resilience of our St. Croix community," said Lydia Pelle, Chief Operating Officer of VIHA. "Walter I.M. Hodge Pavilion is more than just a housing development; it's a symbol of opportunity and resiliency for Virgin Islanders. VIHA and our incredible partners at MDG Design & Construction are proud to continue leading the charge in reimagining affordable housing, and these recognitions affirm our work."

VIHA Executive Director Dwayne Alexander echoed that sentiment, calling the recognition "a powerful reminder of what we can achieve when vision, resilience, and collaboration come together for the people of the Virgin Islands." He said the project represents "dignity, opportunity, and long-term stability for our families on St. Croix" and reaffirmed VIHA's "unwavering commitment to transforming public housing into thriving communities across the Territory."

Originally constructed in 1971, Walter I.M. Hodge Pavilion sustained severe storm damage from Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017, leaving more than 100 of its 248 units uninhabitable. The rehabilitation restored and modernized every apartment, incorporated storm- and wind-resistant features, and improved landscaping and communal spaces to strengthen resilience and encourage community engagement.

The project also funded a robust resident wellness and empowerment program called Bright Path, designed to support education, employment, and overall wellbeing. As part of this initiative, general contractor J. Benton Construction helped generate local economic growth through job creation and subcontracting opportunities for St. Croix residents. More than \$11 million in contracts were awarded to Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprises (M/WBEs), and over 250 Section 3 hires were made.

Community engagement has been central to the project's success. Since 2022, residents have participated in a variety of events — including a job fair hosted by J. Benton Construction, a youth basketball clinic with prizes and trophies led by Senator Kurt Vialet, a book donation event organized by the Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, multiple health and wellness fairs, and a holiday celebration for residents.

The rehabilitation was made possible through complex financing and interagency collaboration. It featured the first use of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) program in the Virgin Islands, and the first application of the Community Development Block Grant–Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) program for a housing project. Additional funding came from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and 9% Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTCs).

VIHA and MDG coordinated across multiple federal agencies to meet all regulatory requirements and successfully deliver the project.

From the official Novogradac press release, Rebecca Arthur, MAI, Partner with the Valuation Group of Novogradac and Chair of the Nashville conference, said: “These awards are a great example of the extensive possibilities in affordable housing. This year, we highlight a variety of types of housing in a wide range of locations around the country. They’re an example of why affordable housing is so important and impactful.”

In a joint statement from NAHRO, President George Guy and CEO Mark Thiele praised the year’s honorees:

“The affordable housing crisis is a national challenge, but every solution begins at the local level. This year’s winners represent agencies of every size and setting, including rural, urban, and suburban communities that range from small to large. What unites them is a shared purpose: creating opportunity, advancing community priorities, and serving with both imagination and compassion. Their programs demonstrate what leadership in action looks like, from redeveloped housing and health initiatives to workforce succession planning, AI integration, and educational programming that opens doors for the future.”

The Virgin Islands Housing Authority extended appreciation to its partners, including HUD, FEMA, VITEMA, the Office of Disaster Recovery (ODR), the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority (VIHFA), Merchants Bank of Indiana, Goldman Sachs Bank, J. Benton Construction, LLC, and Cost Control Company, Inc.

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