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PFA Awards More Than \$775 Million for Territorywide Construction Projects, Including St. Thomas Schools, St. Croix Senior Home, and Fire Stations

Contracts include \$268.7M for Suffolk-CBNA's St. Thomas Education Bundle, \$69.5M for J. Benton's Herbert Grigg Home on St. Croix, \$424.5M for KHVI's East End Infrastructure project, \$8.7M for fire stations, and \$2.7M for warehouse services.

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Ivanna Eudora Kean High School on St. Thomas, one of five schools included in the \$268 million education reconstruction bundle approved by the Public Finance Authority

The recovery push across the territory continued this week, as the Public Finance Authority approved several contracts for major construction projects and bundles across the territory.

The first item on the agenda was a contract amendment for the Suffolk-CBN joint venture's work on the St. Thomas education bundle. This tranche of work includes the demolition and rebuilding of the Ivanna Eudora Keane High School, Lockhart K-8, Jane E. Tuitt Elementary, Yvonne Milliner Bowsky Elementary and Emmanuel Benjamin Oliver Elementary schools. The renovation of the Administrative Center is also included in this project bundle.

The initial contract awarded for this bundle was in the sum of \$38.1 million, which was expected to cover the costs of project initialization and design work. The contractor has made some significant progress in that regard, reported Office of Disaster Recovery Director Adrienne Williams-Octalien. With just over \$12 million of the initial sum expended thus far, designs on each of the sub-projects in the bundle have advanced between 20 and 30 percent. As the design phase progresses, Ms. Williams-Octalien said that it was now time to “move forward with early work packages.” This early work includes testing for hazardous materials, and structural engineering investigation, analysis and modeling among other things, said the ODR director. Making plans for accommodating students displaced from the Jane E. Tuitt elementary school within the Ulla F. Muller school compound is also included in that work package.

Ms. Williams-Octalien expects demolition work on the Administrative Center to begin next month, with the demolition of Lockhart and Emmanuel Benjamin Oliver schools slated for the beginning of 2026. The federal shutdown has introduced some delays, as demolition work planned for this year is still awaiting approvals from federal agencies including FEMA, she told PFA board members.

Altogether, the contract extension for the CBNA-Suffolk Joint Venture will provide an additional \$268.7 million dollars to advance work in the St. Thomas education bundle. This sum includes \$168.7 million for the current phase of work and \$100 million for “construction support” that anticipates the next phases of the projects, Ms. Williams-Octalien said. Work on the St. Thomas education bundle is expected to wrap up in 2030. “We are looking at five schools in five years...that will be phenomenal,” she declared.

Governor Albert Bryan Jr. cautioned that achieving that kind of timeline will heavily depend on a stable environment moving forward. “That's if everything goes right – no crazy federal movements, no economic shutdowns, no global pandemics,” he cautioned. “That's also pending no new governor stopping everything and deciding we need to go in a different way,” he continued, alluding to his term-limited departure from office following next year's elections.

Apart from approving additional funds for ongoing project work in the St. Thomas education bundle, the PFA board also moved forward with new projects, approving a contract for the reconstruction of the Herbert Grigg Home for the Aged on St. Croix. Of the three responses to the request for proposals, J Benton Construction was deemed to be the most suitable. Their total cost estimate of \$69.5 million was \$10 million lower than the highest bidder, and only \$2.2 million higher than the lowest bid. The evaluation team also looked favorably on the winning bidder's qualifications, background, and experience for this kind of project.

The initial award for the project will be in the sum of \$25.8 million, which will cover pre-construction services as well as early work packages, representing the initial 30 months of work. “At that point, we return to the governing board for a minimal number of amendments to the contract so we can get to the final guaranteed maximum price for this project, while simultaneously seeing construction progress,” Ms. Williams-Octalien noted.

Concerns about J. Benton's capacity to manage this in addition to the other major projects the company is undertaking simultaneously were allayed by the ODR Director. "We are moving at the right pace," said Ms. Williams-Octalien. She cautioned that challenges for manpower and resources will arise as recovery projects move into the construction phase, but maintained that as of now, the situation is under control.

Looking ahead, however, "all of these contractors...have presented their plan to augment the local workforce, because that is a given," Ms. Williams-Octalien noted. "Many of them are saying that they are going to call on their national and their global networks to be able to augment the current staff, and also for the specialty staff," especially for facilities such as the hospitals and schools, she continued. "What we're looking at [is] their plan for economies of scale and how they're going to use these staff across multiple projects." Maximizing efficiency across these massive projects is the entire ethos behind Rebuild USVI, Ms. Williams-Octalien explained.

The St. Thomas East Horizontal Infrastructure bundle was also awarded during the PFA's Wednesday meeting. This bundle addresses water, power and wastewater needs across the defined geographical area. The contract, for an initial value of \$424.5 million, was awarded to KHVI, a collaboration between Kiewit Infrastructure South Company and Haugland VI. As with other Rebuild USVI bundle projects, the work will be split into phases. The contract currently covers the first two phases, pre-construction and early work packages, which are expected to be completed within 30 months.

The PFA board then turned to the territory's fire stations. Four of them are included in this bundle: Cotton Valley fire stations on St. Croix, the Fortuna and George B. Scott fire stations on St. Thomas, and Cruz Bay fire station on St. John. Of the two responsive bidders for this bundle, Person Services Corporation was adjudged the best fit for the contract. The contract, awarded for the first two phases of work, will cost up to \$8.7 million, while the total value of the bundle is expected to be just under \$42 million. Pre-construction and early work packages are expected to be completed within two years, Ms. Octalien-Williams anticipated.

Finally, the PFA awarded a \$2.7 million contract to Fabians Trucking, to "provide warehouse management and security services for material storage sites." The sum covers one year's worth of services, with two options to renew for an additional year each. This was actually a contract amendment, explained Ms. Williams-Octalien, which reduced the total sum available by \$2.4 million, to ensure that the provided services aligned with the current needs of the EnvisionVI project it is supporting.

Following these awards, the ODR Director noted that only two more bundles remain to be contracted out to reach the goal of \$8 billion awarded by the end of 2025. "I just want to take a second to say awesome job," Governor Bryan declared. Ms. Williams-Octalien responded by giving credit to her colleagues, to whom she referred as the "Super PMO Team." Chief Engineer of the Department of Public Works Tawana Nicholas was singled out for praise by Ms. Williams-Octalien. "She stays up with me late at night when we're doing this," the ODR director disclosed.

Nevertheless, board members insisted that the soft-spoken Williams-Octalien take her share of the credit for her leadership through this complex process. "You really are a leader," said board member Dorothy Isaacs. "You have to give credit where credit is due."