

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Government House Proposes Zoning Change to Allow Microbreweries and Microdistilleries in Virgin Islands

Senator Kurt Vialet welcomed the governor's proposal to permit small distilleries, recalling his similar 2021 legislation that was repealed after public backlash. Lawmakers now appear united on modernizing the territory's brewing laws.

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A proposal from Government House to expand zoning restrictions to allow for microbreweries and microdistilleries is expected to come to the Senate floor for deliberation in the near future.

According to Jean Pierre Oriol, commissioner of the Department of Planning and Natural Resources, “the proposed measure for the small-scale distilleries was transmitted on October 1, 2025 by the Office of the Governor for consideration.”

As Mr. Oriol explained, the territory’s laws were amended in 1972 to prohibit the fermentation of rum products on agriculturally-zoned land. He reminded lawmakers that “the intent was just to protect Cruzan Rum.” The law does not prohibit vodka or rye distilleries, for example.

But as Mr. Oriol noted, there is a “booming craft distillery market here in the territory right now.” He referenced producers like Leatherback Brewery, Brew STX, and St. John Brewers.

“The impetus was for us to get into the 21st Century, [and] create a definition for micro distillery and micro brewery,” explained Mr. Oriol. Microbrewers will be limited to 100,000 proof gallons a year, he said. He offered Captain Morgan, which produces roughly 12 million gallons a year, as a comparison.

“I know that there’s going to be a lot of economic value, especially with the cover over and all of that,” noted Senator Angel Bolques Jr. He wondered whether the proposed measure was in line with the Comprehensive Land and Water Use Policy.

Mr. Oriol replied in the affirmative. “These small-scale distilleries that can take place on smaller plots of land are also encouraging the mixed use of properties,” he said. It’s one of the areas outlined in the plan. He also allayed Senate Bolques’s fears about potential environmental concerns.

Senator Clifford Joseph was worried about potential noise pollution from distilleries that could be allowed to set up shop in residential areas. Mr. Oriol reminded him that “the noise ordinances say you can’t run machinery after 11 pm on any property.”

The move to introduce a new category for microdistilleries is in line with Vision 2040, which encourages individuals to “take advantage of the economic benefits of the rum cover over revenue,” Mr. Oriol added.

Senator Kurt Vialet, for his part, had little concern. Instead, he stated that, “I am just smiling to myself about all of this talk about this microbrewery. I am just like, unbelievable.” Mr. Vialet reminded his colleagues that approximately four years ago, he introduced similar legislation that was “met with uproar by a select group of individuals.”

“I was a sponsor, the bill got a lot of back and forth until they had to be pulled,” Sen. Vialet lamented. “We could have been enjoying the benefits of this from four years ago,” he stated. The lawmaker [was publicly rebuked](#) over the amendment of a zoning law that cleared the way for a rum distillery to be built without the required process of rezoning. Critics say it would have allowed these projects to move forward while bypassing requirements for public comment. Following heavy backlash, senators repealed Senator Vialet’s provisions [less than a month after they passed](#).

With the new effort to accommodate microbreweries and microdistilleries now before lawmakers, Senator Vialet said, “I’m glad that Government House and myself are now on the same page for this legislation.”

