The Virgin Islands Consortium

VI Housing Authority Reports Operational Gains as Leadership Outlines Ongoing Challenges

VIHA says inspection scores have moved from 59 to 70 as it works to correct systemic issues, improve rent collection, and manage voucher utilization while modernization projects such as Walter I.M. Hodge and D. Hamilton Jackson continue showing progress.

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The Walter I.M. Hodge Pavilion, a recently redeveloped VIHA property that has received multiple awards.

The V.I. Housing Authority, while still grappling with significant operational challenges, is making steady progress when it comes to improvement, according to Executive Director

Dwayne Alexander.

Currently, the agency is actively working to address systemic inefficiencies. "We are in trouble status," Alexander noted, referencing the housing authority's current classification by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. However, recent strides by VIHA have raised inspection scores from an average of 59 to 70, Mr. Alexander said. Despite the positive movement, the VIHA executive director is determined to see scores rise even higher. "We need to be able to place the housing authority in a comfortable position of 75% or higher," he told board members.

Rent collection remains a critical concern for the authority, with current rates hovering around 87% in St. Thomas and 90% in St. Croix. This is significantly below the industry standard of 95-98%, Mr. Alexander noted. “That's a task that we're definitely working on,” he said. Mr. Alexander pointed out that residents are required to pay a maximum of 30% of their total income, “so they should not be in a situation where they do not have the ability to pay rent if they have lost income,” he argued. VIHA tenants, Mr. Alexander said, “need to notify the managers so they can make an adjustment” if they find themselves having difficulty affording rent. The absolute failure to pay, however, is “totally unacceptable.”

VIHA's Housing Choice Voucher program currently utilizes 1,323 of 2,092 available vouchers, representing a 63% utilization rate. Alexander noted budget constraints are limiting full voucher deployment. “We are already at the maximum amount of money that we can spend…we’re at our budget threshold,” he noted.

Meanwhile, modernization efforts are showing promise. The D. Hamilton Jackson project on St. Croix has already welcomed its first returning families. The recently redeveloped Walter I.M. Hodge Pavilion recently received multiple awards for the project. "We're making progress," Alexander stated.

Board members reacted positively to Mr. Alexander's report, suggesting ways that the board could better support the work of VIHA. Noreen Michael suggested quarterly property walk-throughs to provide board members with firsthand insights into operational challenges. "It's one thing to sit in these meetings and pass resolutions," she noted, "but I think it's important for us to walk some of the properties to really get a feel for what's happening."

Mr. Alexander concluded his presentation with optimism, noting that the agency has a 24-month plan to lift itself out of the trouble status category “We are energized. We are ready to take this agency to the next level,” he said.

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