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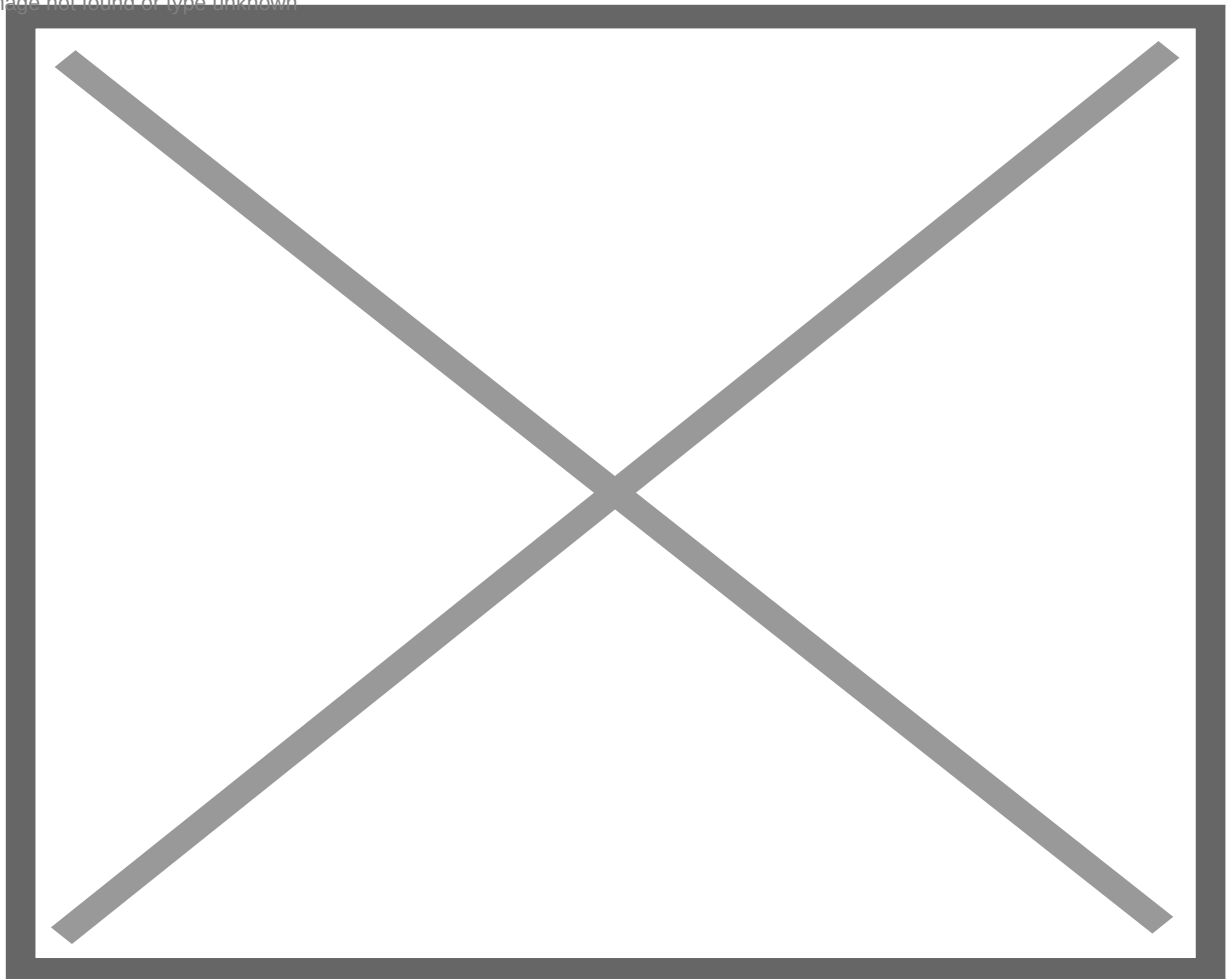
Frederiksted Pier Will Not Reopen to Public Fishing, VIPA Says as Waterfront Debate Intensifies

VIPA cites liability concerns, past drownings, and federal security rules as residents challenge restrictions and press for restored access during discussions over a \$5 million waterfront development plan.

Community Center / **Published On February 18, 2026 10:16 AM /**

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The Frederiksted Pier. By. GETTY IMAGES.

The Frederiksted Pier “will not be accessible like in the past,” according to Virgin Islands Port Authority Executive Director Carlton Dowe, who told the Consortium Wednesday morning that liability concerns and changing conditions make a return to unrestricted public fishing and swimming unlikely.

“The pier will not be accessible like in the past,” Dowe said. “Too many liabilities... people drowning... it can't just be open... things are not how they used to be.”

Dowe’s remarks came one day after a tense community meeting about the Frederiksted Waterfront Master Plan, where residents repeatedly demanded the return of public access to the pier for fishing, walking, and recreation.

What the Meeting Was Actually About

According to Dowe, the meeting “had more to do with getting input from the public [regarding] the development of the pier.... \$5 million appropriation to at least start the work including design — which is already done conceptually — and some construction.”

He added that the public was “given an opportunity Tuesday to share ideas.” The \$5 million legislative appropriation is intended to jumpstart waterfront improvements surrounding the pier area, including planning, design, and initial construction phases aimed at strengthening the cruise product and enhancing economic activity in Frederiksted.

But instead of focusing primarily on sidewalks, aesthetics, and development concepts, much of the meeting centered on the loss of traditional pier access.

Residents described fishing and swimming at the pier as generational traditions. “I was born and raised on St Croix,” one speaker said during the meeting. “Losing the pier is huge. It really is.”

The fairness issue quickly became central. Several residents questioned why paying dive customers and commercial tenants can access certain areas while locals cannot.

Federal Security Compliance

VIPA officials at the meeting emphasized that the pier is classified as a restricted port facility under federal maritime security regulations.

Marine Manager and Port Facility Security Officer Mervyn Constantine told attendees that the Port Authority must comply with 33 CFR 105 requirements and that failure to do so could result in serious penalties.

“Port Authority and the FSOs and the port police, we intend to keep 32 CFR in full compliance,” Constantine said.

He warned that, “If this operation is not secured, we can get fines that don't account numbers, but it's quite hefty by the U.S. Coast Guard if we are found in violation per incident, per day.”

When asked why access could not be restored on days when no cruise ships are in port, Constantine responded that the facility is recognized as a restricted area.

Dowe: Liability is Also Driving Decision

In his Wednesday remarks, Dowe introduced another factor — liability. He further stated that past conditions no longer apply. “There was a time when you go could to the WICO Pier, Crown Bay Dock and fish, but things are not like they used to be....”

Dowe reiterated that unrestricted access cannot return. “The pier will not be accessible like in the past.”

Economic Development vs. Cultural Loss

Lawmakers at the meeting emphasized that cruise growth is central to the waterfront initiative. More than 200,000 cruise passengers are expected to visit Frederiksted, and officials described the master plan as a starting point for expanding economic opportunity.

But for many in attendance, the pier debate overshadowed broader development plans.

The meeting, intended to gather public input on how the waterfront “should look,” became a referendum on whether federal security rules and liability concerns have permanently altered a cultural practice.

For residents who grew up fishing and swimming at the pier, Dowe’s statement signals a definitive shift: the past version of public access will not return.

The broader waterfront master plan process continues, with additional community engagement expected in the coming months.