

Senators Defend \$5 Million Frederiksted Waterfront Investment Amid Community Pushback

Lawmakers say the appropriation is a “start” to strengthen cruise-driven economic growth and improve waterfront infrastructure, while residents argue the plan must address flooding, blight, and deeper structural challenges beyond the pier.

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Ernice Gilbert **February 19, 2026**

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Ann E. Abramson Marine Facility and Frederiksted waterfront. By. GETTY IMAGES.

Four senators of the 36th Legislature appeared Tuesday evening at a community meeting on the Frederiksted Waterfront Master Plan, defending a \$5 million legislative appropriation aimed at jumpstarting improvements around the pier while acknowledging broader concerns about the town’s long-standing challenges.

Present at the meeting were Senator Kenneth Gittens, Senator Kurt Violet, Senator Novelle Francis Jr., and Senator Clifford Joseph.

The meeting, hosted by the V.I. Port Authority at the Henry E. Rohlsen Airport, was intended to gather public input on how the funds should be used to begin development of the waterfront corridor surrounding the Frederiksted Pier.

“This Is a Start”

Senator Kenneth Gittens made clear that the \$5 million appropriation is not intended to solve all of Frederiksted’s issues but to begin targeted investment in the waterfront area.

“The \$5 million appropriation was a start,” Gittens said, explaining that the Legislature allocated the funds to the Port Authority in part because it can move projects forward more quickly than central government agencies.

“We have not forgotten about the rest of Frederick,” he added.

Gittens noted that the investment is tied to cruise tourism and economic opportunity, adding that Frederiksted is expected to receive more than 200,000 cruise passengers this year.

“The more people that come is the more development that you're going to have,” he said.

He described efforts to improve access behind the fort, address beach conditions, and enhance the experience for cruise visitors, arguing that strengthening the cruise product could benefit taxi drivers, tour operators, restaurants, and other businesses.

Competing in the Caribbean

Senator Novelle Francis Jr. echoed the economic development theme, warning that St. Croix must compete aggressively with other Caribbean destinations to maintain and grow cruise traffic.

He stated that every island in the region is courting major cruise lines and offering incentives to secure business, underscoring the urgency of improving the Frederiksted waterfront.

Francis also stressed that the master plan would serve as a roadmap, outlining priorities, timelines, and projected costs that would guide future legislative funding decisions.

Bridge Repairs and Infrastructure

Discussion also touched on long-standing infrastructure concerns, including the damaged bridge behind the fort.

Lawmakers indicated that federal funds have been secured for the repair of the Frederiksted bridge through the Department of Public Works, allowing local funds to focus on other waterfront-related improvements.

Senator Kurt Violet was referenced during the meeting in discussions about shoreline restoration and sand retention, issues raised in the context of both tourism and environmental resilience.

While much of the conversation centered on the pier and cruise access, legislators maintained that improving pedestrian connectivity, accessibility, and beach access remains a priority.

Community Pushback

Residents, however, repeatedly challenged the narrow focus of the planning boundary, arguing that revitalizing only the waterfront would not address flooding, blight, insurance barriers, and economic hardship in the broader town.

One speaker warned that fixing only the pier and shoreline risked cosmetic improvement without meaningful change.

Lawmakers acknowledged those frustrations but maintained that beginning with the waterfront is a strategic first step.

“This is just the beginning,” Gittens said, reiterating that the current allocation does not represent a comprehensive solution but a starting point.

Pier Access Debate

Although the meeting was structured around development and design input, a significant portion of the discussion shifted to pier access restrictions.

Residents pressed for restoration of fishing and walking privileges, while Port Authority officials cited federal maritime security regulations and liability concerns.

Although the senators acknowledged the concerns raised about pier access, Executive Director Carlton Dowe made clear the following morning that unrestricted public fishing and swimming [would not return](#), citing liability exposure and changing safety conditions.

What Happens Next

The Port Authority and its consultants said the public input gathered Tuesday will help shape the master plan, which will include phased implementation strategies and cost estimates.

A second community meeting is expected to be held in Frederiksted in the coming months.

For lawmakers, the message was clear: the \$5 million appropriation is intended to stimulate economic growth through waterfront enhancement, particularly as cruise traffic increases.

For residents, the question remains whether that strategy will translate into meaningful improvement beyond the shoreline.