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St. Croix Bus Terminal Upgrade and Public Health Lab Rezoning Head to Senate Vote

The two bills before lawmakers would clear zoning hurdles for a \$1.69 million transit facility in Estate Body Slob and bring a Department of Health laboratory site in Estate Penitentiary Land into compliance for future occupancy and funding eligibility.

Development / **Published On March 17, 2026 06:11 AM /**

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**Concept design for the bus and passenger terminal development in Estate Body Slob.
By. V.I. DEPT. OF PUBLIC WORKS VIA V.I. LEGISLATURE.**

Two zoning measures involving St. Croix properties used by the Government of the Virgin Islands are headed toward a vote in the Legislature, with one tied to the continued operation and planned expansion of a long-used bus terminal and the other aimed at bringing a Department of Health

laboratory and emergency medical services office into compliance with current land-use rules.

Both bills are scheduled for Wednesday's legislative session, where lawmakers will decide whether to approve the requested changes and send the measures to the governor.

The first proposal, Bill 36-0269, would grant a zoning use variance for Plot Nos. 24B and 24D, Estate Body Slob, King Quarter, St. Croix, to allow the property to continue being used as a bus and passenger terminal.

According to Keshoi Samuel, a planning technician with the Department of Planning and Natural Resources, the site has functioned as a bus terminal for more than 30 years, and "the use variance aims to allow continued operation of the non-conforming bus terminal."

The Department of Public Works plans to demolish the current 400-square-foot terminal and replace it with a 2,100-square-foot facility. Mr. Samuel told lawmakers that "the new building will accommodate three employees, 50 transit passengers, and 30 plus parking spaces for cars and busses." He said construction is expected to take 12 months.

"This project will enhance public service delivery by upgrading outdated facilities that support essential transit operations," Mr. Samuel testified.

Carol Overson McGregor, DPW's deputy commissioner of transportation, said the structure will be built with concrete blocks, the offices will be air conditioned, and the building will be fully ADA-compliant. She also said the design includes provisions for possible flooding and that work can begin "once the construction contract is executed."

Lawmakers raised no objections to the proposal. Funding of \$1.69 million has been identified for the project.

The second measure before the Legislature is Bill 36-0270, which would rezone Plot Nos. 11-F and 11-G Estate Penitentiary Land, Company Quarter, St. Croix, from R-3, or Residential-Medium Density, to P, or Public.

Mr. Samuel said, "The purpose of the request is to bring the property into zoning compliance for the BSL-3 Public Health Laboratory and Emergency Medical Services Office."

The site once housed the Ralph deChabert Housing Project, but it has since been released from the Virgin Islands Housing Authority. The surrounding area is now largely zoned for commercial and public uses.

According to Mr. Samuel's testimony, the Department of Health plans to use the property through "the two-story buildings designated for offices and laboratory function." He also said the laboratory is a "non-public facing lab." In addition to aligning the site with its intended use, the rezoning would "bolsters eligibility for federal disaster recovery fundings."

No representatives from the Department of Health attended the hearing to provide further details about the laboratory's intended functions.

Senator Angel Bolques Jr. questioned whether the site would serve as a "temporary or a permanent facility for the Department of Health," but said that discussion would need to happen at another time.

Senator Marvin Blyden said he was hopeful that “once we turn it to public, that's [an] opportunity for grants.”

Senator Hubert Frederick reflected on the history of the property and the expectations once attached to it. “We promised the people that it was going to be a mixed-use facility, and they could come back. And now they're not coming back, and we're turning this property into something else,” he said. Even so, he expressed hope that the new lab would “be there forever and actually service the island like it should.”

The laboratory is not yet operational and cannot obtain a certificate of occupation without the zoning change.

Both measures now await action during Wednesday’s legislative session.

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