

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Bryan Laments Inaction on Derelict Buildings, Says VI Has Chosen to Do Nothing

During a Public Finance Authority meeting, Governor Albert Bryan Jr. said his proposed legislation on abandoned and derelict buildings stalled in the Legislature, leaving towns to deteriorate while government and elected leaders failed to act.

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Downtown Christiansted, where several abandoned and deteriorating buildings remain along a main roadway. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM.

A side discussion about real estate during Wednesday's meeting of the Public Finance Authority provided Governor Albert Bryan Jr. a platform to express his disappointment

with the lack of forward movement on one of his major initiatives.

Board member Keith O'Neale began the brief diversion from the day's business by noting the existence of several abandoned buildings occupying prime real estate in St. Croix's historical towns. "One of the main streets that goes into Frederiksted" sits "a building that's so old, the roof is collapsing in on itself," Mr. O'Neale said. "Where does eminent domain come in?" he wondered. "Where can the government step in and say...for the public good, we're going to takeover this building, fix it up and use it for something?"

Governor Bryan, whose [much-touted draft legislation](#) to deal with abandoned and derelict buildings in the territory was pre-empted by legislators who instead [formed a sub-committee to tackle the issue](#), responded to Mr. O'Neale's query with wry amusement.

"We submitted legislation," the governor reminded. "We had town hall meetings. People showed up and were rude and disrespectful. We sent it to the Legislature for comment. Never see the light of day because everybody afraid to do anything."

"Doing nothing is an action," Governor Bryan declared. "That's what we have chosen." He noted that government agencies including the Department of Public Works and the Department of Planning and Natural Resources do have the authority to deem a building a hazard and have it torn down, "but then it costs money. It's the government [that] has to fix it or tear it down," he noted.

"We the people have chosen to do nothing." According to the governor, lawmakers "didn't have to pass my legislation but they could have passed some legislation so the towns don't continue to fall apart." He critiqued the lack of forward movement on the initiative as an inherent flaw in Virgin Islands society. To make progressive change "takes conviction and bravery," Governor Bryan declared, lamenting that "apparently, we don't have that kind of commitment to keeping our towns in place."

Board member Dorothy Isaacs noted that property taxes on derelict buildings may often be going unpaid, depriving the government of much-needed revenue.

"These are the election-year issues that we need to be talking about, not people's personalities," Governor Bryan declared. He reiterated his disappointment that his efforts were not able to move the needle on this issue during his second term. "I thought in this last four years, we could have gotten something on the books...it wouldn't be perfect but we [would] tweak it until we get it to the point where we could get something done."

The outlook was not completely bleak, however. Governor Bryan noted that the private sector was working on several revitalization projects in towns across the territory. "There are things that are happening but very slowly. It's very positive, I would say."

Nonetheless, he argued that more needs to be done to ensure that properties embroiled in long probate disputes do not fall into a state of disrepair and abandonment.