

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Suspension of Undergrounding Project To Accommodate Crucian Christmas Festival Costs WAPA Over \$35K

WAPA approved a contract extension after pausing the Hannah's Rest Phase 1 Underground Project for six working days to avoid traffic disruption along Centerline Road during the Crucian Christmas Festival, a move that added \$35,251.20 in costs.

WAPA / **Published On March 27, 2026 06:14 AM /**

Janeke Simon **March 27, 2026**



The V.I. Water and Power Authority's governing board on Thursday weighed the balance between business considerations and community needs as it considered a contract extension tied to ongoing work to move electrical infrastructure underground in St. Croix.

At issue was whether WAPA should absorb the cost of a short project suspension granted in December to avoid traffic disruption along Centerline Road during the Crucian Christmas Festival, a pause officials said was made in the interest of public safety and community access.

Matthias Clarke, a mechanical engineer for WAPA, told board members that J. Benton Construction had been prepared in early December 2025 to begin the final segment of excavation work on the Hannah's Rest Phase 1 Underground Project. However, after a public notice was issued announcing the upcoming work, WAPA received pushback over the expected impact on traffic along Centerline Road.

"That prompted us to suspend work for enhancement of public safety measures for the accommodation of Crucian Christmas Festival," Clarke said. "The public notice was then rescinded and a suspension notice issued to the contractor."

According to discussions with the contractor, the six-working-day suspension carried a cost impact of \$35,251.20. Clarke said those costs included traffic control equipment, sanitary facilities, and dedicated staff who could not be reassigned to other projects on short notice, but did not include laborers or skilled workers.

"Overall, the postponement ensured open access to the motoring traffic, especially that of first responders on high alert at a time of year when there's anticipated to have an increase in civilian activity and emergencies," Clarke said.

Because of the December suspension, the project's completion date will move from April 1 to April 14. Board members were told that the trenches dug along the route will initially receive what Chief Executive Officer Karl Knight described as a "minimal" paving treatment. Once other work along the road is completed, the Department of Public Works will return to provide the final surface treatment. Knight noted, however, that this remains "still a little ways off."

Board Chair Maurice Muia expressed some concern about WAPA having to absorb costs tied to a pause that was not "actually due to the Authority." Knight, however, argued that "there are times when community interests sort of trumps the business interests."

Because WAPA exists to serve the people of the Virgin Islands, Knight said, "our shareholders are the community." When "it serves their interests that we would modify our plans, we try to do so within reason," he said, while cautioning that such changes should not "have a financial impact that is ultimately a burden on ratepayers."

Knight added that while WAPA had the authority to deny the request for a suspension, officials believed it was "a simple enough concession to the community." He said the negative public sentiment likely to result from traffic congestion during festival season would not have been worth continuing the work during that period.

The board ultimately approved the proposed contract extension.