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WAPA Crisis Exposes Water Failure at Belle Vue as Longtime Tenant Goes Nearly a Day Without Basic Access

Angela Rene says WAPA's extended outage left her unable to pump water, while an emptied Belle Vue cistern remained dry until lawmakers intervened, raising new questions about conditions at a federally backed St. John housing redevelopment project.

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Bellevue Village, St. John.

The districtwide WAPA crisis that impacted the St. Thomas-St. John District since Saturday exposed a basic living-condition failure at Belle Vue, where a longtime St. John resident says an empty cistern left her without water for nearly a full day, prompting intervention from lawmakers

and renewed questions about tenant conditions at a federally backed affordable housing redevelopment.

Angela Rene, who said she has lived at Belle Vue since 2006, told the Consortium on Monday afternoon that the extended power outage left her unable to pump water into her home. Without power, she said, the only way to access water was to manually lower a bucket into the cistern and pull it up.

But Ms. Rene said one of the two cisterns serving her area had been emptied after maintenance staff performed a cleaning, leaving her without a usable backup. According to Ms. Rene, two cisterns usually serve two units, allowing residents to access the second cistern when one is empty. In this case, she said, the cistern she could have accessed manually was dry.

“Cistern dry — no water — called maintenance guy to bring water since morning — up to now 5pm — no water,” Ms. Rene said.

She said the situation left her unable to shower, wash dishes, wash clothes or carry out other basic household needs from about 9 p.m. Sunday into Monday afternoon, while power outages continued across the district.

“I can’t shower or do anything,” she said, adding that because the office closed at 5 p.m., she feared she would spend the rest of the night without water.

Ms. Rene said she contacted maintenance for assistance, but the issue was not addressed for hours. She said staff refused to provide her with a corporate contact number. She also said Franklin Fahie, whom she identified as the maintenance worker, told her she did not have an argument.

“There should be no reason why I should be living like this,” Ms. Rene said. “We are taking a beating in Belle Vue. I have leaking windows, broken windows, issues with bathroom doors, and they expect you to pay rent on time.”

She added, “I should not have to be this way since 9pm last night.”

The situation was eventually brought to the attention of lawmakers. The Consortium contacted Senator Marvin Blyden, who has been involved in legislative discussions surrounding Belle Vue and other affordable housing properties. After Mr. Blyden made calls, Belle Vue management moved to have the cistern filled and the immediate matter addressed.

The incident unfolded against the backdrop of a broader housing redevelopment effort at Belle Vue. Previous Consortium reporting detailed that Jackson Development Company [acquired Bellevue Village](#) on St. John, Calabash Boom Apartments on St. John, and Lovenlund Apartments on St. Thomas, with the acquisition backed by HUD disaster relief and mitigation funds. The effort has been promoted as a way to preserve affordable housing, improve resiliency and create a pathway for tenants to transition into homeownership.

The V.I. Housing Finance Authority previously [announced \\$74.3 million in financing](#) connected to the acquisition, rehabilitation and homeownership conversion of 315 housing units, including 72 units at Bellevue Village, 48 at Calabash Boom Apartments and 195 at Lovenlund 1 and 2. Consortium reporting also noted that Jackson Development Company was working to catch up on long-standing work orders at the properties, while renovation and rehabilitation work remained a key part of the broader plan.

For Ms. Rene, however, Monday's crisis was immediate and personal: an islandwide utility failure was made worse, she said, by a housing maintenance issue that left her without water access inside her home.

The power outage itself remained unresolved for some customers late Monday. In its 10:45 p.m. update, WAPA said additional generating units, including Wärtzilä 2 and Wärtzilä 3, were online. However, the utility said the plant had not yet returned to full generating capacity, even though service had been restored to most feeders.

WAPA said Feeders 7E and 6B, covering Main Street and Frenchtown, would be temporarily rotated out of service for approximately two hours to allow restoration of Feeder 7B. The utility said service would be returned to 7E and 6B after the rotation was complete and asked customers to conserve energy to help maintain grid stability.

In a 6:00 a.m. update, WAPA said all feeders in the St. Thomas-St. John District had been restored as of approximately 11:59 p.m. The authority thanked the public for its patience and support throughout the event, and said customers experiencing isolated outages should report them through WAPA's outage reporting portal or by calling 340-774-3552, Option 4. WAPA said its dispatch team monitors outage reports 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The crisis prompted Senator Angel Bolques, the at-large senator from St. John, to describe WAPA's problems as broader than a single failed generator.

"I would say the real problem with WAPA is not really one broken down generator, or the issues that came about by the storms, but WAPA itself has suffered from decades of aging infrastructure, depending on fossil fuels, insufficient backup capacity, and delayed modernization of the authority," Mr. Bolques said.

He said the long-term solution requires replacing unreliable generators, building out large-scale battery storage, expanding solar power and modernizing transmission lines. He also pointed to the need for microgrids that can keep critical services and some communities powered while maintenance or repairs are underway.

In response to Ms. Rene's situation, Mr. Bolques said he could only assume she was not the only resident facing such hardship during the outage. He said the issue likely extended to other communities across the Virgin Islands where residents depend on electric pumps to access water stored in cisterns.

Mr. Bolques said he has been working on legislation that would require new homes to include a solar panel powerful enough to run a water pump during outages. He said the idea is not to require every household to power an entire home with solar, but to ensure that families can at least access running water when the electrical grid fails.

"So what we want to do is require the building code to include a solar panel powerful enough to run a pump, a water pump, so that when we have issues like this, hurricane situations, a family, — hopefully the roof stays on through the storm — but a family may be able to still have running water," Mr. Bolques said.

He added that access to water is tied directly to "health and welfare and the quality of life," because "running water makes a huge difference in a home that may not be powered entirely, but having running water to wash dishes and bathe and shower, cook, make a huge difference."

The Belle Vue incident illustrates how WAPA's generation crisis can cascade into other essential parts of daily life, particularly in communities where water access depends on electric pumps. It also places renewed attention on the condition of a housing complex now tied to a federally backed redevelopment effort intended to improve long-term affordability, resilience and quality of life for residents.

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