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## VITEMA's New Emergency Operations Facility Now Estimated at \$54.2M, More Than Double FEMA's \$22.51M Award; \$7.2M in Equipment Unfunded

Six years after FEMA approved \$22.51 million for Hermon Hill, VITEMA says design is 60% complete but the project is now estimated at \$54.2 million, with construction still pending and \$7.2 million in furniture, fixtures and equipment now still unfunded.

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A 2026 architectural rendering shows the proposed VITEMA Hermon Hill facility design for the emergency operations and saferoom project. By. VITEMA.

Six years after the Federal Emergency Management Agency approved \$22.51 million for the reconstruction of the Hermon Hill Wind Retrofit and Saferoom, the project's design phase is now

60% complete, but the estimated cost has risen to about \$54.2 million and key portions of the facility remain unfunded.

Daryl Jaschen, director of the V.I. Territorial Emergency Management Agency, provided the update Tuesday before the Committee on Disaster Recovery, Infrastructure, and Planning. He told lawmakers that while the \$22.51 million in federal funding remains available, the total estimated project cost had increased significantly as of February 2026.

According to Mr. Jaschen, Spring Line Architects has completed more than half of the design and the “required independent peer review.” As of May 30, 2026, “approximately \$2.4 million” had been spent on architectural and engineering services. The design phase is expected to be completed by October 2026, he said.

The project’s second phase, which includes procurement, demolition, construction and closeout, will begin after FEMA approves the Phase I deliverables, Mr. Jaschen explained.

The widening gap between available federal funding and the estimated project cost drew concern from several committee members. “We’re probably looking at asking for some increases in the funding based upon just the cost of construction,” Mr. Jaschen told Senator Clifford Joseph. Since FEMA approved the \$22.51 million award in 2020, construction costs have soared.

Senator Kurt Vialet questioned the “feasibility of the project being completed” with the estimated cost now more than \$30 million above the available funding. “Where are you actually going to get that additional funding from to be able to complete the project?” he asked.

Mr. Jaschen said the available funding will “basically stabilize the location there, [and] will build the building.” However, a table included in his testimony placed building construction alone at \$37,022,510.

Senator Vialet remained unconvinced. “To build a building with \$22 million, you probably have to not build an entire floor in order to complete,” he said.

“I’m a bit scared that we’re ending up in situations in which these projects are going to be built because they have these grandiose designs that isn’t necessarily needed,” Senator Vialet stated. “I am hoping that we are able to find the \$54 million.”

Once completed, the Hermon Hill facility is expected to support an eight-workstation, 24-hour, 9-1-1 Emergency Communications Center. It will also include two emergency operations centers, three emergency public information activity centers, and four continuity of operations locations for “government functions.”

VITEMA’s St. Croix operations will also be relocated to the building. The site will include accommodations for staff of FEMA’s Caribbean Area Office, and the design includes provisions for major communications outages during disasters. Two generators will provide backup power to the facility.

Hermon Hill is expected to serve as a central point for coordinating future disaster response. However, Mr. Jaschen clarified that the safe room inside the building is “not a public congregate shelter.” Instead, it will be used for the “protection of 9-1-1 operations, local government officials, federal partners, agency representatives, and military staff” stationed on St. Croix before or during disaster response.

Before construction begins in earnest, VITEMA plans to hire an Owner Representative who will be located at the job site during demolition and construction. Mr. Jaschen said the role is important “to develop that relationship with the individuals who are living around.”

That community connection will be particularly important because one of the fifteen special conditions attached to the project’s federal consistency determination concerns dust from demolition and construction. Mr. Jaschen said VITEMA will focus on community engagement throughout the process.

“It’s a residential area,” he said, emphasizing the need for “good communication and support with our neighbors out there.”

As the project moves forward, Mr. Jaschen also informed the committee that Furniture, Fixtures, and Equipment, or FFE, for the building have not yet been funded. VITEMA estimates those needs will cost \$7,208,035.

Mr. Jaschen said the agency intends to explore whether several grants may be suitable for completing those purchases once the building is complete. “There are different opportunities that will come up,” he told Senator Angel Bolques Jr.

VITEMA has also identified an annual operations and maintenance budget of \$280,000 for the facility. That funding would cover HVAC, plumbing, electrical systems, generator services, fire safety systems, security, communications, landscaping and other needs.