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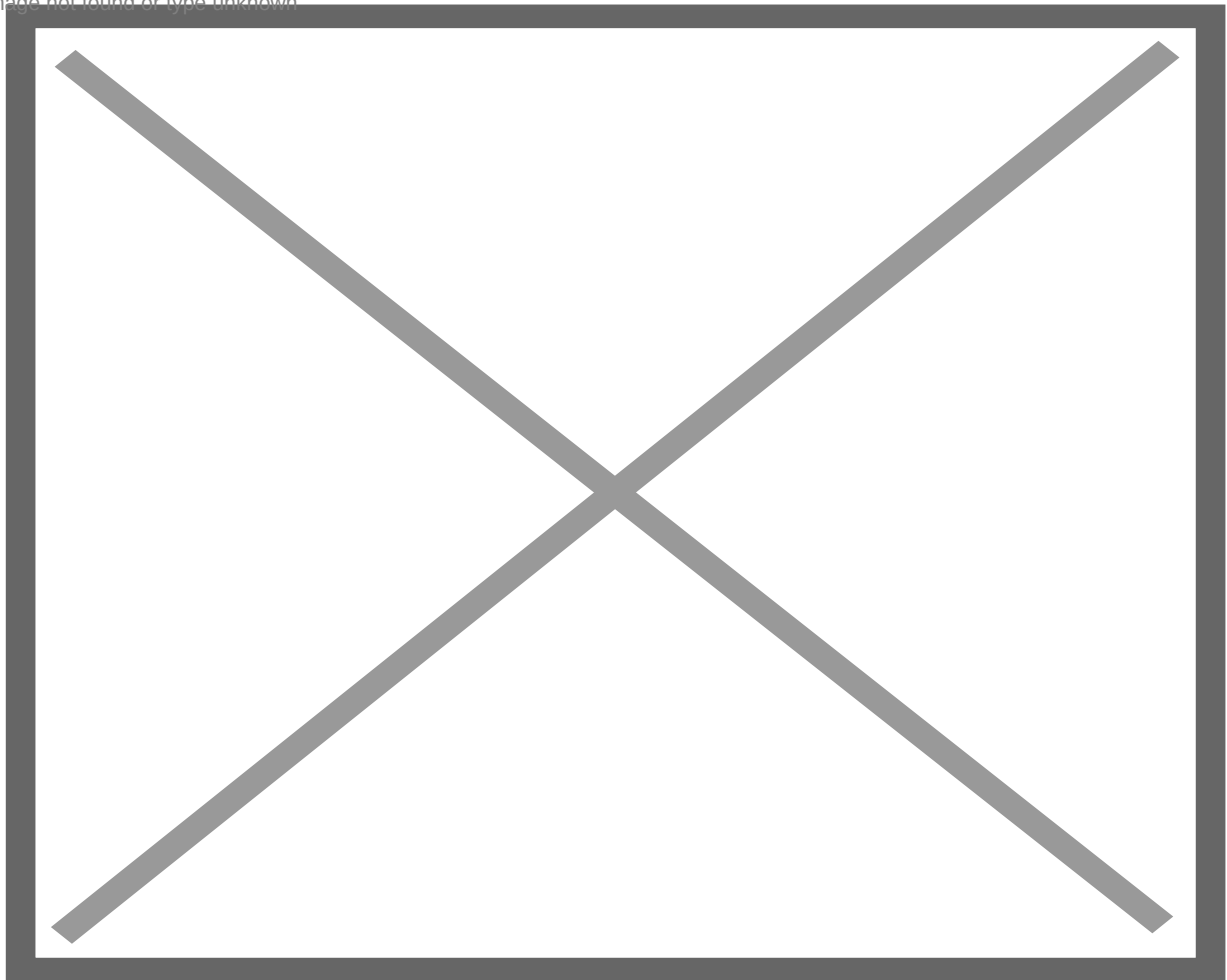
St. Thomas Cricket, L.J. Auto and Paradise Paws Leases Advance; Rent Conflict to Be Corrected

Lawmakers advanced three St. Thomas property leases covering a proposed international-standard cricket ground, an auto repair business and expanded K-9 services, while a dispute over Paradise Paws' annual rent must be addressed before final approval.

Development / **Published On August 05, 2026 06:31 AM /**

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ST. THOMAS — Three leases involving government-owned property advanced from the Senate Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance on Monday, including a long-term agreement intended to give cricket a permanent home, a lease for an auto repair business and additional renewal options for a K-9 boarding and training facility.

The Paradise Paws measure advanced despite conflicting testimony over whether the company's annual rent is \$21,208.02 or \$48,000. Committee Chairman Sen. Novelle Francis Jr. said amendments would be prepared before the bill reaches its final legislative stage.

Cricket Association Seeks Permanent Home

Bill 36-0293 would authorize a lease between the Government of the Virgin Islands and the St. Thomas Cricket Association Inc. for Parcel N-2 of Tract 1, Estate Nazareth.

The 312,150.96-square-foot property would be used to develop cricket in the St. Thomas-St. John District.

The initial lease term is 30 years, with options for two additional 10-year periods. The association would pay annual rent of \$1,200 in monthly installments of \$100.

Vincent Richards, assistant commissioner at the Department of Property and Procurement, said the association will "undertake, at its own expense, property improvements valued at approximately \$500,000."

Those improvements include excavation, grading and other ground preparation for playing surfaces, along with the installation of floodlights and perimeter fencing.

The association must provide the government with copies of applications submitted to the Department of Planning and Natural Resources for the different phases of construction within established deadlines.

The government would also retain emergency access to the property following natural disasters.

The GVI "reserves the right, at its sole discretion, to use all or any portion of the premises for emergency responses..." Richards said.

The government would not be liable to the association for "any inconvenience, loss of use, or other damage resulting from such use..."

St. Thomas Cricket Association President Doyle Jones said the sport has lacked a "permanent home" in the St. Thomas-St. John District since Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017.

Jones said the Estate Nazareth property "presents an extraordinary opportunity to develop a venue capable of hosting international cricket matches" and "with the appropriate investment, has the potential to become an ICC-certified cricket ground."

The International Cricket Council is the sport's global governing body.

According to Jones, approval of the lease would give the association the "certainty" required to pursue grants and attract private investment.

The Legislature previously provided the association with \$1.5 million, of which \$500,000 has been released.

Jones said the funding was used in part to complete a conceptual plan for the first phase of development, now estimated at "approximately \$7 million."

Documentation has been submitted to the Department of Sports, Parks and Recreation to obtain the remaining funds, and Jones said the association would continue “agitating.”

The association has purchased grounds-maintenance equipment and acquired temporary facilities. However, “additional work is needed to adequately support our current activities,” Jones testified.

That work includes obtaining topsoil to resurface part of the field and establishing a temporary players’ pavilion.

Jones said the organization intends to pursue public-private partnerships to develop a “financially sustainable model that will allow the George E. Goodwin Cricket Grounds to become a premier sports and community venue for generations to come.”

He told Francis that after the lease receives approval, the association will “develop a capital program where we’ll be able to raise funds.”

Potential contributors have indicated that they will not make “significant donations” until the association has a lease, Jones said. L.J.

Auto Lease Includes Annual Rent Adjustments

Bill 36-0311 would authorize a lease between the government and L.J. Auto Repair for Parcel No. 22 Revised Submarine Base, No. 6 Southside Quarter.

The 3,400-square-foot property would be used to operate a garage and auto repair shop.

The agreement carries an initial term of 20 years, with options for two additional 10-year periods. Annual rent would be \$24,000, payable in monthly installments of \$2,000.

Richards said the rent “shall be adjusted after the first year of the initial term, and every year after...in accordance with the increase of the Consumer Price Index.”

L.J. Auto currently holds a one-year lease for the property and has already invested more than \$200,000 in improvements.

Richards encouraged senators to support the longer agreement, telling them that “they’re diligent about keeping a very clean operation, and they’re very diligent about disposing of waste oil.”

Conflicting Rent Figures Raised for Paradise Paws

Bill 36-0331 involves an agreement between the government and Paradise Paws VI LLC for Parcel No. 180-I, Submarine Base, No. 6 Southside Quarter.

The property consists of 49,317.7 square feet.

Richards said the Department of Property and Procurement plans to amend a lease originally assigned to K9’s on Patrol Service Inc. and later assigned to Paradise Paws, a “successor-in-interest, owned by the same principal.”

The amendment’s sole purpose is to “add four options to renew the lease for a total of eight additional terms of five years each.”

The existing lease remains in effect through March 21, 2031.

Keith Richards, speaking for Paradise Paws, said the business wants to expand in response to increasing demand.

“As the demand for K-9 boarding, training, and related services has continued to grow, Paradise Paws VI has identified a need to expand our facility and services.”

The company’s representative testified that annual rent is \$21,208.02, payable in monthly installments of \$1,766.22.

Vincent Richards, however, told the committee that annual rent is \$48,000, with monthly installments of \$4,000.

Paradise Paws owner Paris Nicholson disputed the higher amount, saying the rent should not increase to \$48,000 because the amended agreement does not add any property to the lease.

Lawmakers voted on the measure without first resolving the discrepancy. Francis said the necessary amendments would be prepared before the bill proceeds to its final legislative stage.