logo Image not found or type unknown

Waste Management Proposes $19.95 Monthly Household Waste Fee, $3 Hotel Charge as Vendor Debt Expected to Top $44 Million

WMA plans a $19.95 monthly residential waste fee, a $3 charge on occupied hotel and short-term rental rooms, weight-based tipping fees and stricter septage charges as vendor debt approaches $44 million and the authority remains $17 million short today.

Government / **Published On August 07, 2026 06:16 AM /**

Nelcia Charlemagne August 07, 2026

Image not found or type unknown

The Virgin Islands Waste Management Authority is preparing a series of new and revised fees aimed at generating approximately $13.5 million in recurring annual revenue, including a proposed $19.95 monthly residential waste charge and a $3 fee on occupied hotel and short-term rental rooms, as outstanding vendor debt is expected to climb slightly above $44 million.

WMA Executive Director Hannibal “Mike” Ware told the Senate Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance that the authority “recognizes that long-term success requires more than annual appropriations alone” and is therefore “advancing several complementary revenue reforms” intended to strengthen its financial position.

The changes come as WMA continues carrying legacy obligations, some dating back as far as nine years.

Chief Financial Officer Daryl Griffith said that after upcoming adjustments, outstanding vendor obligations will total “a little bit over $44 million.”

Ware said WMA has turned to both the governor and Legislature for help resolving the accumulated debt.

“To dig out of this is near impossible with our current funding stream and mechanism,” he said.

With new invoices continuing to arrive, Ware described WMA as being in a “perpetual state of debt.”

“I am basically on my knees before the Senate…to assist me,” he said.

$19.95 Monthly Residential Waste Fee Proposed

Among the authority’s proposed changes is a residential solid waste management fee, which Ware called one of WMA’s “most significant structural reforms.”

He stressed that the proposed charge would not be a tax, but rather “a cost-of-service-based user fee.”

An initial analysis placed the cost of providing the service at between $500 and $570 per household. WMA has instead chosen a phased approach intended to “balance affordability with sustainability.”

Under the proposal, households would initially pay $19.95 per month.

WMA estimates that the residential fee would generate approximately $2.7 million annually.

Ware said the charge would not be attached to property tax bills, as had previously been suggested. Instead, it would be tied to utility accounts.

The revenue estimate is based on approximately 37,000 active meters operated by the V.I. Water and Power Authority. WAPA would receive a 5 percent administrative fee for handling the collections, Ware told Sen. Kurt Vialet.

Hotel and Short-Term Rental Fee Proposed

WMA is also proposing an environmental service fee of $3 for each occupied hotel and short-term rental room.

The authority projects that charge would generate another $2.7 million annually.

Waste-disposal charges would also be revised through a return to weight-based tipping fees.

WMA had shifted to a volume-based system after landfill scales became inoperable. Ware said scales on each island are being repaired, allowing the authority to return to charging based on the weight of waste entering its facilities.

That change is expected to produce an additional $2 million in revenue.

Septage Fees to Be Enforced

WMA is also “enforcing its long-approved septage disposal fee structure,” Ware said.

He told lawmakers that the amount charged for septage disposal “has not fully reflected the operational burden placed on the Territory’s wastewater treatment infrastructure.”

A fee schedule previously approved by the Public Services Commission “establishes equitable cost recovery while ensuring that private users of these facilities contribute proportionately to the costs incurred by the Authority,” Ware said.

Enforcing those charges is projected to generate “approximately $300,000 annually.”

Taken together with WMA’s other revenue measures, Ware said the authority expects to generate approximately $13.5 million, “providing a recurring revenue stream that would serve to stabilize operations.”

Sen. Marise James supported the move toward charging for services.

“You have to pay to live…You get services. You have to pay for them,” she said.

Vialet expressed a similar view.

“At a point, we got to change the mindset in the Virgin Islands. You know that there are just stuff that we're going to have to pay for, and it cannot be a government obligation,” he said. “Government don't have the resources to pay for it, and we’re slowly seeing the island just get dirtier and dirtier every day.”

Ware cautioned, however, that the new revenues will not immediately eliminate WMA’s dependence on government funding.

He said “government support will remain necessary during the transition period because the full cost of operating the system significantly exceeds the initial revenue generated by these reforms.”

Some Vendors Considering Walking Away

A portion of WMA’s outstanding debt stems from work performed by local contractors following Hurricanes Irma and Maria, including services that the Federal Emergency Management Agency ultimately declined to reimburse.

Sen. Marvin Blyden said several vendors providing critical services are prepared to “just hand in the towel.”

Those include companies involved in waste collection and disposal.

Ware said WMA tries to remain “as close to current as possible on their current bills” even as older obligations remain unresolved.

WMA Still $17 Million Short

The authority's proposed fiscal year 2027 budget totals $58,438,695.

Of that amount, $39,954,391 would come from local funding sources, including the General Fund, Anti-Litter and Beautification Fund, Tourism Revolving Fund, Sewer Wastewater Fund and Waste Tire Management and Disposal Fund.

Even after considering General Fund appropriations and WMA-generated revenue, Griffith said the authority remains approximately $17 million short.

Professional services account for $24 million of the budget.

Garbage collection, landfill operations and maintenance services make up $16 million of that amount, while wastewater treatment and disposal services exceed $7 million.

$3.23 Billion in Wastewater Modernization Program

At the same time that WMA confronts operating deficits and legacy debt, it is managing the largest capital investment portfolio in its history.

Through FEMA's prudent replacement program, the authority has secured $3.23 billion to replace and modernize wastewater infrastructure.

Ware cautioned that the work will not happen quickly because design, permitting, environmental review and construction "will take several years."

WMA is therefore pursuing interim projects through an early action plan, including the purchase of new pumps for pump stations in both districts.

One of the major interim projects involves the LBJ pump station.

Engineer Alex Bruney said plans call for relocating the existing station to "eliminate issues that we currently have."

The project's design is 100 percent complete, and permitting is underway.

$100 Million Approved for Landfill Work

The authority has also secured $100 million in Community Development Block Grant disaster-recovery mitigation funding for landfill projects.

The money is intended to support development of a new landfill on St. Croix and expansion of the Bovoni Landfill.

WMA is required to close the Anguilla landfill on St. Croix within four years, but a replacement site has not yet been identified.

Drug Tests Complicate Effort to Fill 28 Vacancies

WMA is simultaneously attempting to fill "28 critical vacancies," including skilled positions such as engineers that can be difficult to recruit locally.

Human Resources Director Erica Callwoods said another obstacle has emerged during recruitment: applicants failing mandatory drug tests.

A “lot of the candidates failed those tests,” she told lawmakers.

Ware cited the authority’s attempts to hire wastewater workers as an example.

“We could [have] just hired four new guys – we're gonna be straight – and all four fail the drug test. And this has happened on two separate occasions since I've been here,” he said.

Senate President Novelle Francis Jr. responded, “Unfortunately, our people like ganja instead of working."