

The Virgin Islands Consortium

VIPA Puts \$31.5 Million St. Thomas Airport Fire Station Contract on Hold Over P3 Conflict Concerns

VIPA delayed action on J. Benton Construction's \$31.5 million ARFF contract while counsel reviews conflict-of-interest concerns tied to the airport P3. Separately, only Kiewit qualified to bid on a slate of major marine projects across the territory.

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Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting trucks sit outside the ARFF facility at Henry E. Rohlsen Airport on St. Croix, where VIPA paused a \$31.5 million replacement contract over questions tied to J. Benton's P3 role.

A proposed \$31.49 million contract to replace the deteriorated Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting facility at Cyril E. King Airport in St. Thomas was put on hold Thursday after Virgin Islands Port Authority board members raised conflict-of-interest concerns over J. Benton Construction's involvement in the separate public-private partnership initiative to redevelop the territory's airports.

The board declined to move forward with the proposed \$31,494,055 contract with J. Benton Construction, which submitted the lowest responsive bid for the project, opting instead to give VIPA's legal counsel one week to provide a formal written opinion on whether the company's participation in the airport P3 raises a conflict.

The delay comes as VIPA faces a September 8 deadline to submit its response to the Federal Aviation Administration regarding grant funding for the project.

VIPA officials said the existing Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting facility, commonly known as the airport fire station, has sustained severe roof damage and water intrusion over the years, forcing operations to be relocated to a temporary facility. The proposed replacement would be a three-story, 21,000-square-foot building constructed on the footprint of the existing ARFF facility and financed largely through federal grant funding, with a 10 percent local match.

Board member Celestino White questioned whether J. Benton's participation in both the P3 initiative and the separate ARFF procurement could create a problem for the authority.

"J. Benton Construction LLC is listed with the Port authority as a partner with SkyCity," Mr. White said. "Is this board and the review committee traveling on questionable ground knowing that J. Benton Construction LLC is a partner on the P3 and is now applying for separately a \$31 million contract?"

VIPA Senior Staff Attorney Vincent Frazer said J. Benton's participation in the P3 process does not, by itself, disqualify the company from competing for other VIPA contracts.

"When the selection and an agreement with the P3 partner comes to fruition, then that may change the circumstances," Mr. Frazer said. "At this point, I can't think of any reason why it would be disqualified."

Despite that assessment, board members decided to wait for a formal written legal opinion before acting on the contract.

The board separately confronted another procurement issue involving major marine capital projects planned across the territory, after learning that only one of six companies responding to a March 2026 Request for Qualifications satisfied all mandatory requirements.

The RFQ was intended to pre-qualify as many as five firms that could later compete for upcoming marine infrastructure work. Instead, Kiewit Infrastructure South was the only company to clear the qualification process.

One respondent failed to meet VIPA's required safety-performance standards, while another — the authority's current dredging contractor — failed to submit a required section of the prequalification package.

"Kiewit Infrastructure was the only firm to provide a responsible and responsive proposal to VIPA's RFQ," Procurement and Contracting Manager Khadila Joseph told the board.

Board members subsequently authorized VIPA management to issue the multi-million-dollar marine improvement Invitation to Bid exclusively to Kiewit Infrastructure South. The action allows Kiewit to bid for the work; it does not constitute an award of the underlying construction projects.

VIPA's board also approved several other operational procurements Thursday, including the purchase of a new airfield sweeper following longstanding service and maintenance problems with the supplier of its existing equipment.

A Tymco airfield sweeper will be purchased from R&B Power LLC for \$311,788.

The board also approved a contract with SF General Maintenance Services to provide janitorial services at Henry E. Rohlsen Airport for \$25,000 per month, along with an emergency marine salvage master contract with Above & Below Marine Services ahead of peak hurricane season.