logo Image not found or type unknown

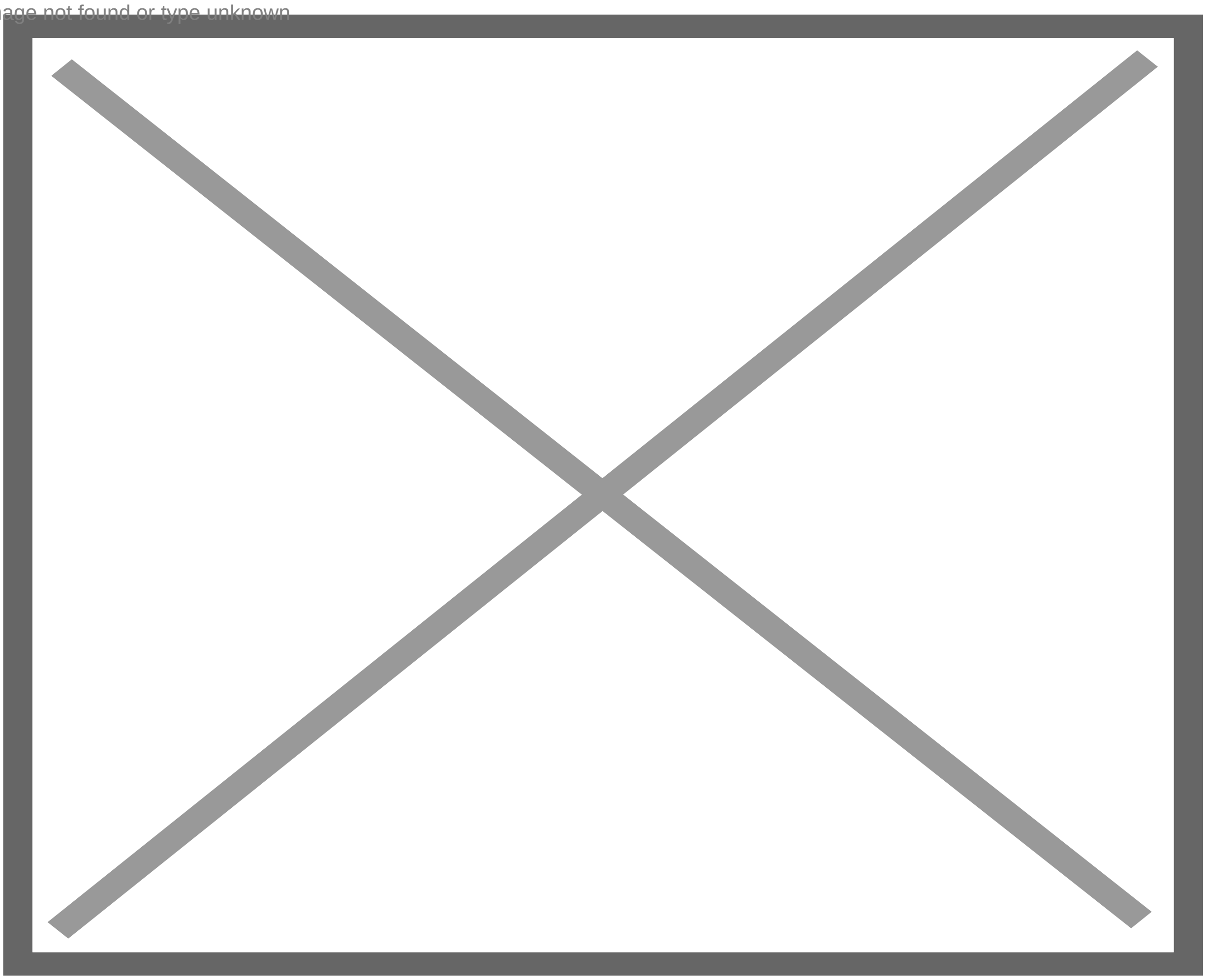
Lawmakers Back 20-Year Lease for $500,000 Food Yard Project in St. Thomas Subbase

Bill 39-0339 would lease two Subbase parcels to Eight One Subbase, LLC for a planned Food Yard featuring mobile vendors, container-based concepts, seating and other amenities. The $500,000 project carries a 20-year lease with $12,000 in annual rent due.

Development / **Published On August 21, 2026 06:49 AM /**

Nelcia Charlemagne August 21, 2026

Image not found or type unknown



Concept imagery for the proposed Food Yard in St. Thomas shows mobile food vendors, containerized spaces, seating and other amenities planned for the Subbase development backed by lawmakers. **By. V.I. CONSORTIUM.**

ST. THOMAS — A proposal to transform two Subbase parcels into a food court for mobile vendors and emerging culinary businesses drew broad support from lawmakers, who advanced a

20-year lease that anticipates approximately $500,000 in property investment and annual rent of $12,000.

Bill 39-0339 would lease Parcel Nos. 81A and 81B, Submarine Base, No. 6 Southside Quarter, St. Thomas, to Eight One Subbase, LLC, whose sole member is Kwesi Howard. The planned development, known as the Food Yard, would combine mobile food vendors with container-based spaces and other amenities while giving Mr. Howard responsibility for managing the project's subtenants.

Senator Milton Potter, who introduced the measure, said the lease “presents an opportunity to convert underutilized public property into an active revenue-generating asset that serves our community.”

He described the development as a “platform for local food entrepreneurs who might otherwise lack access to a traditional brick-and-mortar location, while generating employment and expanding commercial activity in the district.”

“This project reflects the kind of public-private partnership that benefits both government and community,” Sen. Potter said.

Mr. Howard told lawmakers that the idea grew from a hobby that developed into a passion and eventually a business concept. In conversations with other culinary enthusiasts, he said he repeatedly encountered people interested in establishing food businesses who “did not necessarily have the capital needed to open a traditional restaurant.”

He sees the Food Yard as a lower-barrier entry point where emerging restaurateurs can “introduce their concepts, build a customer base, refine their business and generate the revenue and experience necessary to grow.”

Mr. Howard also described the project as a potential economic driver extending beyond the individual food vendors, with activity supporting food preparation, hospitality, maintenance, security, entertainment, fisheries, agriculture and other sectors.

“My goal is to create an environment in which the Virgin Islands dollar circulates through Virgin Islands businesses and Virgin Islands families,” he said.

While Mr. Howard could not give lawmakers a definitive estimate of the number of jobs the development would create, he outlined a site capable of accommodating several businesses. “Five or six vans could park during the day, but there's also going to be another area that's going to be made out of containers,” he explained. By his estimate, the Food Yard could ultimately feature at least 12 different offerings.

Mr. Howard said he wants the development to showcase the Virgin Islands' food culture while “allowing new culinary concepts to emerge.” Lawmakers encouraged him to maintain a diverse selection of food options, with Senator Marvin Blyden telling him that as long as the development offers variety, “it will be very successful.”

The site's proximity to docking cruise ships could also create opportunities to draw visitor traffic, according to Mr. Howard. Senator Kurt Vialet called the development “something good” for the Virgin Islands, while Senator Avery Lewis encouraged Mr. Howard to ensure that the property is ADA-compliant.

Vincent Richards, assistant commissioner at the Department of Property and Procurement, also backed the concept, saying it “has the potential to generate meaningful community and economic benefits.”

Under the lease, the property would be used for a mobile food vendor court with related amenities, including restrooms, parking, shaded seating and storage. Mr. Howard would manage the businesses operating as subtenants, and property investment is anticipated to be approximately $500,000.

The initial lease term is 20 years, with three additional 10-year renewal terms. Annual rent is set at $12,000, payable in monthly installments of $1,000.

Because the property is located within the Coastal Zone Management Tier 1 area, Mr. Howard must obtain the required permits before proceeding. Rent will be reduced during the permitting and construction period.

Bill 39-0339 now advances to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary for further consideration.