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Senate Approves \$300K to Remove St. Thomas Pedestrian Bridge; Work Begins Friday

Lawmakers unanimously approved \$300,000 to remove the pedestrian bridge near the former Addelita Cancryn Junior High School, while also backing compensation for displaced LBJ Gardens residents, revised homeownership funding and several other measures.

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Nelcia Charlemagne **August 27, 2026**

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The Legislature unanimously approved \$300,000 Wednesday to remove the derelict pedestrian bridge near Western Cemetery and the former Addelita Cancryn Junior High School on St. Thomas, clearing the way for work to begin Friday evening as lawmakers also acted on housing assistance, a disputed government lease, road naming and several other measures.

Bill 36-0344 was special ordered to the floor by Senator Marvin Blyden and appropriates the money to the Department of Public Works to complete the bridge removal. All 15 senators voted in favor.

Multiple non-germane amendments were added to the measure, including one from Senator Novelle Francis Jr. requiring the Office of Management and Budget to make four equal quarterly allotments of annual appropriations for disbursement by the Department of Finance.

Crystal Gade Lease Fails

Another measure special ordered Wednesday did not receive enough support to pass.

Senator Carla Joseph brought Bill 36-0237 to the floor after it had been held in the Committee on Rules and Judiciary. The bill proposed a multi-year lease between the Government of the Virgin Islands and DM Hospitality LLC for Parcel No. 2C Crystal Gade and a portion of Parcel No. 3 Crystal Gade on St. Thomas.

The lease would have allowed DM Hospitality to operate a food and beverage management company with a bakery and deli, along with a jewelry business management company.

The measure had been held in committee following opposition from the St. Thomas Reformed Church, which maintained that it is the rightful owner of Parcel No. 3. The church also argued that although Parcel No. 2C had been conveyed to the government, restrictive covenants were attached.

Sen. Joseph told her colleagues Wednesday that legally binding proof establishes that the entire property was transferred to the government. Only six senators voted in favor, however, and the measure failed.

If Sen. Joseph wants the proposal considered again, she will have to submit a new bill request and restart the appropriate legislative process.

LBJ Gardens Residents to Receive Compensation

Lawmakers unanimously approved Bill 36-0274, requiring the V.I. Housing Finance Authority to compensate homeowners in the Lyndon B. Johnson Gardens community who have been required to leave their homes because of government action.

“The government created this situation. The residents of LBJ Gardens should not be asked to bear the financial burden of the government's decision,” Senator Marise James said.

Senator Clifford Joseph welcomed the measure’s passage after what he described as a prolonged struggle by residents.

“It's been a hard, long battle for you guys, and I am happy that this will be approved here today,” he said.

Senator Hubert Frederick also thanked residents for their patience.

VI Slice Funding Reduced; Cistern and Slab Grants Added

Lawmakers also supported Bill 36-0273, which amends Act No. 8465 to redirect money previously appropriated for the First-Time Homebuyers Program to the Williams Delight Community Homeownership Program and the VI Slice Homeownership Program.

Sen. Blyden urged his colleagues not to approve the legislation as originally drafted. While supporting funding for Williams Delight, he said he was “totally against giving up funds to VI Slice.”

Senator Kurt Vialet subsequently offered an amendment changing the allocations. The VI Slice amount was reduced from \$3.735 million to \$1.745 million.

The amended legislation also allocates \$1.745 million to the Housing Finance Authority for a cistern and slab program. The money is to be awarded to first-time homebuyers in grants of no more than \$50,000 for construction of a cistern system and/or slab.

Contentment Road to Honor Alicia "Chuck" Hansen

There was also overwhelming support for Bill 36-0213, which renames Contentment Road on St. Croix Senator Alicia “Chuck” Hansen Lane.

Senator Dwayne DeGraff said the former senator “led the way” for current and future lawmakers.

Senator Angel Bolques Jr. called the recognition appropriate. It is “fitting for her to be honored in this way, and I believe this recognition helps to solidify the public service that she gave to the people of the Virgin Islands,” he said.

Sen. Joseph described the honor as a “long time coming.”

Additional Measures Approved

The Legislature also approved the nominations of Lynton Scotland to serve as a member of the Governing Board of the V.I. Water and Power Authority and Dr. Kisha M. Christian to serve as the fifth pharmacist on the Governing Board of the V.I. Board of Pharmacy.

Other approved measures included:

- Bill 36-0252, ratifying a perpetual access easement for ingress and egress over a portion of Public Road R.O.W. Store Tvaer Gade, Queen’s Quarter, St. Thomas.
- Bill 36-0272, rezoning Plot No. 4 of 12 Estate Richmond on St. Croix from R-3, Residential-Medium Density, to B-2, Business-Secondary/Neighborhood.
- Bill 36-0307, rezoning Parcel No. 17-D-5 Estate Adrian, No. 18, Cruz Bay Quarter, St. John — consisting of 0.83 acres — from R-1, Residential-Low Density, to B-3, Business-Scattered.
- Bill 36-0224, amending Title 20 of the Virgin Islands Code relating to the moving-violations point system.
- Bill 36-0250, amending Title 3 of the Virgin Islands Code relating to personal loans made to members of the Government Employees’ Retirement System.
- Bill 36-0278, establishing immunization requirements for children and students enrolling in Virgin Islands educational institutions, providing for exemptions and requiring electronic reporting of compliance to the Department of Health through the Virgin Islands Immunization Registry.

- Bill 36-0279, creating the position of Women Veterans Coordinator within the Office of Veterans Affairs.

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