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SkyCity Seeks EDC Benefits and One-Year Residency Waiver, Projects 100-120 Indirect Airport Jobs

SkyCity told EDC commissioners that airport redevelopment could support 100 to 120 indirect jobs and additional direct hiring, while requesting a one-year residency waiver for specialized technical positions it says may be difficult to fill locally now.

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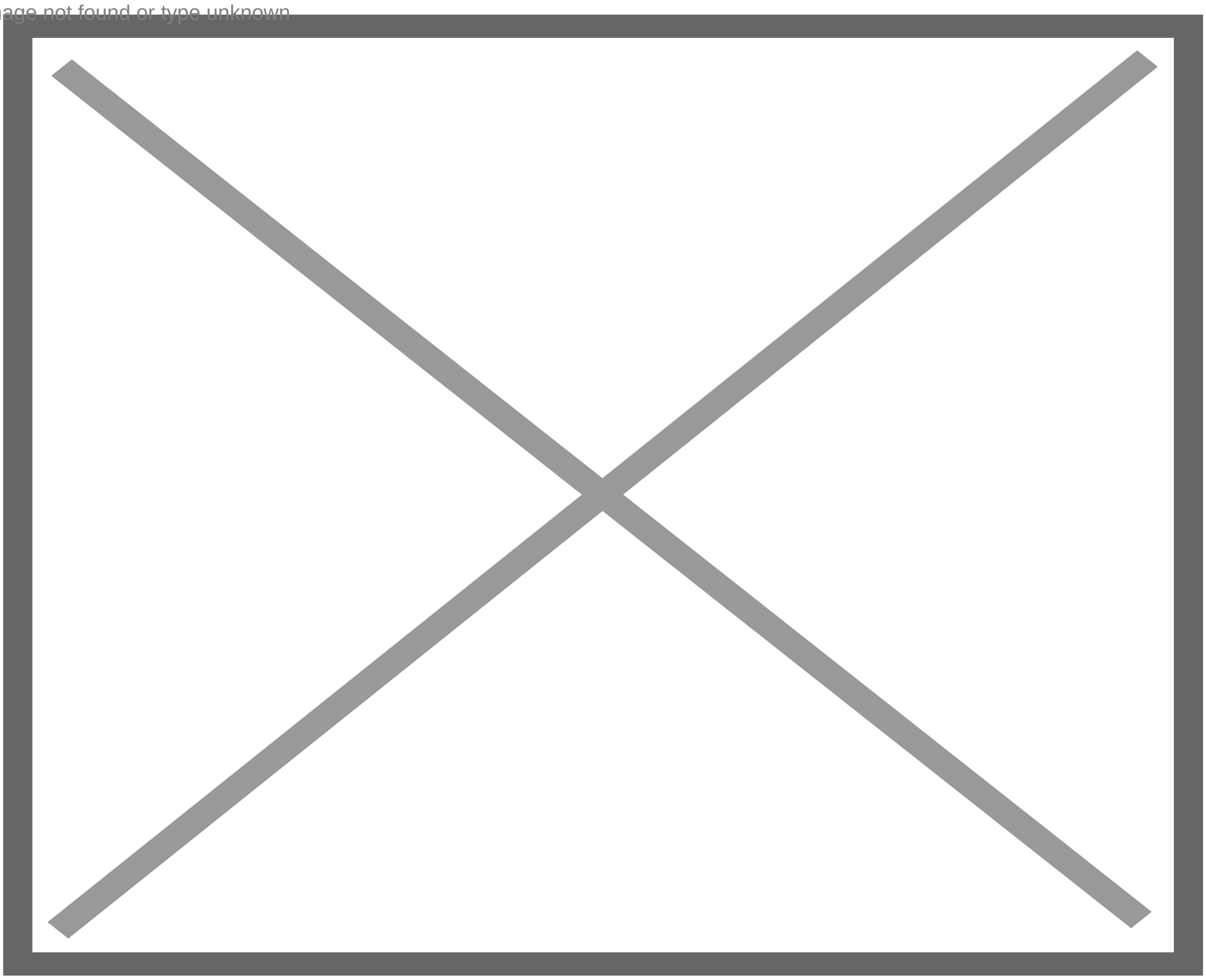

A Delta Air Lines aircraft departs Cyril E. King Airport on St. Thomas on June 11, 2026, as SkyCity seeks EDC tax benefits while negotiations continue over the proposed 40-year airport redevelopment and operations P3. **By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM.**

SkyCity VI Airports Company is seeking Economic Development Commission benefits and a one-year waiver from residency requirements as it prepares for the potential redevelopment and operation of the territory's two airports, telling commissioners Thursday that the project would create new direct employment while supporting an estimated 100 to 120 indirect jobs.

The temporary residency waiver, company representatives argued during a public hearing before the EDC, would give SkyCity time to fill specialized technical positions that may be difficult to staff immediately with local talent while transitioning existing Virgin Islands Port Authority aviation employees into the new operation.

Marjorie Roberts, presenting the application on SkyCity's behalf, said the waiver would be limited to the project's first year. Company officials said the need would depend partly on how many eligible VIPA aviation employees ultimately accept positions with SkyCity's airport operator, Avports, and how much additional training is required.

SkyCity Head of Human Resources Jimez Ashby Jr. said "all eligible non-retired VIPA aviation employees were offered positions with Avports at their current job classifications, wage levels, and service credit." A training and development program would also be implemented "to ensure a seamless transition of airport operations."

Beyond those workers, Mr. Ashby said the project is expected to generate additional employment during both the construction and operational phases.

"The project is expected to create new direct and indirect employment opportunities during both construction and operations," he said.

Mr. Ashby highlighted what he described as SkyCity's focus on "continuing hiring and bringing back talented Virgin Islanders home," while telling commissioners that "every full-time team member hired to date by Sky City and Avports is local to the U.S. Virgin Islanders."

He also described the wider network of businesses and workers typically associated with airport operations, including custodial services, information technology and cybersecurity, maintenance and facilities support, construction and capital improvement work.

That broader ecosystem could support "an estimated 100 to 120 indirect jobs," Mr. Ashby said, while cautioning that "these estimates may vary depending on the needs of the business and future market conditions."

The employment discussion formed part of SkyCity's case for receiving EDC benefits as it continues negotiating a public-private partnership with VIPA to redevelop and operate the Cyril E. King Airport on St. Thomas and Henry E. Rohlsen Airport on St. Croix.

Aecon Concessions President Steve Nackan emphasized that the airports would remain publicly owned throughout the proposed 40-year concession.

"This team was purpose-built," Mr. Nackan said while outlining the experience of the companies making up the SkyCity consortium.

He stressed that ownership of the airport properties would remain with VIPA. "At the end of the term, the airport operations and all built assets will revert to VIPA at no cost," he said.

Mr. Nackan argued that EDC benefits would help support the private investment required for the airport redevelopment while reducing charges associated with airport operations.

He described the benefits as "critical in creating the financial conditions necessary to support this level of private investment by helping to reduce airport charges."

SkyCity, he said, commissioned an independent study assessing the economic impact of operating as an EDC beneficiary. According to figures presented to commissioners, the study projected aviation-sector gains of an additional 1.1 percent in jobs, 1.2 percent in direct gross domestic product and 1.2 percent in tax revenue.

The visitor-spending component projected an additional 1.3 percent in direct jobs, 1.3 percent in direct GDP and 1.3 percent in tax revenue, according to Mr. Nackan. Capital development would also generate one-time construction-related economic activity.

Mr. Nackan pointed to Aecon's experience with airport projects in Ecuador and Bermuda as examples of the company's ability to develop local workforces. "Our P3 airport company [in Bermuda] maintains over 90% local employment," he told commissioners.

SkyCity also pledged to prioritize local vendors and establish a program intended to increase participation in airport concessions by businesses owned by women, minorities and disadvantaged people.

Company representatives highlighted SkyCity's existing community involvement in the Virgin Islands, including partnerships with the Elmo Plaskett Little League Championship and the Audi Henneman Intra Neighborhood Basketball League. Ms. Roberts also outlined planned contributions of at least $70,000 annually to charitable causes, as required of EDC beneficiaries.

Mr. Nackan said SkyCity would also seek to develop educational and career opportunities for entry-level workers and University of the Virgin Islands students.

"This project represents more than just airport redevelopment. It's a long-term investment and commitment to the U.S. Virgin Islands economy, its workforce, its businesses, and its tourism ecosystem through significant private investment," he said.

The underlying agreement between VIPA and SkyCity, however, has not yet been finalized.

Asked by Commissioner Dr. Haldane Davis about the status of negotiations, Mr. Nackan said his confidence that the parties would ultimately reach an agreement was "high."

"I'm a very confident and optimistic person," he said.

Mr. Nackan told commissioners that SkyCity could operate the airports even without EDC benefits, but maintained that obtaining the incentives would improve the economics of the project.

"We could certainly operate much more efficiently, and the benefits to… the users of the airport would be enhanced if we had these benefits from you," he said.

Jahred Kallop of Tikehau Star Infra, SkyCity's other capital partner, said any savings generated by the EDC benefits would flow directly into the project rather than being retained separately by the investors.

"It would be passed on 100% at the project level," he said.

Commissioner Dr. Gary Molloy pressed company representatives on the requested residency waiver and the transition of existing employees. SkyCity officials reiterated that the waiver would last only one year and was intended to provide flexibility during startup while local workers are trained and the company determines how many VIPA aviation employees transition into the new operation.

Commissioners also raised questions about employee transitions, operational safety and the planned sequencing of airport construction before concluding the public hearing.

No decision was made Thursday. The EDC is expected to act on SkyCity’s application at a subsequent meeting.