

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Cameras In Christiansted Don't Work, Police Officer Reveals

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Camera installed on WAPA pole in downtown Christiansted

Take a drive downtown Christiansted on any given day, and you'll see there are cameras installed in various locations that are supposed to monitor activity in the town, and peradventure someone tries something unlawful, the cameras would capture the act without needing a single witness. But, there is one problem: the cameras don't work, according to a veteran police officer in a recent interview [on 102.1 FM, Life Radio](#).

Police Officer Naomi "Sandra" Joseph, a law enforcement officer for almost 30 years, who is also vying to become a senator in the 31st Legislature, said the cameras once helped them solve crimes and capture criminals, but because they were never maintained, the cameras no longer work and are only there now to create an appearance of surveillance.

"I've traveled a lot of places, and I've seen where CCTV (Closed-Circuit Television) works. That might be a key element to at least allow the citizenry to take a step back and say, 'Okay, I don't have to say because now we have cameras capturing everything.' We have a false perception that, in our towns, we are under camera [surveillance], but they don't work," Joseph said.

Downtown Christiansted, St. Croix

When asked for clarification on the matter, Joseph reiterated her previous point.

"Nah, they don't work," she said. "I'll be the first to tell you that they don't work. So what we really need is [something] similar to what Albany, New York is doing, what London does on a daily basis, having a surveillance center where operators sit, watch the screens and direct officers to incidents."

As the interview progressed, Joseph was asked why were the cameras not working, especially when they have been used in the past to solve crimes.

"St. Croix Foundation received a grant and they put the cameras up, but it was just for the cameras," she said. "There was never any maintenance at all included in the grant money."

Not only were the cameras allowed to become inoperable overtime, Joseph pointed out, the Police Department did not have people dedicated to monitor the screens through which the town activity was channeled.

"Nobody even thought about, 'Hey, I'm putting cameras up, I have to maintain them. I have to make sure that I have somebody beside this police officer in the police station, who is taking police report as he walks in'," Joseph explained. "The camera is behind his back, so he can't pay attention to those, we needed to have somebody in there watching those screens."

Joseph further confirmed the cameras worked when initially installed, and made known that the Police Department "got convictions as a result of them." So why didn't the V.I.P.D. or the V.I. Government reinvest in the cameras since they were proven to be so effective?

"That's why I want to be your senator," Joseph said, "because I know shortsightedness exists."

Christiansted, St. Croix

Remembering she was still in the force, Joseph appeared to be backpedaling when she was pressed about the cameras' reach, choosing not to answer the question and saying some of the cameras still work.

"Well, [the cameras] are not working 100 percent," she said. "If you walk in the station right now, you'll see cameras pointing downtown Christiansted."

She continued: "What they're not doing is nobody is not (sic) watching them, and some of them are not working. So, they're not 100 percent effective as we would want them to be."

Laughing, Joseph admitted she was now backpedaling, and said as a sergeant in the police department--a position considered lower management--she could not do much to change the situation, adding that upper management lacked "foresight and fortitude to utilize a tool as valuable."

Joseph concluded by saying that, "if they are working, they are useful," however "as it stands right now, they are not as useful as they could be."

The Virgin Islands have been clouded with a rash of crimes in recent weeks, many of which have gone unsolved by the V.I.P.D.

Last week, St. Croix Police Chief James Paris released a statement acknowledging the wave of criminal activity on the island, and promised the community the Department was making every attempt to ensure incidents similar in nature don't continue to occur. Paris also said his department was expecting to bring "positive closure" to crimes already occurred.

He added:

The Police Commissioner has made some necessary adjustments for the department therefore allowing for added visibility on our streets. We have employed the assistance of other law enforcement and affiliated agencies within and around these Virgin Islands.

However, we are asking that you in our community be ever vigilant in your everyday activities. Be always aware of your surroundings and report any and every unusual incident immediately to 911, as none is not too small or minor to report.

On August 10, [masked men robbed Crucian Gold](#) at around 11:15 a.m., looting jewelry and making away with an undisclosed amount of money. Friday, July 4 [saw three armed men robbing Mid-Island Credit Union](#), attacking employees and stealing their money and cellphones. And [just three weeks ago](#), St. Croix Senator Diane Capehart was carjacked at gunpoint by two masked men while putting up campaign signs on the Melvin Evans Highway in the Hannah's Rest area.