

The Virgin Islands Consortium

WAPA Celebrates Opening of Substation, Solar Energy Plant

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On Monday, the Virgin Islands Water & Power Authority officially opened its Gregory E. Willocks Substation, as well as a 17-acre solar power plant in a special double-dedication ceremony at the facilities' location in Estate Spanish Town on St. Croix.



Newly opened Gregory E. Willocks Substation in

Spanish Town, St. Croix.

The dedication of the two projects brought out many dignitaries, including Gov. John P. de Jongh, Jr., Delegate Donna Christensen and Lt. Gov. Gregory Francis, in addition to WAPA employees, project managers and contractors from the mainland. Businessmen from Japan who played a role in bringing the projects to life were also on hand for the celebration.

In his remarks about the solar farm, WAPA Executive Director Hugo Hodge, said, "From this day forward, we will no longer be able to say that we're a hundred percent fuel-oil generated," which received loud applause from the large crowd.

Hodge went on to say that he'd read an op-ed in a local newspaper suggesting that "WAPA was killing the solar industry in the Virgin Islands." Then, looking out over the expansive solar plant to his right, he said, "I beg to differ."

He also acknowledged the Authority's high prices.

"We understand at WAPA that as long as the rates are where they are, it will be hard for the public to digest all the rest of what's going on," Hodge said, "but rest assured with this solar project and the one coming on St. Thomas next month, that we expect to put energy on the grid in December, the LEAC was lowered \$0.04 this month of October already."

He added, "We're already moving forward with that reduction that was promised here."



A portion of the 16,748 solar panels installed in Spanish

Town, St. Croix.

The event also celebrated the opening of the Gregory E. Willocks Substation, which was named after longtime WAPA engineer and leader, Gregory Willocks. According to a brief bio printed in the event program, Willocks was "instrumental in the implementation of many projects which kept the Authority on the leading edge of electrical and water production."

In expressing her gratitude to WAPA for the honor of memorializing her late husband in this way, Mrs. Willocks said, "We are truly grateful and humbled that you have chosen to dedicate this substation in his name. We will be forever grateful, and I know for many years to come, the family--his grandchildren and grandchildren to come--will drive by this highway and look over and remember Greg for the contributions he has made to WAPA and the Virgin Islands community."

The Spanish Town substation is the second on St. Croix, there is one other at the Authority's plant in Estate Richmond, and "will serve as the distribution point of energy for the western part of the island, as well as some areas on the eastern end," according to WAPA. The Authority further pointed out that "along with helping to decrease line loss, this new substation will also assist with improving system reliability."

This is to say the new plant is supposed to help cut down on the frequent power outages on the island.

In his remarks, Governor de Jongh, said, "I think the understanding that we have and what the Virgin Islands can achieve and what we have done is probably the most important thing I think we can recognize and take away from today's program. We will reach our goal of sixty percent by 2025."



WAPA's Executive Director, Hugo Hodge

The Governor was making reference to the Virgin Islands Government's plan of reducing the territory's carbon footprint by the year 2025.

A WAPA representative told the *VI Consortium* that 1,500 homes in the western part of St. Croix will begin seeing the benefits of electricity generated from the solar plant. He said homes connected to Feeders 8B, 9B and 10B will be directly impacted.

He further noted that the solar plant is not at its full capacity, but is expected to be by December.

Featured Photo: Ribbon-cutting ceremonies for the Gregory E. Willocks Substation (left) and solar energy plant (right).