

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Exclusive: WICO's Boschulte Says Options Being Explored For Alternative Uses Of 'Governor's Mansion'

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"The WICO board, we have been having conversations around what we at WICO believe should be the best use of the facility -- whether it should be the governor's residence, whether it should be a museum, whether it should be an attraction for guests so it can continue to generate revenue to take care of itself."

That's what West Indian Company Limited (WICO) CEO Joseph Boschulte said during an exclusive interview with *VI Consortium* Tuesday at WICO's executive offices in St. Thomas regarding current plans the company is exploring for the future use of Estate Catherineberg, commonly known as the Governor's Mansion, that sits high atop Denmark Hill overlooking Charlotte Amalie.

The discussion with Boschulte comes after last month's revelation by Gov. Kenneth Mapp of [his \\$12,500 per month rental home on St. Thomas](#), being paid for by Virgin Islands' tax payers, due to, according to Mapp, the Governor's Mansion not currently being in suitable living condition. After many readers expressed outrage at the cost of the rental, *VI Consortium* sought to learn more about the historic property, and to gain access to the grounds and interior of the building to see their condition first hand.

But before delving into WICO's new plans for the 18th-century property, which was the colonial Great House of the Estate Catherineberg plantation when the territory was under Danish rule, Boschulte explained the relationship between WICO, Catherineberg, and the Government of the Virgin Islands, specifically the office of the governor. A relationship, Boschulte says, that has always been a good one.

"Catherineberg is owned by the West Indian Company and the West Indian Company is a public corporation, by V.I. Code," he began. "We are not an agency, an entity, a semi-autonomous, but we're owned, one-hundred percent, by the Public Finance Authority."

"In 1993, the V.I. government bought WICO from the Danish company that owned it," he continued. "GERS bought a portion of the property and the assets, which was Havensight Mall and that piece, and the PFA, at the time, bought the West Indian Company Limited, which was primarily the dock and the assets there."



," Boschulte said.

West Indian Company Limited

president and CEO, Joseph Boschulte

He went on to say that while the PFA owns WICO, "there were some very specific drafting of the Code that allowed WICO to continue to operate as a corporation, but now as a public corporation, and at the same time enjoy the benefits of being under the government's auspices, for example, we don't pay property taxes."

Furthermore, Boschulte said shortly after the PFA purchased WICO in 1993, "an agreement was established between WICO and the Government of the Virgin Islands, primarily through the office of the governor, for the office of the governor to have use of Estate Catherineberg and the facility. So that relationship has been in place long before I got here."

In order to decide if WICO should change directions with the use of the property, which in recent times has come to be the place where the territory's governor resides, Boschulte, who has been at the helm of WICO since May 2012, shared details of a series of "collaborative conversations" being conducted between his company and the governor's office.

"What's happening right now is collaborative conversations between WICO and the office of the governor," he said. "We are assessing the conditions of the property. Government House is doing their assessment through their architects to see if it's habitable or if it's not, what needs to be done, and at the same time, we're doing our assessment outside, too."

Who Pays For What?

Since the governor's office is funded through tax payer dollars and if Catherineberg is considered 'the people's house,' which Boschulte believes it is, stating, "It's owned by us and we are owned by the government," it seems either way Virgin Islands' tax payers may pick up the tab for property repairs.

"So, even if they come and say in order to make it habitable, you have to change the bathroom, the lease outlines whose expense it should be and that's part of the dialogue right now -- the different parameters surrounding who does what and that's why we're working collaboratively," Boschulte explained.

He continued: "At least my understanding of it, in conversations with our board, clearly there are points that say 'government's responsibility, WICO's responsibility.' There is a free flow of information between us and them, or there is an expectation that there would be."

While it was not disclosed how much WICO purchased the property for, Boschulte said that as WICO's head, his job is to see the company makes a good return on its investment.

"One of the things we do at WICO is we're self-sustainable, we believe heavily in doing things that if it can't take care of itself then," he trailed off, adding, "Ultimately for us, as CEO of WICO, clearly I'm concerned all our assets, specifically Estate Catherineberg, brings its return back to the company."



WICO's executive offices,

located at the Havensight Mall, St. Thomas

Although the mansion is not being used as a living space for the territory's highest official -- the last governor to reside there was Gov. Turnbull from 1998 to 2006, except for a stint of renting a home for \$7,000 a month (which was paid for by WICO) when the estate was closed due to "health-threatening bacteria found to be flourishing in it," according to a previously published report -- Boschulte said it is often used as a place for governors to host social gatherings.

"Governor de Jongh used the property and I think Governor Mapp has done a couple of social events there. As opposed to somebody living in it, that's what we're trying to assess right now," he said.

While Boschulte would not say in which direction WICO is leaning toward going concerning the future use of Estate Catherineberg, he said information would be forthcoming, around mid to late April, after the assessment of the property is completed.

"What I can tell you is within the next four to six weeks, I should have more information and better things to say like, 'Hey, this is exactly what's going on,'" he said, adding, "because the architects are looking at it, the surveyor is looking at it, we also did a topography."

"One of the things that's clear is that it's a very, very old facility and when you're dealing with older facilities, it's a very different TLC that's needed versus just going in and tearing stuff down. so, we're working on that," Boschulte continued.

"What I can tell you is that I'll definitely follow back up with the governor's office so that we could figure out when would be a good time to do some things," he said.

Outside Estate Catherineberg

Prior to speaking with Boschulte, who stressed that although WICO owns the estate it is the governor's office that keeps the keys, *VI Consortium* contacted both parties by phone requesting access to the facility; however, both parties referred reporters back to the other.

At his office on Tuesday, Boschulte explained that WICO's primary responsibility as Catherineberg's owner is to maintain the property's grounds. He said not even WICO has direct access to the interior of the mansion at will, only the governor's office has that.

"As far as I can tell you, from back in the 90s, we have been responsible for maintaining the grounds of the property," he said, adding, "maintenance of the facility, and internal, is [unclear] to the building, so we don't go



Shot of Catherineberg from the

main road driving south

So, while Boschulte could not provide access to the property, reporters nonetheless took the short and winding drive from WICO's offices up to Denmark Hill to observe Estate Catherineberg, albeit from a distance.

There, we were met by a friendly security guard stationed at a modest, red-and-white guard booth just outside the property's wrought-iron gates. Like Boschulte, the guard reiterated the strict no-access policy unless authorized by the governor's office. He also said he had never been inside the mansion itself, although he has traversed the grounds.

A solid red-and-white concrete wall stretched the full way around the off-white colored residence, which Boschulte says sits on approximately two acres. The American and USVI flags erected at the top of the building could be seen flapping in the wind. Manicured greenery and flowers grew up around parts of the wall, constructed into the hillside, in an effort to maintain the property's privacy.

Boschulte, who likened WICO's with the governor's office as a good landlord-tenant relationship, said he doesn't know how many rooms the home has.

"You know, I don't even know," he admitted when asked. "Since I've been here, I have not physically gone into the property. Our team, we don't go in, so unless there is someone from the governor's staff with us, we don't have access. They have the keys."

However, Boschulte said WICO's ties with the governor's office is a close one.

"The reason I can tell you what's happening inside is because we talk [with the governor's office]. Clearly, we have some overlap because the chief of staff of the

governor, Randy Knight, is the chairman of the WICO board, so we have some co-mingling there, in a good way.

"So, he can talk from the governor's office what's happening directly for their use and purposes. And we can speak from the assets of the company what we believe should happen," he said.

VI Consortium has reached out to the governor's office requesting information on its assessment of the inside of the Governor's Mansion. No response had been received at press time. *VI Consortium* has also made contact again with persons in the governor's office responsible for allowing access to the inside of the property and is awaiting a response.

Ernice Gilbert assisted with reporting for this story.

Feature Image: Front gate of Estate Catherineberg residence

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