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WAPA Hires Outside Company to Restore Meter System for Accurate and Timely Billing

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The governing board of the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority said Friday that it has given approval for the hiring of outside assistance to complete the restoration of the utility's Automated Metering Infrastructure. WAPA said once restoration is completed, it will be in position to ensure accurate and timely billing. The board's action came in a Friday morning emergency meeting.

Senators on Thursday [overrode](#) Governor Albert Bryan's veto of a bill that sought to bring relief to Virgin Islands ratepayers by reducing the amount of time the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority could back-bill customers.

To complete system restoration, WAPA said it is returning to a contractor and the principal engineer who originally designed and implemented the automated metering system which was decimated in the 2017 hurricanes.

The board authorized entering into contract with Black & Veatch International Company for the first stage of system restoration at a cost of \$371,140. The work by Black & Veatch will be completed in 16-18 weeks, and all field work will be finalized by the end of 2020. Executive Director Lawrence J. Kupfer told board members that since the hurricanes WAPA has been working on system restoration with internal resources.

“The Authority is now seeking outside assistance to complete the restoration. Complete rehabilitation of the system will improve meter communications, synchronize data management systems, and improve meter data management functionality,” Mr. Kupfer said.

He added that the completion of system restoration is directly linked to the authority's ability to bill timelier and ensure accuracy.

Chief Operating Officer of Electric Systems Clinton Hedrington Jr. said Black & Veatch was selected, and the firm is best suited to execute a corrective plan they designed. “B&V has the capacity to immediately begin work on this project, and engineer Rick Schmidt’s intimate knowledge of the system design and functionality is of great value to WAPA,” he said.

In other action, the board authorized Mr. Kupfer to enter into contract with Wartsila LLC for engineering services and engine reservation fees. This contract is associated with the purchase and installation of two, four-megawatt emergency generators for St. John, which had previously been approved by the board in September 2018. The cost for engineering services and reservation fees total \$3 million. Once the design work is completed and a final cost negotiated, the governing board must approve the contract terms, WAPA said.

Once installed and commissioned, the generators, that will be located in Cruz Bay and Coral Bay, will provide electrical service to St. John during service interruptions on St. Thomas, according to the authority. “With these units, St. John can be independently restored while the outage issues on St. Thomas are resolved,” Mr. Kupfer told board members. The battery system will provide grid stabilization as determined by a power system study. Once negotiations are completed, the governing board must approve the final contract cost. The project will be funded on a 90-10 match by FEMA.

Mr. Hedrington said at the meeting that the project was originally approved in 2018 however it underwent additional review by FEMA to determine its qualification for federal funding. The project is categorized by WAPA as one of several hazard mitigation undertakings to create a more resilient, efficient, and reliable electric system in the territory.

The board also approved a loan contract amendment with Rural Utility Services and a new deposit control agreement to replace the former Cushion of Credit Account. The changes were required by RUS which provided a \$13 million loan to WAPA to initially develop and implement the automated metering infrastructure and associated systems.

Board members in attendance included: Chairman Anthony D. Thomas, Vice Chair Noel Loftus, Secretary Juanita Young, Directors Kyle Fleming and Joel Lee, and Cheryl Boynes Jackson. Elizabeth Armstrong, Jed JohnHope, and Hubert Turnbull were excused.