The Virgin Islands Consortium

Government Spent $107,563.56 In 4.5 Months For Mapp Mansion Rental

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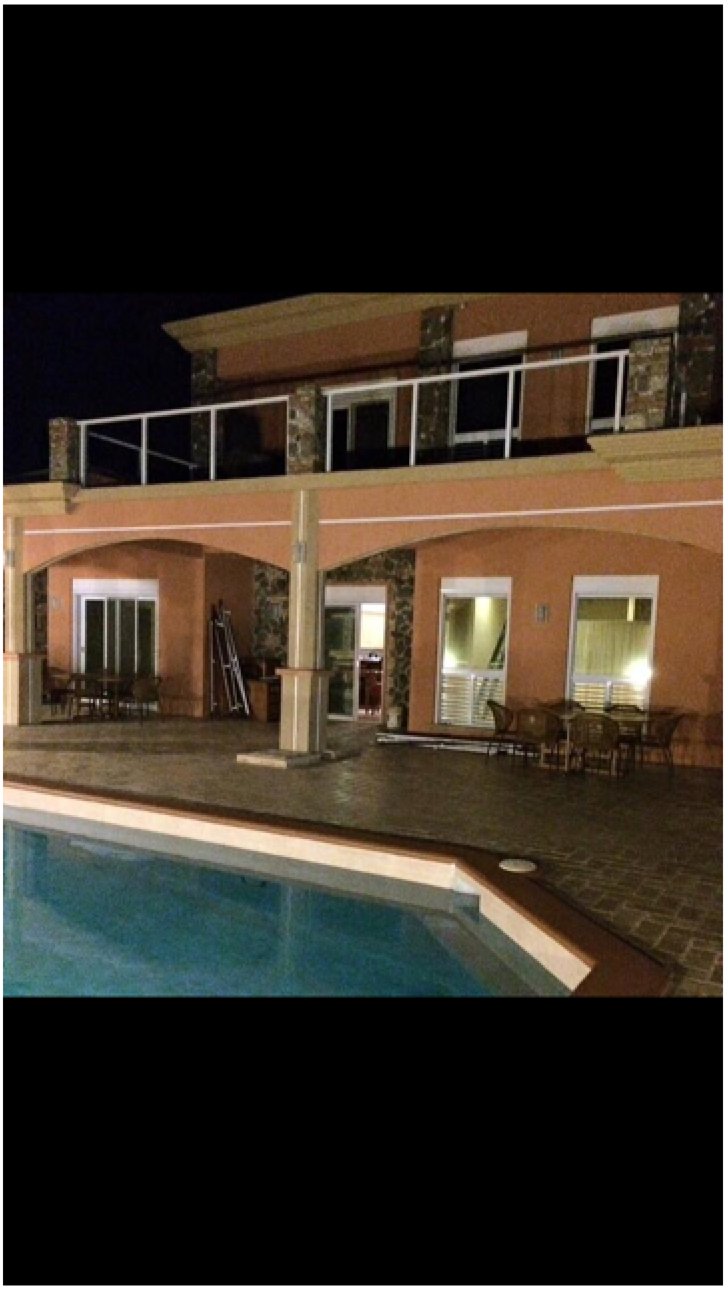
ST. THOMAS -- The total amount of funds that the Government of the Virgin Islands -- through the West Indian Company -- expended on the Estate Nazareth mansion, dubbed Villa Fratelli Cresta where Governor Kenneth Mapp lived for four and a half months, is $107,563.56, documents made available during a Senate Committee of the Whole hearing currently underway at the Earl B. Ottley Legislative Hall on Thursday, revealed.

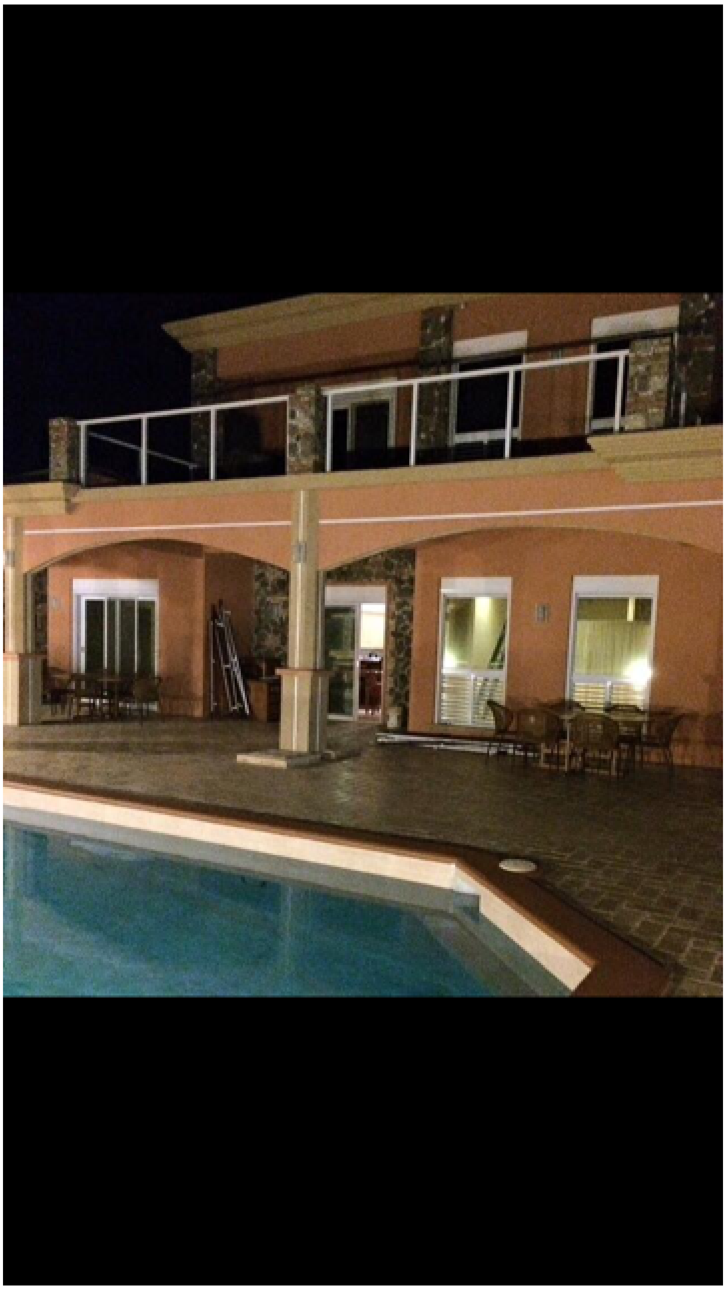
This amount includes other expenditures such as housekeeping at $137 daily; a guest chef who visited the mansion to cook for the governor four times during his stay at the villa for $240 on each visit; electricity averaging $399.53 monthly; and phone and internet services averaging $350.69 monthly.

Dividing the total payment of $107,563.56 into five months, the breakdown equates to $21,512.712, and "if divided by the actual living time which is four and a half months, we were paying $23,902.00," monthly, Sen. Kurt Vialet said.

Senators, questioning Government House and WICO officials, expressed dissatisfaction with the many discrepancies that were brought to the fore at the hearing.

Estate Nazareth Mansion, dubbed Villa Fratelli Cresta





Sen. Vialet, while agreeing that it is imperative a resolution be found in relation to housing of governors, decried the the Estate Nazareth situation as inconsistent, and said the people of the territory should know exactly what took place.

WICO was able to recoup some of the money -- some $45,000 -- after WICO and the owner of the villa renegotiated the terms of the agreement.

The freshman senator scolded WICO and government officials for spending upwards $100,000 in 4.5 months for housing a governor. "We could have laid the foundation for a house," Vialet offered. Vialet, a passionate advocate of St. Croix, told WICO CEO Joseph Boschulte that while the company he heads at a salary of $209,000 annually, has consistently failed to make payments to the Government of the Virgin Islands in lieu of taxes as per an agreement the company has with the GVI, it made payments of over $100,000 for the governor's residence -- and would have made over $200,000 in payments in one year to the owners of the mansion, had not the situation snowballed into a scandal after the media caught on.

"How were you able to find $107,000 in four and a half months, and then justify that you don't have any money to pay the government of the Virgin Islands," Vialet pressed.

WICO board member Michael Watson said the new WICO board, in existence for about four months, has a plan to address the issue of payment to the GVI "comprehensively."

Senator Terrence "Positive" Nelson said the issue of housing for the territory's governors was old, and is currently being guided by the Revised Organic Act of 1954 that does not take into consideration "how we have to govern a multi-island territory." And he questioned why the governor must reside in the capital.

However, Nelson focused his 8 minutes of questioning on what he called the unaccounted and unauthorized movement of money through the government, not only with the current issue, but multiple other instances.

"What I'm pointing to is the loose accounting system of this government," Nelson said. "If you don't have proper accounting, you can't account for the money that runs through the government, whether it's for WICO, PFA (Public Finance Authority), Government House or anything else."

While a majority of senators chided the government officials facing the Committee of the Whole on Thursday, a few took part of the blame, acknowledging that the governor, who, according to the law must reside on St. Thomas, came into government without a place to live because Catherineberg and Government House have been deemed unlivable.

"Somewhere down the line you got to find money to pay for somewhere for the chief executive to stay. Somewhere down the line it has to happen," At-Large Senator Almando "Rocky" Liburd said. Senator Clifford Graham, Finance Committee chair, carried the same sentiments, even as he expressed frustration with what had transpired at Estate Nazareth.

"As a responsible Body, as a responsible community, looking out for our governor, something has to happen, and I'm saying at some point monies have to be appropriated, some place has to be identified, and I believe that the governor has a right to choose where he wants to stay," Liburd continued, contending that some people may want the governor to live somewhere that's not befitting of the territory's chief executive.

"Let's be real," Liburd added with empathy in his voice. "Kenneth Mapp may be who he is; we don't know who is going to be the next governor. But at some point there has to be a place where our people are proud of where we place our chief executive."

See the documents, including lease, checks, services, WICO resolutions and more, here.