

The Virgin Islands Consortium

deChabert Demolition Green-Lighted By DPNR

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ST. CROIX -- The Virgin Islands Housing Authority has announced that it's received the permit from the Department of Planning and Natural Resources that allows it to commence the demolition work on the abandoned Ralph deChabert Housing Community. The permit was issued on July 24.

"Now that we have received all the required permits which include the Coastal Zone Management (CZM), the earth change and demolition along with an approved abatement plan and storm and water pollution prevention plan, the Virgin Islands Housing Authority can now move forward with this vitally important development for the island of St. Croix," Robert Graham, executive director of VIHA.

At a [June town hall meeting](#) organized by VIHA , residents of communities neighboring the now-shuttered Housing Community gathered at the Juanita Gardine School auditorium to receive pertinent information about the project, which has been contracted to a Puerto Rican company, RG Engineering Inc.

But after a presentation was given by RG Engineering's sales manager, Jose M. Robles, in which Robles explained thoroughly details of the upcoming project, attendees, including Senator Novelle Francis, shared concerns about hiring, and whether local employment was a priority.

"I'm very concerned because if we look at tradition, when these out-of-Virgin Islands companies come here, they take the lion's share of the funding back to their community," Sen. Novelle Francis, Jr. told *The Consortium*. "In this instance we're seeing where Puerto Rico will be benefiting from this, more so than the Virgin Islands economy."

A local company placed a bid for the contract [but failed](#) in winning the board's approval.

During his presentation, Robles said the first phase of the work, which includes the removal of asbestos and lead from the structure, will be performed by its own specialists; not locals.

Retired track coach Eurman Fahie, also present at the town hall, said VIHA could have made moves to train locals so they'd be ready to work from beginning to end. Lydia Hughes, chief operating officer at VIHA, said there are four more projects in the pipeline, and that VIHA will take Fahie's recommendation into consideration.

But locals will be employed, Robles said, as federal mandates must be adhered to, one of which being the hiring of [Section 3](#) individuals as a priority, and RG Engineering has been provided with a list of the candidates. Hughes, however, made a point of clarifying who qualify as section 3 individuals, reminding the audience that said persons must live in public housing and must be on the lease of the property.

According to the press release issued on Friday, residents in the neighboring areas will notice various road detours, which VIHA says has been implemented to prevent site-trespassing and the safety of workers as they commence the abatement phase of the demolition, which includes the removal of hazardous material such as lead-based paint and asbestos, a portion of the work VIHA says must be completed before the structure can be demolished.