

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Demolition Of deChabert Starts Today, Housing Authority Says

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ST. CROIX -- Virgin Islands Housing Authority Executive Director Robert Graham announced late Monday via press release that the vacated Ralph deChabert Housing Community will see "physical demolition" beginning today by contractor R.G. Engineering.

On Friday, August 21, VIHA [received approval from the Department of Planning and Natural Resources](#) after the first five buildings on the easternmost portion of the site had been cleared of hazards.

"This is definitely a momentous occasion for the Virgin Islands Housing Authority. We have eagerly awaited this moment where we could witness the removal of these vacant buildings that have been uninhabited for several years," Graham said.

VIHA says it will continue to maintain communication with the community and the various governmental agencies to ensure their knowledge of the project and to mitigate any potential impact or inconveniences that may arise during the various phases of work to be performed.

Its goal, according to the release, is to successfully undertake the project with minimal impacts to the community and the environment.

"It is the objective of the Authority to continue to keep the community and our valued stakeholders informed of the progress of the project as we move through the various phases," Graham added. "We ask for the community's continued support and cooperation during the demolition phase and apologize for any inconveniences that may arise."

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.

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. Francis 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 were 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.