

The Virgin Islands Consortium

WAPA Board Mandates Hiring Of Virgin Islands' Residents For Upcoming Projects

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ST. CROIX -- At its regular monthly meeting here on Friday, the Governing Board of the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority approved amendments to existing contract guidelines and language, to mandate the hiring of Virgin Islands residents and workers for the Authority's projects.

WAPA and its subcontractors have been under fire for hiring a majority of workers from outside the territory to perform work on major projects, most of which can be done by the local workforce. The Consortium ran [multiple stories](#) on the matter earlier this year.

"The hiring of Virgin Islands residents is a priority item as the territory continues to feel the effects of the economic recession. These changes are required to place greater emphasis on the enforcement of local laws which require hiring local residents for our development projects," said WAPA Executive Director Hugo V. Hodge, Jr. He added that these changes will ensure that WAPA fulfills the requirements of the law as it relates to the hiring of qualified Virgin Islands residents to the greatest extent possible.

The board approved a contract extension to allow for additional work in the fire protection systems at the two district power plants. "The additional scope of work factors in various upgrades that are necessary to the fire protection systems but were not factored into the original scope of work since the extent of the upgrades were being assessed at the time we accepted the proposals," Hodge said. He said the additional calendar days will allow the contractor, ESI, Inc., until December 31st to complete the additional work.

Also approved by the board was a change order and time extension to an existing contract to allow for additional fire protection system upgrades in and around the generating units at both power plants. The contract with IV-AGA of Texas has been extended to October 2016 to complete the work that will incorporate a long-planned upgrade to the existing fire and gas alarm systems at each unit.

Hodge was given authorization to proceed with a grant-funded project that will replace pole mounted power transformers with pad-mounted transformers at four schools here. The funding is in the form of a FEMA pre-disaster mitigation grant where the federal government is footing the bill for 75 percent of the project cost while WAPA is picking up the remaining 25 percent.

In his monthly report to the board, Hodge noted that the LPG conversion project on St. Croix is proceeding to the [finish line](#).

"We received the first of several shipments of LPG on Wednesday morning and the process continues toward filling the eight storage tanks while we commission and conduct final testing of the LPG system. We will be burning propane to generate electricity during this testing, and barring no hiccups in the system, I would say we are well on our way to finalizing this project on St. Croix."

Hodge said two of the generating units on St. Croix are fully converted and will be final tested to burn LPG in the generation of electricity.

"These two units are capable of meeting the peak power demand on St. Croix." Also, he said, this week VITOL and WAPA demonstrated for the V.I. Fire Services the many redundant fire protection systems associated with the LPG system.

Hodge also advised the board that WAPA's efforts, as well as those of Governor Kenneth Mapp and Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett, continue toward securing the final permits required to carry out marine work at the Randolph Harley Power Plant to facilitate the introduction of propane on St. Thomas.

"We continue to reach out and discuss the approval process with officials at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; Governor Mapp and Delegate Plaskett are both working with the agencies in the Executive Branch of the federal government to assist us in any way possible, and this issue has reached as far as The White House," Hodge said. "We

remain hopeful to have this permit in hand soon, perhaps within the next thirty days,” he added.

In other action, the governing board:

- Approved an ocean freight and port-to-site delivery charge for certain components of the heat recovery steam generator which recently arrived from the mainland. Additional charges were accrued due to an increase in the component's weight when compared to an earlier estimate provided by the shipping company.
- Approved a five-year lease option for the rental of commercial property which houses the St. John business office at the Marketplace in Cruz Bay. The five year lease option run from January 1, 2016 to January 1, 2021 at a cost of \$4,654.83 per month.
- Authorized renewal of a health insurance policy with CIGNA Healthcare for employees, retirees and their dependents effective January 1, 2016 at a cost of \$1.9 million.
- Authorized a contract to upgrade the Authority's strategic plan with an eye towards an implementation strategy and key performance indicators to measure results of the plan.
- Approved funding to maintain Master Service Agreements for professional and technical assistance in maintaining compliance with federal consent decrees at both power plants. The board also approved an extension on the life of the agreements, they now run through the end of 2016.

Board members present included: Chairman Gerald Groner, Esq., Vice Chair Juanita Young and members: Director Marvin Pickering, Commissioners Devin Carrington and Gustav James, Noel Loftus, Cheryl Boynes-Jackson and Elizabeth Armstrong.