

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Administration To Build Complex On St. Croix To House Supreme Court And Legislature

Exclusive / **Published On January 10, 2016 11:51 AM /**

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ST. CROIX -- Governor Kenneth Mapp revealed to The Consortium in an exclusive interview conducted at Government House here on Friday afternoon, that his administration intends to construct a complex to house the Virgin Islands Legislature, Supreme Court and some parts of the Department of Labor, as well as Human Services. Above, an example of a modern office complex.

"Part of our plan for infrastructure development is to build a complex to house the Supreme Court, the Legislature of the Virgin Islands and small component pieces of Labor and Human Services, and those kinds of issues where synergies work," said the governor.

The territory's leader divulged the news in response to a question posed by a Consortium [Facebook user](#), De Made Burke, who inquired whether the government would consider building one complex here to house all government department and agencies.

But while the territory's leader is in favor of some consolidation, he said bringing all government operations under one roof would stifle commerce in parts of the island that need the activity the most.

"When you do that, you're going to do what is called trenching. You're going to move all government employees [in] one place, and wherever you have some government services in the different towns and areas of the island, you're going to economically wipe them out," he said. "The key is how do we move government services into government facilities."

"But to build one building and move all government agencies will have a detrimental effect, particularly on the Island of St. Croix where, if you put it in the middle of the island, then you will finish wiping out the remnants of Christiansted and the activity that you have going on in Frederiksted, and then you would bring everything to a central core."

The governor then mentioned the recent passage of the ArcLight/GVI agreement that will generate some activity to the center of the island, which is expected to bring new commerce action to St. Croix's mid-island area.

"I'm not of that economic mindset" of consolidating all government operations in the same complex. I believe you have to reduce the cost of government and the operations of government, but you want to use government work and facilities as part of your economic activities in different aspects of the island," he concluded.

In June 2015, it was revealed during a Committee on Finance hearing that the Virgin Islands Department Of Labor's St. Croix arm was locked into a 20-year lease costing \$322,000 annually with the owner of the Castle Coakley building where Labor is housed.

That deal was reached under the John P. de Jongh administration and was revealed through documents the department provided to members of the finance committee, and confirmed by then-Commissioner-designee Catherine Ann Hendry, while under oath at the Fritz Lawetz Conference Room in the Frederiksted Legislative building.

Sen. Kurt Vialet pointed out the disparity between the St. Croix rental of \$322,000 annually as compared to the St. Thomas space, where VIDOL is currently paying \$250,000 annually — with square footage for both properties being almost equal at 17,000 and 17,936 for St. Thomas and St. Croix respectively. Yet, the difference in cost for rent per annum is \$72,000.

Governor Mapp's decision to consolidate some government agencies is sure to win approval from constituents who want to see the government become more responsible with taxpayers dollars. But some will also contend that he is not going far enough.

The planned consolidation of the Legislature and Supreme Court here follows a tour of the Innovative building by Senate Democrats, who toyed with the idea of purchasing the massive, modern complex as St. Croix's new legislative building. But that planned failed; derailed by a Senator Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly press release [condemning their actions](#).

