

The Virgin Islands Consortium

At Canegata Ball Park Facility, Government Officials Field Community Questions

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ST. CROIX -- The second of two town hall meetings organized by St. Croix Administrator Stephanie Williams, above left, brought a capacity crowd to the Canegata Ball Park Multipurpose Center in Gallows Bay, Christiansted, as residents sought answers on pressing issues facing their communities. A similar event was held on February 17 at Rotary West in Frederiksted.

Residents raised concerns about the lack of streetlights, high gas prices, abandoned property, potholes and more. Each question was met with answers from officials of various government departments and agencies, who sat at a makeshift table that took up the entire width of the facility's stage.

As host, Ms. Williams created an atmosphere conducive to questioning. Her responses -- sometimes prefacing those of officials who the questions were directed towards -- encouraged straightforward and sincere answers.

On abandoned homes, which residents say are being used by vagrants who store garbage in those homes and use their cisterns -- a potential breeding ground for mosquitoes -- Ms. Williams said legislation would have to be created to permanently fix the problem.

On deplorable road conditions, Denise Browne, assistant commissioner of Public Works, said the department was "on the move," speaking feverishly and with excitement about initiatives he said the department has been implementing. Mr. Browne said \$3 million had been set aside to buy much-needed equipment to aid Public Works in better doing its job. "No more patching roads," he said, stating that D.P.W.'s ongoing efforts will affect all three islands.

The assistant commissioner said beginning on April 1, D.P.W. would start the cleanup process of gutters and drainage in the downtown Christiansted area, working its way through the island.

In a prior conversation with Ms. Williams, the administrator told The Consortium that the town hall meetings were arranged to help give community members a direct voice within the Mapp administration, and thereby giving the governor and his cabinet members a sense of what the community expects.

And the effort was an introduction to what Ms. Williams says will be an ongoing process of bridging the community and those elected to represent its interests.

Officials representing the Virgin Islands Police Department, Department of Public Works, Department of Labor, Department of Health, Division of Personnel, Bureau of Internal Revenue, the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority and the Virgin Islands Waste Management Authority, among others, were present.