

The Virgin Islands Consortium

St. Croix Senators Delaying Four-Star Hotel Project; Mapp Says

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ST. CROIX -- Although he did not list names, Governor Kenneth Mapp said in his 2017 fiscal budget transmittal letter to Senate President Neville James, that he is having difficulty in getting senators from this island to support the hotel project he [announced earlier this year](#), to be built here.

In fact, Mr. Mapp has made his fourth request to the Senate, asking legislators to redirect some \$1 million -- initially set aside to be used for [HOVENSA litigation](#) -- "to develop, identify a brand and identify financing to build a full service luxury resort on St. Croix."

"I do not understand why I am having such difficulty with senators from the district of St.

Croix in moving this project forward," said the governor.

[Earlier this month](#), he explained why the funds are needed.

"Those resources are needed so that the transaction team can begin its work to structure a project, develop a brand partner, develop initial schematics and locations for the island of St. Croix, and to go out to the market to bid for a brand partner — meaning a Hyatt, a Hilton, a Starwood, a Marriott — whoever the transaction team determines would be the best player for this project, and to begin the process to determine the source of the financing, that then allows me to submit to the Legislature for their consideration a completed package that can begin the construction and development," Mr. Mapp said.

Mr. Mapp announced the four-star hotel project for St. Croix [during his 2016 State of the Territory Address](#). In February, the governor [revealed](#) what he dubbed a "transaction team" whose job is to identify partners to bring the governor's vision to fruition. Mr. Mapp said experts have concluded that a first class resort affiliated with an internationally known brand, is what's needed to attract the flights and commerce necessary to truly develop the big island's tourism industry.

The team includes Dept. of Tourism Commissioner Beverly Nicholson-Doty, Attorney Joel Holt, Government House Chief Counsel Emile Henderson, Finance Commissioner Valdemier Collens, Chief Economist Dr. Simon Jones-Hendrickson and St. Croix hoteliers Mr. Jack Pickle and Elizabeth Armstrong, the latter being an owner of the upscale Buccaneer Hotel here.

"I have asked the PFA [Public Finance Authority] to have the destination study updated," Mr. Mapp said [during his 2016 SOTA](#), referring to a study held to locate an area on St. Croix best suited for the resort. "It is my administration's objective to send to this body before year's end a development project for the construction and operation of a branded hotel facility of at least 4-stars and not less than 250 rooms for the island of St. Croix. In the coming days, I will announce a project team of persons from the public and private sectors who will assist the administration on putting together a transaction deal with a major brand for this facility."

The governor reiterated this intention in the transmittal letter to Mr. James.

"Building an upper upscale hotel of at least 250 rooms and the ancillary facilities will create hundreds of new jobs, drive construction activity and generate a synergy for other private sector tourism related investment on the island. The stark reality is; St. Croix needs the rooms," he said.

During the annual Chamber of Commerce Meeting held on this island in February, the governor said that the territory could expect a growing number of visitors as the national economy improves and American travelers have an increased desire to stay within the security of the United States. Adding a major resort on St. Croix, he argued, would bolster the island's appeal.

"Now is the time to make sure our infrastructure is in place so we are able to attract new visitors to our shores," he said.

The Senate president is responsible for all operations of Legislature, including the scheduling of hearings and Committee of the Whole meetings. But the 31st Body has yet to take up the re-appropriating of the \$1 million as an item to help facilitate movement of the hotel project.

Attempts to reach Mr. James for comment this morning were unsuccessful.

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