

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## Stalled Progress At Paul E. Joseph Stadium And Main Street Revitalization: Francis Chides Administration At Budget Hearing

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ST. THOMAS -- After temporarily halting work at the Paul E. Joseph Stadium [in February, 2015](#) to restructure the agreement with contractor GEC, LLC, Governor Kenneth Mapp mid-October 2015 announced that [work would start that same month](#). Again in October of last year, the governor [announced](#) the that work on the long-awaited Main Street Revitalization Project in downtown Charlotte Amalie -- which the territory's leader said would not only provide major enhancements to the downtown area, but also employment for multiple residents. But there, too, progress has been nonexistent; even after the governor announced Tip Top Construction as the contractor.

"This Main Street Revitalization Project will be the beginning of this administration's vision to enhance not only the downtown area but the entire Charlotte Amalie waterfront from WICO to Crown Bay," Mr. Mapp said in October.

Nothing, however, has materialized.

The issue of delayed construction was highlighted by Senator Novelle Francis on Monday at a budget overview hearing held at the Earl B. Ottley Legislative Hall in the Committee on Finance.

"Can you speak to the opportunities that we're creating and the hope that we're creating, when we have a number of shovel-ready projects -- especially in the district of St. Croix -- that we still have not been able to get off the ground? Starting with Paul E. Joseph Stadium [and] looking at some of the road conditions that we have here," asked Mr. Francis to Office of Management and Budget Director Nellon Bowry.

Mr. Bowry said in regards to the roads, Public Works Commissioner Gustav James needed to establish an ongoing road maintenance program, which would include 74 additional employees at D.P.W., and some \$700,000 additional funds to the department's budget. "We're talking about boots-on-the-ground kind of positions to do ongoing maintenance, in addition to the major construction that's [funded by the GARVEE bonds](#)," he said.

Back on the discussion of stalled projects, Mr. Francis pressed: "So we have not seen [construction] in 2015, we have not seen that in 2016, and you're saying that in 2017 we're hoping to accomplish that?" Mr. Bowry suggested that once the D.P.W. program was funded and staffed, work would indeed commence on GARVEE and other road projects, but he did not clarify why the Paul E. Joseph Stadium and Mainstreet Revitalization had stalled.

Mr. Francis was not satisfied: "What will it take to truly see that these capital projects get off the ground and put people to work? When we talk about crime and everything that we're seeing in this community, putting people to work eliminate those conditions that we create for them. So in having the funding available for the capital projects, what does it takes for us to truly get these things moving?"

Mr. Bowry said the government needed to "up the sense of urgency and become more aggressive in converting those projects from plans to real work in progress."

Last year, Mr. James said work on the Main Street project "will be performed at night, so as to not interfere with the daily commerce on Main Street." Mr. James further stated that the plans for the project would be posted on D.P.W.'s website "in the near future." But a sift through the department's [website](#) provided no such information.

St. Thomas-St. John Chamber of Commerce President Sebastiano Paiewonsky Cassinelli last year said the project was long overdue and a much-needed to help bolster this island as the premier tourism destination that it is.

"The Revitalization of Main Street is the cornerstone for the revitalization of Charlotte Amalie and will solidify our position as a premiere destination for visitors. This investment in our infrastructure will improve our overall product and serve to showcase our unique

historic district," he said. But that was in October; and the Chamber hasn't said anything in regards to the project since.

And Mr. Mapp, in announcing the Paul E. Joseph work, praised partners and administration officials for their efforts in bringing the project to the point of what was to be its commencement.

"I want to thank the administration's team of attorneys along with Commissioners Gustav James, Pedro Cruz and Randolph Bennett and the PFA's consultant, Coastal Systems—USVI, for working with the representatives of GEC, LLC to get this significant project back on track," he said.

We've heard nothing since, even as the Paul E. Joseph Stadium sits uninviting and as an eyesore to residents and visitors alike.

*Feature Image: Portions of downtown Charlotte Amalie.*

*Image Credit: SpiritOfArgo.*

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