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Residents of Long Reef Road Plead: 'Please Fix this Road'

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A portion of Long Reef Road By. KIA GRIFFITH FOR VI CONSORTIUM

ST. CROIX — Nearly two years after the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority contractor, GEC, LLC, began work to install pressure-reducing valve stations along Long Reef Road, residents and employees who frequently traverse the area are left frustrated about the state of the road, stagnant sewage water, and fluctuating water pressure.

“Please fix this road,” was the plea of Shelley Claeys, as she maneuvered the St. Croix Christian Church van along an uneven road with several potholes toward the church. Many other passersby shared her frustration.

Ron Howard, vice president of Bay Garden Condominiums Board, in an emailed statement to fellow board members, said, "I have had to have my wheels balanced more often." He then itemized the expenses incurred after his friend, who was driving his car, fell in a pothole she didn't see until it was too late — which subsequently tore out his transmission. Mr. Howard spent \$250 in repairs plus a \$75 towing fee.

The Long Reef Road potholes are part of a larger, territory-wide problem USVI motorists have had to endure for years, though the Department of Public Works has been making progress with road repairs, and even accelerated work during the pandemic as motorists were in large part off the roadways.

Even so, potholes are still a major problem in the USVI, and those on Long Reef Road are large.

One pothole was 4 ft long with a depth of 3-1/8 inches, as measured by Dexter Hypolite, president of Bay Garden Condominiums. The deepest pothole measured was just over 6 inches.

One noticeably uneven surface of the road extends from just in front of a radiator shop to in front of the G.E.R.S. building's side entrance for a measure of 173 feet.

When asked to make a real-world comparison of that measurement, Mr. Hypolite said, "That's equivalent to four, forty-foot-long school buses."

Sewage water runs across the road and stagnates in enormous potholes.

"Driving through it is not pleasant and not safe for our health," Mr. Howard stated in relation to the open sewer in front of the Little Reef Condos.

Another common concern was that the dust from the road is taking a toll on the respiratory system of all residents who live on Long Reef Road.

Regina Williams, a retired educator, explained why she does not move about on the road as often. "The road turns me off. If I don't need to go someplace of business, I don't go; I stay, because I can't deal with that road. It's very, very bad."

Once the road is paved, speeding can pose a danger to residents and students at the St. Croix Montessori School. A long-time resident and member of the Bay Garden Condo Board recommended three speed bumps. "One is needed between the Bay Garden Condo exit gate and the pedestrian gate by Building 3 of the condo complex, one just before the corner leading to the entrance gate and one further down the hill just past the school by the radiator shop."

WAPA's Governing Board is expected to be presented with a quote for resurfacing the entire roadway, which was outside of the original scope of the project. Jean P. Greaux, Jr., director of corporate communications at WAPA, said that once the quote is approved, WAPA will proceed in contracting and mobilizing a company for the actual paving work.

The paving of Long Reef Road is the only action item for WAPA's Governing Board meeting on Thursday. Although WAPA installed and activated all waterlines and pressure-reducing valve stations, some residents along the road still experience significantly little to no water pressure. Ms. Williams said it happens in her condo up to four times a week.

Should individual customers install a booster pump at their facilities?

Mr. Greaux confirmed that WAPA has no plans of installing booster pumps in this area and that individual customers can install booster pumps themselves. He said Long Reef Condos has been operating on a pressurized water system for several years in which they collect potable water in their cisterns, and it is then pumped to the condo units. However Mr. Hypolite, the Bay Garden Condominiums president, explained why doing so would affect WAPA bills. "By installing a pump on our end, we have to take into account the cost of electricity. Usage will increase and residents will see a slight increase in bills," he said.

Project completion is slated August 31, 2020, but it remains to be seen whether the sewage runoff problem will be remediated and road be paved before then.

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