

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Wants \$2 Million To Renovate Executive Offices; Senators Buck

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ST. THOMAS -- While some government department and agencies received budget recommendations lower than their 2016 allotment from the Mapp administration, Governor Kenneth Mapp is seeking a 2017 budget of \$12.1 million, [some \\$3 million more than his 2016 request](#).

The \$12.1 million total would see \$11.9 million coming from the government's general fund -- including \$538,000 for the Bureau of Economic Research -- all of which must be approved by the Legislature.

According to the administration's director of business and administration, Rochelle Benjamin, the funds would cover "mandatory costs and planned initiatives for the central operations" for Mr. Mapp's office and B.E.R.

Included in the proposal as funds to be used for "other services", was \$3.5 million, with \$2 million being set aside for "the renovation [and] repair for all the Government Houses on each island," Ms. Benjamin said.

There was a short pause, then Senator Kurt Vialet, member of the Committee on Finance, through which the hearing was held on Tuesday at the Earl B. Ottley Legislative Hall, responded.

"That might have to stay so for now, we can't afford that," Mr. Vialet said. "All over need repairs. So, they will just be the norm like everybody else. Everybody needs repairs [but] we don't have money for this or that."

Ms. Benjamin responded by explaining that the current state of the executive offices are extremely poor. "It's really bad," she said.

Mr. Vialet, however, was not having it: "It's bad all over. It's really bad all over," he countered, with a grin.

Senator Positive Nelson reminded testifiers of the tumultuous debates relative to Mr. Mapp's spending habits last year, stating that while he believes that the governor is allowed "certain discretion," leaders should be mindful of all the other government-owned facilities in dire need of refurbishing.

"When we have all these sick buildings -- the entire Government of the Virgin Islands, most of these buildings are in fact sick buildings -- it really doesn't go over well when the head of state focuses on fixing his entities where he really doesn't sit in too long. So I feel it just comes off wrong. I just feel like we should send a different message," Mr. Nelson said.

The other services allocation also includes \$80,000 for a motor vehicle "that will provide for the safety and protection of the governor," as well as \$350,000 for furnishings, landscaping and other expenses relative to the new location of our business office, public relations and Bureau of Economic Research," according to the budget.

The governor's desire to ride in limousines [was stifled](#) following [community outcry](#). The \$80,000 protection vehicle could serve as an alternative.

Before the session paused for lunch, Senator Sammuel Sanes said while the Senate would look at the "other expenses" relative to the repairs for governor's offices, Government House should not be surprised to find that the monies were not included in the final budget.

Feature Image: Government House, St. Croix