

The Virgin Islands Consortium

St. John Property Tax Bill Clears First Hurdle

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ST. THOMAS -- Senate Vice President Janette Millin Young said on Tuesday that long sought financial relief bill for St. John property owners passed a significant hurdle with the adoption of her substitute amendment by the Senate Finance Committee during a three-and-a-half-hour hearing. The bill, which would change how property tax bills would be re-valuated was held in committee for additional amendments and to allow the taskforce appointed by the lieutenant governor to complete its review in 30 days and issue its recommendations.

The meeting took place at the Cleone H. Creque Legislative Conference Room on St. John Monday evening.

After months of consultation with concerned residents and real estate experts, Mrs. Millin Young introduced Bill No. 0234 in an effort to prevent many long-time Virgin Islands families and residents from losing their properties as a result of dramatically escalating property taxes on unimproved properties due to adjacent property construction, according to a press release Mrs. Millin Young's office issued today. According to the senator, a large number of St. John residents have been crying out for relief from increases in their property tax bills, sometimes as high as 200 percent.

Senator Myron Jackson joined Mrs. Millin Young as a prime sponsor. Senators Novelle Francis, Jr., Kenneth Gittens, Justin Harrigan, Sr., Neville James, Almando "Rocky" Liburd, Nereida Rivera O'Reilly, Tregenza A. Roach and Kurt Vialet are co-sponsors.

"While I recognize this bill is not a panacea to the problem of inflated real property taxes in the territory, it is designed to provide a measure of relief to all property tax payers, especially St. Johnians, who are at risk of losing their properties as a result of extremely high mounting property tax bills. As a lawmaker, it would be wrong and unconscionable to witness this development taking place and not attempt to provide some type of legislative relief," Mrs. Millin Young, Senate vice president, said.

Several St. John residents testified in favor of the substitute amendment. Many shared their concerns with senators of their experiences and concerns with the property tax assessment process. Tax Assessor Ira Mills testified on behalf on the Mapp administration and called for several changes to the substitute amendment. Mrs. Millin Young indicated some of Mr. Mill's suggestions were merited and would be considered in upcoming amendments.

"I believe we have taken a giant step in helping Virgin Islanders hold on to their properties and I am pleased that my colleagues are inclined to working toward producing a workable solution," Mrs. Millin Young concluded.