

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Construction On Paul E. Joseph Stadium, Melvin Evans Highway And St. Thomas Waterfront Starts In January 2017, Public Works Commissioner Says

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Ernice Gilbert **August 22, 2016**



ST. CROIX -- With community outrage mounting that the government has sitting in a Public Finance Authority (P.F.A.) account \$144 million, \$90 million of which to be used to rebuild the territory's roads, Public Works Commissioner Gustav James has made known to Senate Democrats that three major projects -- Paul E. Joseph Stadium, the rebuilding of the Melvin Evans Highway here, and the massive Veteran's Drive (waterfront project) in St. Thomas -- would begin in January 2017.

That's according to Senator Kurt Vialet, who told this publication that Mr. James assured the majority during a meeting on Thursday that the projects would no longer see delays.

"If we're able to get those three projects started in January you're talking about \$70 million to \$80 million in projects started," Mr. Vialet said. "We are consistently pushing the commissioner of Public Works to get these projects started." Mr. Vialet reminded that Senate Democrats had issued a press release calling on the Mapp administration and Mr. James to issue an update in regards to the these projects and to give a clear explanation as to why they hadn't commenced. He also noted the recent releases relative to the Company Street project, which Mr. Vialet said should be completed before the busy November season so that Christiansted businesses are not negatively impacted.

"A next concern is we want to make sure that we have quality work. We don't want them to just do the projects and get paid while the quality isn't there," he said.

As for the Grant Anticipation Revenue Vehicle (GARVEE) bonds to rebuild the territory's roads, secured after years of trying by the bill's chief sponsor, Senator Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly, the funds would see \$40 million being used on the Veteran's Drive project in St. Thomas and the remaining \$50 million on the Melvan Evans Highway here, along with other smaller projects. St. Croix Senators last year had fought passionately to secure most of the funds for their district, contending that the Big Island needed more attention. But their efforts were unsuccessful [after St. Thomas lawmakers balked](#).

And relative to the long-delayed Paul E. Joseph Stadium development, speaking at a Chamber of Commerce annual meeting [held at the Palms at Pelican Cove in February](#), Mr. Mapp said that the project had expanded in scope; a decision that he said would cost the government \$15 million more than the \$20 million that was first agreed upon. The expansion had also considerably pushed back the facility's completion date from late 2016 to June 2018, according to the governor, who revealed the latest timeline to The Consortium following his keynote at the meeting.

But the changes, according to Mr. Mapp, would reflect a facility capable of not only housing sporting events, but also major entertainment activities. According to the governor, the government was in talks to purchase property surrounding the stadium to facilitate the expansion.

The announcement came as part of the governor's vision to revitalize the town of Frederiksted, with enhancements to be done beginning at the entrance and moving all the way to the stadium.

The facility itself won't house the Carnival Village, Mr. Mapp revealed, but once completed, would be be a three-story complex with all the features of a stadium — including a media floor, he said. Using charts, the governor detailed the inside and outside of the space (seen [here](#)), and its entrance as well.