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## Footprint of Festival Village at New Paul E. Joseph Stadium Criticized by Lawmakers During Hearing on Bill Seeking Additional \$8.2 Million to Complete Project

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Senators in the Committee on Rules and Judiciary on Friday lamented the footprint of the Festival Village being constructed as part of the Paul E. Joseph Stadium. In many ways, the stadium's allure aside from its potential to host major sporting events, was a state-of-the-art festival village that's able to facility large entertainment activities. But during the Friday hearing, it was revealed that only \$170,000 was set aside for the design of an iteration of the festival village that was no longer being built, and much of which had already been expended, said John Wessel, managing member of GEC, the contractor responsible for building the stadium. Additionally, permanent, professional booths that were supposed to be erected are no longer part of the plan, a revelation that annoyed some lawmakers.

In essence, the festival village in the current plan is simply an area at the front of the stadium where vendors will place booths, coney islands will be erected and a stage for entertainment built. According to a rendering of the design, nothing stands out.

"This is unacceptable that we have waited this long and basically to give back to the St. Croix community that? No," said Senator Myron Jackson, who along with Senator Janelle Sarauw sponsored the bill that created the lauded Division of Festivals.

Asked by Senator Javan James whether discussions had been held with the Division of Festivals, GEC officials said no.

"What I'm seeing here on the screen today, I think that we're doing the people of Frederiksted an injustice if that is to be the final product," Ms. Sarauw said.

The criticism came during a hearing of Bill No. 33-0275, forwarded to the Senate by Governor Albert Bryan, which seeks an additional \$8.2 million, \$4.1 million of which will be expended in fiscal year 2021, to complete the beleaguered stadium — which saw its first groundbreaking ceremony [during the John P. de Jongh administration](#), a second [during the Mapp administration](#), and has yet to see major construction work almost two years into the Bryan administration.

The \$8.2 million would bring the total cost for the stadium to well over \$28 million. Yet even then, the stadium would be a barebones facility subpar to standards deemed appropriate for international sporting events. To get the premium facility, an additional a la carte of \$3.6 million will be needed upon the \$8.2 million being considered. G.E.C. currently has \$6.5 million on hand.

Ms. Sarauw likened the situation to G.E.C. providing the territory with a pair of shoes from the now-defunct Payless Shoe Store, and offering an upgrade to a Nike pair of cleats for \$3.6 million, bringing the cost of the facility — whose original price tag was \$20 million — to well over \$30 million.

The \$8.2 million, if approved, will be taken from the Internal Revenue Matching Fund. The project's latest completion date is September 2021.

The measure was approved as it came with an amendment for accountability by Senator Novelle Francis. The bill, along with three others discussed on Friday — Bill No. 33-0077, and Bill No. 33-0245 — will be examined further during a Senate session on Monday.