

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Senate President Commends Carnival Committee For Abandoning Entrance Fee, Fencing

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ST. THOMAS – Senate President Myron D. Jackson on Friday commended the Virgin Islands Carnival Committee's decision to reverse its plans to charge an admission fee and enclose the Carnival Village for the first time in the event's 65 year history, as it opens to the public today with musical entertainment over the next week.

At a March 21st meeting of the Committee on Workforce Development, Consumer Affairs and Culture, Mr. Jackson and other members asked the Carnival Committee to submit multiple documents addressing issues surrounding the proposed enclosure, including a detailed plan of emergency exits and entrances and all security measures, statistics of the recommended capacity limit, a copy of the Carnival ride vendors contract,

correspondence regarding inspections in coordination with the Police Department, Public Works, Fire Services, and the Office of the Attorney General.

“Members expressed concerns about the Carnival Committee not having the planning tools and security measures necessary to enact the proposed changes,” Mr. Jackson said. “We thank the Carnival Committee for using its wisdom in delaying implementation of the enclosure of ‘Juan’s Musical Haven’ Carnival Village. Wise heads have prevailed.”

In March, Carnival Committee Executive Director Halvor Hart told this publication that for the first time in V.I. Carnival history, there would be a fee (\$5 nightly; children 13 and were to enter free of charge), to enter the Village. Mr. Hart had said that funds collected from the fee would be used to bolster security, and had pointed to past violence that shutdown Village activities, as justification for the committee’s decision.

“As you know, St. Thomas usually has incidents that happen, so the idea is to try to close off Village, fence up the Village, and search people as they’re coming in to try to minimize the gun violence and the weapons coming in,” Mr. Hart said in March. He pointed to last year’s Village closing, which ended abruptly during a performance by Soca artist Destra, [after a shooting incident left three men injured and one dead.](#)

Mr. Jackson said he appreciated the Carnival Committee’s attempt to offset costs by implementing fundraising measures in light of the financial crisis, but believed the organization needed to start earlier during the planning process.

He noted that Virgin Islands Carnival has grown from the basic masquerade tradition of 65 years ago into a multi-layered series of events with evolving demands.

“Sixty five years ago through a community effort that began on WSTA 1340 AM, residents were enticed with the concept of reviving Carnival on the island of St. Thomas,” Senator Jackson said. “Radio personality Mango Jones, who later became our first Delegate to Congress Ron de Lugo, and a civil servant known as Mr. Holiday, started to plan for the 1952 Carnival on St. Thomas.”

Modernization in carnival must be balanced with continuing to serve the Virgin Islands public, he said.

“Today we must meet the challenges of a 21st century festival art, especially in the light of other destinations implementing their own Carnivals throughout the region. But our Carnival must continue to be for the people, by the people,” he said.