

The Virgin Islands Consortium

There's Not Enough Funds To Complete Paul E. Joseph Stadium, Public Works Commish Says

Business / **Published On May 19, 2017 10:34 AM /**

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ST. CROIX -- Department of Public Works Commissioner Gustav James, during a Senate hearing in the Committee on Finance on Thursday, told lawmakers that there was not enough funds to complete the Paul E. Joseph Stadium project, a damning admission that left senators scratching their heads. Above, de Jongh administration officials during a groundbreaking event in December, 2014, when the project was originally slated to begin.

Senators expressed frustration with the length of time it has taken before any substantial work could be done at the stadium, and they were not convinced by the administration's explanation as to why extra land was needed to move ahead.

"Wait a minute, we are changing the orientation of a park, and in order to change it we have to acquire land, and we don't even really have a good justification as to why we need to push it that far back that we need to purchase land with all the surrounding land to the front of the property," Senator Kurt Vialet said.

Governor Mapp has given conflicting reasons as to why the project has been delayed. During a [Chamber of Commerce breakfast meeting in March](#), he said he was waiting on senators to provide additional funding before moving forward. However, in a press release [issued in January](#) announcing the authorization of construction, the governor stated that he did not believe the Senate would authorize the additional funding, and would therefore move ahead with construction.

"I do not believe that Senate action on my request for additional funds will occur soon. Accordingly, Coastal Systems and GEC should proceed with the project start immediately," the governor said in a Government House press release issued on January 23.

At Thursday's hearing, held at the Earl B. Ottley Legislative Hall, lawmakers were blunt in their remarks relative to the project.

"So even if we were to pass this measure today, we don't have sufficient funds to complete the project?" Mr. Vialet asked, referring to a measure requesting about \$450,000 to purchase an additional 5.5 acres of land. Mr. James said only portions of the project would be completed.

"We can complete the essential portions, which would exclude certain aspects like the Terrance Martin Field if we did that. But \$17 million is what it will take to complete what is on the map," Mr. James went on, referring to a rendering of the project he brought along as part of his testimony.

"So we're getting ready to start a project in which we don't have monies to complete," Mr. Vialet said, the room fell silent for a moment. He added, "A project that has been in limbo for years," which Mr. Vialet said the governor had blamed senators for holding up. "But there's really a bigger holdup," the senator added.

Mr. James went on to explain why the project's cost had climbed above the original \$20 million, noting that it was expanded.

"The project was expanded because of an overall plan, which included the Festival Village and the Terrance Martin Field relocation, and it was based on a charrette that was done some years ago that was based on the enhancement of the entire Frederiksted area. This is not just about Paul E. Joseph Stadium," he said. The plan that Mr. James showed included permanent vendor booths to be used for events, including St. Croix's Crucian Christmas Festival.

Mr. Vialet, however, said that while he wasn't against the plan, the territory was not in a financial position to afford such changes.

"I understand all of that, but we're in a different realm, a different time. We're in a time when the Government of the Virgin Islands don't have a lot of funds that we're just going to splurge here and splurge there. We have so much burning issues that we need to

address, that we have to seriously look as to how we're spending every dime that this government has," Mr. Vialet said.

When the project was [originally delayed](#), the governor cited different reasons for halting construction. Mr. Mapp had said that the original contract awarded to St. Croix-based GEC, LLC, was hastily put together, and that it was approved and signed by former Governor John P. de Jongh, even while the contractor did not have a single design to show.

"The Paul E. Joseph project in Frederiksted, which is a \$20 million project, I have directed for that project to be frozen," the governor said when announcing the halt. "I visited the project on Sunday. As many of you know, that project was put together in haste."

He added: "What is so troubling about that project is that the government has entered into a contract for a \$20 million project for which there is not a single concept or design. The contract allows the vendor to design a stadium and surrounding areas, bill the government at the cost of 10 percent, put it together, and they give us a \$10 million project, the contract says the contractor and the government will split the savings, so the contractor will end up with a \$5 million bonus. We could have a stadium worth \$10 million, and you, the people of the Virgin Islands, would be out \$20 million." Since then, however, GEC has satisfied the governor's concerns.

Mr. Mapp revealed his plan to [expand the original vision](#) during the 2016 Chamber of Commerce Meeting, held at The Palms at Pelican Cove. There, Mr. Mapp made known that the expansion would add another \$15 million to the \$20 million original contract to complete the project, and its completion date had been pushed back to June, 2018. And in a separate press release in 2015 [announcing commencement of work](#) which [never happened](#), the governor pinned the delay with the goal to expand as the inauguration of Frederiksted's revitalization.

"This is the beginning of a vision for the revitalization of Frederiksted that was developed through the design charrette process in 2005 while I was PFA director of Finance and Administration," the governor said in October 2015. "I want to thank the administration's team of attorneys along with Commissioners Gustav James, Pedro Cruz and Randolph Bennett and the PFA's consultant, Coastal Systems-USVI, for working with the representatives of GEC, LLC to get this significant project back on track."

According to Government House, the stadium will be a modern sports complex that has been designed to latest standards with the capacity to provide state-of-the-art facilities for local athletes and attract sports tourism to the island of St. Croix.