

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Catherineberg Will Soon Be A Museum, Ending Unofficial Status As Governor's Residence

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ST. CROIX --Catherineberg, the sprawling mansion sitting atop St. Thomas's Denmark Hill is a historic, beautiful edifice owned by the West Indian Company (W.I.C.O.), and has served as a residence for governors, with the last territorial leader to reside in the building being Charles Turnbull.

Governor John P. de Jongh, who led the USVI from 2007 to January 2, 2015, decided to live in his own house, and current governor Kenneth Mapp stays at the Ritz-Carlton when in St. Thomas, claiming that Catherineberg, because it had not been used for 8 years by the prior governor, had become unsuitable to reside in.

To be clear, Catherineberg, although it has served as a residence for multiple governors, is not the official residence of Virgin Islands governors; Government House in St. Thomas is. Nonetheless, because of its expansiveness and history, it was willingly occupied by past leaders.

The housing issues of the current governor is well documented: Mr. Mapp's initial dwelling after his election as governor at an Estate Nazareth mansion, dubbed Villa Fratelli Cresta, [invited controversy](#) when it was revealed that the governor's four-and-a-half-month stay there had cost the people of the Virgin Islands \$107,563.56. With a scandal building, Mr. Mapp left the mansion, only to [move into the Ritz-Carlton](#) when in St. Thomas, where is currently stays, with a true cost to the people of the Virgin Islands yet to be disclosed.

Now, the most immediate property owned by a government entity that could be repaired for use as an official residence for the governor, will be transformed into a museum, as a bill -- sponsored by Senator Janette Millin Young -- has been approved by senators and forwarded to Mr. Mapp, who is expected to sign the measure into law.

For Mrs. Millin Young and the lawmakers who supported the measure, however, turning Catherineberg into a museum is based on two important factors: the preservation of Virgin Islands history, and generating new revenue.

"As the primary sponsor of this legislation, I want to not only preserve history, but also generate revenue," Mrs. Millin Young said during a Committee on Rules and Judiciary hearing, [held late May](#). She said the reason W.I.C.O. has been unable to make money from Catherineberg, is because W.I.C.O. only maintains the facility. If the facility were to be transferred to the government, and the government installs all the necessary components boasted by successful museums, then funds would be generated, Mrs. Millin Young opined.

Senator Positive Nelson also chimed in: "I like the idea of museums; I worked for cultural resources in North Carolina and I know their value and the revenue generator it can [be]," he said during the same hearing.

The bill allows the West Indian Company to sell the mansion to the Government of the Virgin Islands using taxes that W.I.C.O. owes to the government as an offset. According to W.I.C.O.'s new CEO, Clifford Graham — who testified at the hearing in favor of the sale — the company owes the government \$6.65 million in taxes.

"If Bill No. 32-0002 is approved, going forward the government would receive a PILOT [payment in lieu of taxes] of \$250,000 per year, which WICO's budget can accommodate," Mr. Graham said during the May hearing. (He later clarified that while \$250 payment would still be difficult to meet, it was much more attainable than the current \$700,000, which W.I.C.O. has been unable to pay for years.)

During his testimony, Mr. Graham pointed to multiple reasons for the noncompliance, including the opening of the Crown Bay port in 2006, payroll for its 70 employees, costs relative to the upgrades of the facility, for which W.I.C.O. recently floated a bond of over \$11 million, as well as the cost to maintain the facility -- with Mr. Graham estimating annual costs anywhere from \$220,000 to \$60,000.

