

The Virgin Islands Consortium

St. Thomas Main Street Project Halted Again Without Explanation

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Ernice Gilbert **July 12, 2017**



ST. CROIX -- It was only Monday that Senator Janette Millin Young, during a Committee on Housing, Public Works, Waste Management and Planning hearing on St. Croix, asked Public Works Commissioner Gustav James whether he knew the cost to the economy as work on the beleaguered Main Street Project continued its lead-footed pace. "No, I don't," Mr. James said.

Mrs. Millin Young said she was walking through Main Street recently, and saw something that gave her pause: a going-out-of-business sign, with 70 percent off on everything.

"There are other businesses that have closed completely. There are other businesses that have reduced the space that they need, and most of this is attributed to what's going on with the Main Street Project and the delays," Mrs. Millin Young said.

The senator recognized that the project was once held up in court, which to an extent contributed to the delays. "But once it began, all we have is this little patch; that little block there by the library, and it's not progressing as it should," she said.

Mr. James, admitting that the project has progressed slowly, sought to remove blame on the closure of businesses on Main Street from the slow-moving construction. During a back-and-forth with the senator, Mr. James never gave any indication that the Main Street Project was about to stop again. However, on the same day that he received questioning from Mrs. Millin Young on the project's progress, Tip Top Construction President Joe Hollins received a letter from Mr. James, ordering the company to immediately halt work.

The \$8.4 million federally funded project to put utilities underground and construct sidewalks, was given the go-ahead in December by the feds after a long delay. The U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration had held back its funding after questions about the legality of the performance bond obtained by the contractor to perform the work [came to the fore](#).

"Fortunately, we have resolved the issue of federal funding for the Main Street project," Mr. James [said during a 30-minute press conference](#) at Government House in St. Thomas on December 8. Back then, Mr. James said Tip Top Construction had been given about 520 days to complete the work.

The reason for this latest delay, however, remains unclear. In a letter addressed to Mr. James through the Department of Property and Procurement, Mr. Hollins indicated that the government had on multiple occasions breached its contract by failing to make timely payments. During the Monday hearing on St. Croix, Mr. James gave no hints that the government was struggling to make payments.

With no clear reason for yet another delay, Mr. Hollins surmised in the letter that the latest stoppage "is the direct result of political objectives, posturing, and does not relate to the contract documents and its terms and conditions or requirements in any way."