

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Seeking To Maximize Federal Financial Assistance, Mapp Meets With Over 40 Members Of His Cabinet On St. Croix

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ST. CROIX --- Repairing hurricane damaged facilities, accessing federal assistance, filling critical job vacancies and fully restoring government services were among the topics addressed when more than 40 members of the Mapp Administration's cabinet met on St. Croix Thursday, Government House has announced.

Commissioners, directors and other agency heads each reported on the latest status of their infrastructure, workforce and ability to carry out their duties, according to the release.

Governor Kenneth Mapp said it was important that each agency move forward in assuring that damage assessments were finalized and that requests were made for modular buildings, critical staffing and other needs.

"We need to submit paperwork to the federal government so we can start drawing on those recovery dollars," Mr. Mapp said. "Each of you has to focus on your lane, focus on your responsibilities. You have to look at a wider view to ensure you can provide the services that each department and agency is required to deliver to the community. FEMA [the Federal Emergency Management Agency] has a critical role to play in the support system of this government now, but we must clearly outline our needs."

Citing Mr. Mapp, the Government House release said the federal government will assist in funding new government jobs required as a result of the storm. For example, since more people are now eligible for unemployment benefits, FEMA will help pay the salaries of the additional personnel required by the Department of Labor to process these new claims.

The territory's leader asked cabinet members to work with the Division of Personnel to ensure that available positions, especially those critical vacancies, are advertised and filled. Agency heads reported that the repair of phone service to government offices has lagged behind the restoration of power.

"We must reestablish communication to government agencies. We cannot remain disconnected from the community," the governor said.

According to the release, Mr. Mapp has requested that all offices without landlines be set up to utilize Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) phone service. The Bureau of Information Technology (BIT) and the Virgin Islands Next Generation Network have already laid the groundwork for internet phone service implementation, and BIT Director Angelo Riddick reported at the meeting that the government could eventually save as much as 40 percent on the cost of phone service if all agencies converted to VoIP technology, according to the release.

[Retiring](#) member of the administration's financial team, Office of Management & Budget Director Nellon Bowry, encouraged agency heads to remember the people behind the numbers as they make assessments and work towards the territory's recovery.

"I tell my staff to always remember that what we do affects real people in real ways – we are not just crunching numbers," Mr. Bowry said.

Cabinet members also received a brief presentation from the disaster response consultants working with the Virgin Islands Government. Witt O'Brien's, AECOM and Ernst & Young are assisting agencies in completing detailed assessments of the government's losses, working with insurance adjusters and organizing joint site visits with FEMA to finalize damage and rebuild reports, Government House said.

The governor urged cabinet members to think of government facilities as their personal property and to push for maximum assistance from FEMA and the territory's insurance companies.

“I want every agency head to understand the importance of this process,” Mr. Mapp said. “These are folks that know the Stafford Act backwards and forwards and will help us ensure we are not leaving any money on the table.”

Mr. Mapp and Lieutenant Governor Osbert Potter thanked the commissioners, directors and senior staff members present, many of whom Governor House said worked tirelessly during and in the immediate aftermath of Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

“We also must thank those government employees who really went the extra mile after the storms,” the governor said.

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