

The Virgin Islands Consortium

WAPA Leadership Provides Overview Of Planned Projects Aimed At Better Serving St. John Residents

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Earlier this month, community stakeholders received a broad overview of the Water and Power Authority's projects planned for the island of St. John, WAPA said Tuesday. The discussion included the addition of more resilient composite poles, undergrounding of electrical service in critical areas of the island, the installation of stand-alone generators to power the island, and the addition of renewable energy projects and energy storage.

A WAPA management team led by Executive Director Lawrence J. Kupfer provided the overview, which included an update of restoration, the status of mitigation projects that have been approved and are aimed at adding resiliency to the electric grid, and the installation of a new submarine cable to power St. John.

Since early March, 100% of eligible customers on St. John have been re-energized. WAPA continues to restore service, as customers complete repairs to their homes and businesses, and request reconnection to the grid. Off-island contractors have been retained to carryout permanent repairs to the electric system.

There are several components to the WAPA mitigation project schedule that will be funded by FEMA. The first is the installation of composite poles. On St. John, WAPA plans to replace more than 1,200 wooden poles with the new, more resilient, composite poles at key locations. The poles are rated for sustained winds of 200 miles per hour. More than 110 poles have already been installed on a route that begins in Cruz Bay and extends to Coral Bay. Another component of the mitigation project schedule involves under grounding from Cruz Bay to the Myrah Keating Community Health Center. This work will include removing all of the exposed primary overhead distribution lines from Cruz Bay up to the health center and replace the aerial cables with underground installations. More than 5,000 customers will benefit from these projects, which will provide service reliability to the main business district and critical facilities.

The pole to pad-mount transformer project will remove large overhead transformer banks and replace them with units that sit at ground level. Five such banks are slated to be replaced on St. John.

At the meeting, plans were also discussed for a potential two-megawatt rooftop solar system project with battery storage in Cruz Bay and Coral Bay. Each project carries a price tag of \$15 million. Additionally, a potential utility scale solar facility with battery storage in Coral Bay will be funded by the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant program, with a local match by WAPA. The project has an approximate \$5 million cost.

WAPA is also pursuing federal funding for the installation of an electrical submarine cable to increase reliability on St. John and provide a tie-in between Cruz Bay and Coral Bay. The cable will provide increased flexibility in the transmission and distribution system, reduce the duration of service interruptions, and allow for complete independence and isolation of St. John from the St. Thomas grid—to facilitate a more efficient response, and restoration of service following a disaster. St. John was without electrical service for some 51 days after Hurricane Maria while primary circuits were being rebuilt from the Harley power plant in Subbase to the east end of St. Thomas. FEMA is continuing its review of this project for potential grant funding.

In terms of providing stand-alone generation capacity to St. John, FEMA mitigation grant funding will provide for the installation of two, four-megawatt generators on St. John, one in Cruz Bay and another in Coral Bay. The generating units will be housed in full enclosures with the appropriate levels of noise abatement measures implemented so as to minimize the disruption to nearby residents during the times the units are operational. Air permits have been secured for the operation of the two units, and the environmental permitting process has been initiated.

The meeting on St. John is one of several planned discussions with community leaders on WAPA's blueprint to rebuild an electrical system that is stronger than it has ever been. Similar meetings are scheduled this month with the leadership of the business community on both St. Croix and St. Thomas.

