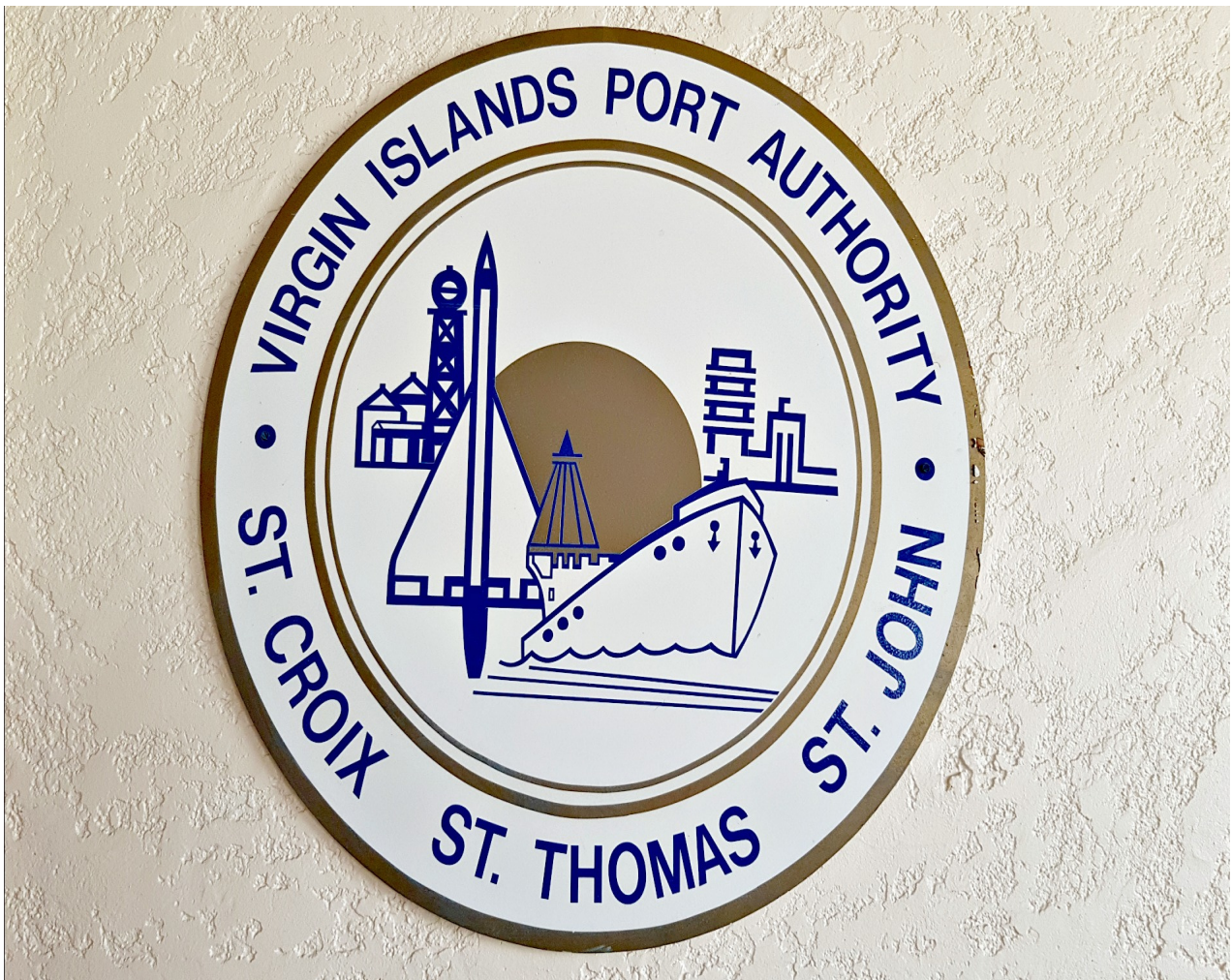


The Virgin Islands Consortium

12 Months Later, VIPA Loses Its 18th High-Level Personnel

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ST. THOMAS -- It has been a year since the Virgin Islands Port Authority began its executive level reshuffle. Since this time, the authority has lost ten high-level personnel. Starting with its executive director, human resources director, director of property management, airport manager, marine manager, chief financial officer, federal grants manager, senior engineer, chief legal counsel, and procurement and contracting manager.

The termination of its property management officer earlier this week brought that number to eleven. Additionally, seven employees retired early, with a person with intimate knowledge of the shakeup stating, "It is perhaps apparent that many retired prematurely

because of the current climate at V.I.P.A. -- mass exodus." This person, who requested anonymity to speak freely on the matter, was referring to recent employee discontent at V.I.P.A., a group of whom had recently crafted a letter of no confidence in the authority's leadership, and which also questioned V.I.P.A.'s bidding process. And remains unclear exactly how many people were let go this week, as the board said in its most recent report following executive session that it "took action" on three employees -- a recent trend that has meant the termination of personnel.

The firing of Carlton Dowe as executive director and [the department's freeze](#) on hiring at the beginning of the 2017 financial crisis set the stage for two dozen essential employees being let go in the course of a year.

Following the removal of Mr. Dowe, Governor Mapp appointed his brother, David Mapp, to lead the authority as executive director, with Mr. Dowe receiving \$92,500 in severance pay upon his departure.

The V.I.P.A. governing board -- a level of organizational governance for authority -- has also seen a shakeup in members in the past year. It is unclear how the mass exodus of experienced personnel has affected the authority following Hurricanes Irma and Maria in September. And some of the positions have already seen replacements, including the chief financial officer position, which is now held by Mauricia Anna Penn. But the apparent incessant loss of experienced employees at the authority at such a critical juncture in the territory's history -- years of reconstruction and massive development projects are underway -- remains a troubling sign, and could cast a pall over those efforts.

Terminated senior-level personnel and early retirees are visualized below:

Terminated Positions

Executive Director

Human Resources Director

Director of Property Management

Airport Manager

Marine Manager

Chief Financial Officer

Federal Grants Manager

Senior Engineer

Chief Legal Counsel

Procurement and Contracting Manager

Property Management Officer

Retirees

Maintenance Manager

Airport Rescue Firefighting Chief

Airport Operations Supervisor

Maintenance Supervisor

Airport Superintendent

Director of Engineering

Marine Manager, STX

As the Port Authority moves forward with infrastructure upgrades around the territory, downtown Charlotte Amalie is poised for a grand makeover that could transform the look of the historic district. The positions of federal grants manager, chief legal counsel, airport manager and procurement and contracting manager are crucial organizational positions for V.I.P.A., especially as hurricane recovery and mitigation-focused efforts continue on all islands.

The new waterfront project is a massive undertaking by multiple departments and federal partners, with portions of the structure falling under the Port Authority's control upon completion. The Veterans Drive Improvement Project officially broke ground in the capitol, beginning construction on "the single largest road construction project in the history of the U.S. Virgin Islands," according the government officials.

It is unclear how the Virgin Islands government intends to coordinate the Main Street Revitalization Project, the Frederiksted Economic Revitalization Project, the reconstruction of major roadways throughout the territory, the Bridge to Nowhere on St. Thomas, the Paul E. Joseph Stadium, -- which Mr. Mapp halted immediately upon taking office and held a [groundbreaking event for in July of 2017](#) -- and an ever growing list of capital projects in the territory simultaneously, while remaining on schedule and within budget. The removal and early exit of experienced leadership at V.I.P.A. is a troubling sign for the agency, which is tasked with connecting the Virgin Islands with the outside world via its ports.

Several ports in the territory are set to receive necessary upgrades. The governor recently announced a pending \$230 million modernization plan for the Cyril E. King Airport. Months of project announcements show that the U.S.V.I. is experiencing a major infrastructure overhaul comparable to rebuilding efforts after hurricanes Hugo and Marilyn and the economic explosion that saw the territory's population jump from 33,000 to 104,000 between 1960 and 1984.

V.I.P.A. is currently experiencing -- or at least approaching -- a major infrastructure overhaul for most of the major ports in the territory. The Urman Victor Fredericks Marine Terminal in Red Hook has also resumed work on the construction of a new parking garage meant to ease parking congestion for residents and travelers on the east end.

Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett, who has been working in Congress to help secure federal dollars, has said that the federal dollars should be spent with the future in mind. “I just want to make sure that we’re really thoughtful about how we do this. So we just don’t spend it on putting up structures just the way they were but really think about some long-term strategy and what our economy and what the territory should look like,” she said. Ms. Plaskett has also spoken publicly in recent months about her concerns with the potential for mismanagement of federal dollars the territory desperately needs following the destructive 2017 Atlantic Hurricane Season.

V.I.P.A. recently awarded the contract for the Veteran’s Drive Improvement Project to American Bridge Company — an off-island civil engineering firm that focuses on design, the management of structures, transportation systems, and infrastructure.