

The Virgin Islands Consortium

H.U.D. Deputy Secretary, Other Reps, Visit Territory To Assess Progress

Business / **Published On June 13, 2018 09:34 PM /**

Staff **June 13, 2018**



ST. CROIX -- The comprehensive upgrade of the territory's roads, hardening of the electrical system, dredging Virgin Islands harbors to accommodate increasingly large cruise ships and developing and repairing housing were among the important projects addressed at a Tuesday meeting with U.S. Housing and Urban Development (H.U.D.) Deputy Secretary Pam Patenaude, Government House said Wednesday.

The H.U.D. team was on St. Croix this week to meet with Governor Kenneth E. Mapp and assess the progress of local recovery efforts. During a February visit to St. Thomas, Deputy Secretary Patenaude announced an award of \$242.7 million to the U.S. Virgin Islands and Tuesday's meeting provided an opportunity for HUD officials to learn more

about the allocation and use of these funds.

Government House said Deputy Secretary Patenaude was impressed by the progress of the territory's recovery and described Tuesday's meeting with Governor Mapp and his team as "incredibly helpful".

"We appreciate your time and the efforts you have put into these presentations. Thanks to each one of you," Ms. Patenaude said.

During Tuesday's meeting, Department of Public Works Commissioner Nelson Petty Jr. reemphasized that all of the territory's roads needed to be upgraded to Federal Highway standards and discussed the anticipated cost. He explained that although many emergency repairs had been made or were now underway, it would take approximately five years to complete permanent road repairs. Centerline Road on St. John, Hull Bay Road and Mandahl Road on St. Thomas and St. Croix's Northshore Road were some of the roads mentioned on Public Works' priority list of road projects to be executed using the first phase of HUD funding.

West Indian Company CEO and President Clifford Graham and Damian Cartwright, Assistant Executive Director and Director of Engineering of the V.I. Port Authority, presented updates on the dredging of the Charlotte Amalie Harbor and St. Croix's Schooner Channel. Mr. Cartwright explained to H.U.D. officials that dredging was necessary to stay competitive within the region, secure jobs and diversify the tourism industry to further boost the Territory's economy. Graham and Cartwright said that many other locations such as St. Maarten and San Juan can already accommodate multiple Oasis-class cruise ships.

In addition to discussions about the territory's roads and revitalization of its tourism industry, V.I. Housing Finance Authority Executive Director Daryl Griffith and V.I. Housing Authority (V.I.H.A.) Director Robert Graham addressed housing recovery. Mr. Graham shared an overview of public housing demolition and plans for repositioning housing communities. According to Government House, V.I.H.A. hopes to achieve this housing transformation in five to seven years. Mr. Griffith presented details on the H.U.D. Community Development Block Grant action plan and allocations.

The V.I. Water and Power Authority (WAPA) strategic plan will include hardening the territory's electrical grid and upgrading its power generating units to withstand future natural disasters, said WAPA Executive Director Lawrence Kupfer.

Finance Commissioner Valdamier Collens, who also serves as executive director of the V.I. Public Finance Authority, assured H.U.D. officials that the administration had prioritized accountability and offered an overview of the U.S.V.I.'s Office of Disaster Recovery, which is responsible for the coordination, oversight and monitoring of all disaster recovery funding, including H.U.D. grants.

Mr. Mapp told Ms. Patenaude that H.U.D. assistance and other federal funding had allowed for significant progress to be made. However, he was also looking forward to further discussions with H.U.D. about some of the challenges in the recovery and reconstruction process.

“We would like to walk through these challenges and work towards resolutions,” Mr. Mapp said. “While we all have our special areas of interests, we are all working towards the same objectives and pushing forward in the same direction for the territory.”

Tuesday’s meeting was followed by a field tour with H.U.D. representatives, including visits to D. Hamilton Jackson Terrace, LBJ Gardens, John F. Kennedy Housing Community and the WAPA Richmond Power Plant.

Mr. Mapp thanked Ms. Patenaude, her staff and H.U.D. Secretary Ben Carson for the agency’s continued support of U.S. Virgin Islands recovery efforts.