

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Draft Report Of Hurricane Recovery Task Force Findings To Be Released July 20

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ST. THOMAS -- Governor Kenneth Mapp addressed an audience of community members, business owners, hurricane experts and policy makers at the final meeting of the U.S.V.I. Hurricane Recovery and Resiliency Task Force on Tuesday, a Government House release has made known.

Mr. Mapp is said to have thanked the members of the Task Force who presented information about the territory's long-term security, resiliency and economic recovery. He said that the U.S.V.I.'s recovery had been neither easy nor perfect, but that significant progress continues to be made.

“One of my biggest challenges as governor is not my political opposition, my biggest challenge is overcoming community skepticism about the significant opportunities made available by the federal government for hurricane recovery,” Mr. Mapp said.

The territory's leader is said to have assured residents that real investment in the Virgin Islands infrastructure is underway and that his administration will remain transparent about how funds are spent and allocated. Mr. Mapp's administration, in an effort to prove its commitment to transparency relative to how the federal recovery funds were being spent, launched the [USVI Hurricane Recovery website](#) last month to track the funding.

While at the event, held at the Ritz-Carlton here, the governor discussed the plan for St. John's independent power generation and the millions of dollars allocated to the V.I. Water and Power Authority for the reconstruction, hardening and expansion of its power systems. The U.S. Government has already spent more than \$600 million on restoring the Virgin Islands electrical system and has authorized the investment of another \$572 million. The new power system, to include wind and solar farms, will significantly reduce the cost of power going forward, the governor said.

“The more we come off of fossil fuel, the more we move away from the uncertainty of oil prices,” he said.

Mr. Mapp also assured the public that he is working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to strategize evacuation plans in the event of a natural disaster this hurricane season, and is said to be nearly daily contact with FEMA, Congress and the White House, according to the release. At a recent press conference held at FEMA's operations center in Sunny Isle, Mona Barnes, Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency director, said out of the 20 facilities inspected, [only two or three were deemed reliable to serve as shelters in case of a storm](#). In light of this, Ms. Barnes said part of the consideration if a storm were to threaten the USVI, would be mass evacuation.

Brad Gair, senior managing director at the disaster recovery consulting firm Witt O'Brien's, said Tuesday that officials in Washington were eager to meet with the governor and learn more about his vision for Virgin Islands recovery.

“Governor Mapp is an amazing crisis leader, leading us to the future,” Mr. Gair said, according to Government House. “I have a lot of confidence in the Virgin Islands management team.”

Mr. Gair said the primary issue in the recovery process was filling the many positions created to facilitate the territory's rebuild and reconstruction. The governor has urged Virgin Islanders to visit the Personnel website to learn more about job opportunities.

Dina Simon, USVI Hurricane Recovery and Resiliency Task Force CEO, said her team is now working to fine tune its report and will publish a first draft online on July 20 to allow for community input before the document is finalized. Copies of the report will be distributed on August 27.

“We want everyone to continue to be engaged in this recovery process,” she said. “We want to hear comments from the community and make sure we haven't missed anything.”

The Task Force report includes information on the specifics of the hurricanes and their impact on the Virgin Islands. It also provides a road map to rebuild more resilient and functional communities.

Presenters at Tuesday's meeting included David Bornn, partner-attorney, Kellerhals Ferguson Kroblin and Jonathan Halfon, FEMA regional coordinator for community planning and capacity building.

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