

The Virgin Islands Consortium

UVI Board Approves Sports And Fitness Center For St. Croix Campus

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The University of the Virgin Islands Board of Trustees, during a regular meeting held on Saturday in the university's administration and conference building on the St. Thomas campus, approved a memorandum of understanding between the Virgin Islands Housing and Finance Authority (V.I.H.F.A.) for the construction and joint management of a multi-purpose center on the Albert A. Sheen Campus.

The center will serve as a shelter during times of emergency on the island of St. Croix, but will generally serve as a sports and fitness/wellness complex, convention center, and nonprofit meeting space that will be utilized by the university, V.I.H.F.A. and the St. Croix community, UVI said. The complex will be located at the front of the campus, between

the simulation center currently under construction and the main highway.

Funding for the facility was provided through the \$1.8 billion that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (H.U.D.) set aside to the territory following Hurricanes Irma and Maria, and incessant lobbying from the Mapp administration. In September, [H.U.D. released](#) to the Government of the Virgin Islands \$243 million as part of the \$1.8 billion. Two more releases of \$846 million and more than \$700 million have already been set aside for the territory, and Mr. Mapp said his administration would submit its plan to H.U.D. for the \$846 million in October. “H.U.D. will have 45 days to act on that plan and approve it or send it back for some adjustments, and then we work on the third tranche of \$774,188,000 which is for mitigation,” the governor said in September.

It's long been a plan of Mr. Mapp's to erect a world-class sports and events center at the UVI campus on St. Croix. Back in May 2016 during UVI's commencement address, [the governor announced](#) that he'd included \$25 million in a capital projects budget for the building, but the development never happened as the territory found itself in [the worst financial condition that it had ever faced](#).

After the initial failure, Mr. Mapp sought funding another way: he [approached Sinopec executives](#) — a Chinese mega corporation with substantial investments in the Limetree Bay Terminals facility, [which plans even further investments](#) — arguing that as part of Sinopec's show of goodwill to a territory that it's building a long-term relationship with, it should foot the bill and in turn receive the rights to name the facility.

“That's about a \$25 million investment,” the governor said in June 2016. “And the president of UNIPEC (same as Sinopec) has advised me that they would take it under serious consideration.”

That attempt failed as well.

But in April, the month the governor announced his plan to build the facility with federal dollars, he was confident that if a proposal was submitted that showed the facility would double as a shelter in times of disaster, the federal government would approve its construction with funds from the \$1.8 billion.

Mr. Mapp's wide-net view of how the funds should be spent was backed up by H.U.D. Secretary Ben Carson. “Our goal is to get people back into their homes, get people back to work, to build a stronger U.S. Virgin Islands for future generations,” Mr. Carson said during an interview with The Consortium in April. “These grants will restore homes and jobs, and repair critical infrastructure like roads, bridges, sewers, waterways, and also the island's electrical grid.”

While Mr. Carson did not explicitly mention a sports and events center, he gave a wide range of areas where the funds could be used.

Feature Image: Tim Duncan the U.V.I. Sports And Fitness Center in St. Thomas on August 11, 2018. (Credit: Ernice Gilbert, VIC)