

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Bryan OKs Plan To Build New Housing Units On St. Croix And St. Thomas; HUD Approves Williams Delight Home Ownership Plan

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The Virgin Islands Housing Authority's (V.I.H.A.) Board of Commissioners held its regular monthly meeting on St. Thomas and via conference on St. Croix Wednesday. Two major resolutions presented for approval involved entering agreements to begin development of public housing units into affordable mixed finance, project-based voucher, or rental assistance demonstration rental units on both St. Croix and St. Thomas.

These measures fall right in-line with [V.I.H.A.'s mission](#), "To create vibrant, dynamic, sustainable communities so families can evolve economically, and to improve lives and

strengthen communities through quality, safe and affordable housing and by providing a myriad of services to empower public housing residents."

Robert Graham, V.I.H.A. executive director, shared that Government House requested that V.I.H.A. provide a 90-day department agency report that highlights the achievements and challenges of the last 90 days. He said that he and his team recently met with Governor Albert Bryan along with the governor's territorial director of disaster recovery, Adrienne Williams-Octalien, to review the Bryan administration's understanding of V.I.H.A.'s portfolio reposition plan.

Housing's objective was to reassure the governor that V.I.H.A. was in sync with the territory's housing priority goals. "The most important take-away from the meeting is that the governor supports us moving forward with phase 1 replacement of Tutu Hi-Rise in St. Thomas and John F. Kennedy in St. Croix," Mr. Graham said. Housing has preliminary designs for both phases. Mr. Graham and the governor also discussed the location of single units in the territory, and the option to build replacement single units at Oswald Harris and Lucinda Millin Homes in St. Thomas. The governor also supports the John F. Kennedy housing community's phase 1 replacement plan, and discussed moving V.I.H.A.'s portfolio reposition strategy regarding JFK forward, according to Mr. Graham.

Mr. Graham said he also brought the housing authority's landlord's rental expansion program, "V.I. Envision Tomorrow," to the governor's attention. The governor now understands that the program – a \$25 million program to bring 500 units of private sector apartments on line by providing a \$50,000 grant to landlords, with a commitment to lease the units for five to seven years, Mr. Graham continued. "We believe the governor now understands the advantage of the program to the extent that he wanted to do an immediate press release that day to inform the public that a program existed that would benefit 500 landlords immediately," explained Mr. Graham. V.I.H.A.'s commissioners issued a recommendation that they wait to ensure that everything was in place before issuing a press release.

According to a recent [article in the Consortium](#), the landlords participating in the program would have to abide by the V.I. Housing Finance Authority's controlled rent rates. If successful, the plan would ease the rent crisis, and give Housing an opportunity to expand the voucher program and support tenant relocation.

The [Consortium article](#) also explained that the Bryan administration revealed a private investor was given \$4 million to build an additional 60 housing units in the Magens Bay area in St. Thomas, and another 80-100 units are slated to be built to the far east of the old Ralph de Chabert housing community in Christiansted. "We're going to rehab 100 units in Safarali here in St. Croix. We're going to continue with the homeownership land in Williams Delight; we'll rehab those units and sell them to the tenants," the governor added, making known that an additional 100 units would soon be built in another location on St. Thomas as well.

While H.U.D. has approved all Williams Delight Home units for home ownership, V.I.H.A. management will conduct the sale in small bites – twelve units at a time – to be better able to manage the process and expectations in a more structured manner, Mr. Graham explained. He shared that Housing and the governor has an alignment in housing priorities to demolish 50 percent of Williams Delight Homes as part of the repositioning

plans. Mr. Graham explained that home purchases would continue on one side while units on the east side are demolished.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's website describes the available housing types: [mixed finance public housing](#) allows for a mix of public, private, and nonprofit funds to develop and operate housing developments that include a variety of housing types: rental, homeownership, private, subsidized, and public housing, and are built for residents with a wide range of family incomes. [Rent vouchers](#), on the other hand, pays the owner the difference between 30 percent of family income and the gross rent for the unit. The rental assistance demonstration is voluntary and seeks to preserve public housing by making more stable funding available to public housing agencies for improvements.

The board also unanimously approved:

- A resolution authorizing a three percent wage increase for exempt employees for fiscal year 2019
- A resolution to approve a second extension of the legal services agreement with Dudley Rich, LLP
- A resolution to approve V.I.H.A.'s anti-fraud, waste and abuse policy

Board members in attendance included Chairwoman Noreen Michaels, Vice Chairman Vaughn Hewitt, Secretary, Commissioner Terry Malone, Commissioner Kaye Gumbs, Executive Director Robert Graham.

Feature Image: Aerial view of portion of Williams Delight on St. Croix (Ernice Gilbert, VIC)