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Waste Management Authority to Close All Unmanned Bin Sites Across Territory and Replace Them With Convenience Centers

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Waste Management Authority Convenience Center in Peter's Rest, St. Croix By. VI CONSORTIUM

V.I. Waste Management Authority head Roger Merritt told lawmakers during a hearing Friday that the authority has been taking steps to eliminate all public, unmanned bin sites throughout the territory, pointing to illegal dumping, the aesthetic degradation of surrounding areas and health risks.

Waste Management plans to replace unmanned bin sites with convenience centers like those found at Mandahl on St. Thomas and Peter's Rest in St. Croix. Community Development Block Grant

Disaster Relief (CDBG-DR) funds from the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority will be utilized to construct the new convenience centers, said Mr. Merritt.

Staff Shortage

While WMA has made some improvements since the last time authority officials faced lawmakers, WMA still struggles with vacancies of critical positions, lack of enforcement officers, lack of hazardous pay, and wastewater issues.

Currently, WMA has 111 employees territory-wide and is in critical need of a chief financial officer, chief legal counsel, chief engineer, and a landfill manager. The authority is also in need of more enforcement officers, since the five it does have are all assigned to the V.I.P.D. to assist with enforcement efforts due to the Covid-19 State of Emergency Declaration, Mr. Merritt said. "We need to hire more officers and inspectors because we need more people on the front line to issue citations and more enforcement," he said.

Senator Donna Frett-Gregory asked whether employees were receiving hazardous duty pay. Mr. Merritt told the committee that there is an additional \$1,500 paid to all employees designated as hazardous duty personnel. "We have been paying that since the authority was founded," he said. "Once an employee was designated hazardous duty, then the money was added to their salaries on an annual basis." However, after Mr. Merritt's statement, Mr. Blyden corrected him by putting on the record that, in fact, WMA employees don't get hazardous duty pay. "There was some kind of agreement that they get a stipend on an annual basis, but that is not hazardous duty pay, and those issues need to be worked out," said Mr. Blyden.

Projects Pending

Mr. Merritt told the committee that WMA has three pending projects: Krause Lagoon, Telemetry, and Coastal Interceptor. The Krause Lagoon project involves replacing 7,300 linear feet of sewer line from Pearl to Catherine's Rest and from Catherine's Rest to Anna's Hope on St. Croix; the Telemetry project involves installing telemetry (an alert system) at all the pump stations; and the Coastal Interceptor project, which involves relocating the interceptor inland, out of the ocean, with new construction.

All three projects are on schedule to be completed by 2021, Mr. Merritt said. In WMA's testimony, the authority admitted that the revenue it collects does not significantly contribute to the cost of operating and maintaining the territory's wastewater infrastructure. However, Mr. Merritt said efforts were being made to boost revenue to increase annual funding, improve the authority's fiscal position, and gradually shift operations to self-sufficiency.

Mr. Merritt said the authority has been working very hard to protect both its employees and contractors during the pandemic. For example, in workplaces where employees are present, the 6-ft social distance is maintained as well as the mandatory wearing of masks. There's also limited physical access to the public, and the authority has increased cleaning and sanitizing of high-traffic areas as well as high-touch surfaces, Mr. Merritt said.