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After Gov't Spends \$18 Million, DPNR Realizes Paul E. Joseph Stadium Needs FEMA Floodplain Approval, Delaying Project Into 2022 and Possibly Beyond

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Design of the Paul E. Joseph Stadium

Those hoping to enjoy sporting events at the Paul E. Joseph stadium, and by extension, entertainment events at the adjacent Festival Village in 2021, will have to wait until June 2022 at the earliest, as construction at the stadium grounds — which the V.I. Government has spent \$17.8 million on — has been halted pending approval for a conditional letter of map revision (CLOMR) from FEMA, a request that was made by the Dept. of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR) recently.

The news of the delay and the reason why surprised senators on Monday during a Committee on Youth, Sports, Parks and Recreation hearing, chaired by Senator Javan James. Senator Janelle Sarauw sought an answer on why the federal government was being brought into a project that is being fully funded by local dollars. The answer is that FEMA has jurisdiction over all floodplains.

GEC managing partner, John Wessel, explained how the CLOMR request came about. GEC is the firm contracted to build the stadium. "GEC prepared, at the request of DPNR, a floodplain analysis done by experts in the field that was for FEMA to review. This happened once we had completed the design showing exactly where all the elevations would be for the field for the stadium, the little league field and the Festival Village. As a result a request was made for a CLOMR because the stadium is being built in a floodplain and has the potential to alter the floodplain," said Mr. Wessel.

GEC was awarded the contract in November of 2014 under the de Jongh administration, and the contract was postponed for about a year under the Mapp administration. "He wanted to change the project from what Governor de Jongh had envisioned to what he had envisioned when he was the executive director of the Public Finance Authority," said Mr. Wessel of former Governor Mapp. The relatively small stadium, if it is completed in 2022, would have taken more than 7 years to be built.

Senators were not pleased.

"We appropriated money from 2014, and it's going to take 7 years to build a funded stadium, could you imagine that?" said Senator Myron Jackson. "Seven years to build a stadium? We're not building the Taj Mahal," he added, referring to the ivory-white marble mausoleum on the southern bank of the river Yamuna in the Indian city of Agra. "No Yankee stadium. We're building, I think, a circle with some infield — it will take us 7 years," the senator stressed. "God help us."

FEMA controls all of the floodplains in the territory, according to James Grum, engineering administrator for capital improvement projects at the Department of Public Works. He said several structures were built without approval, some of them over guts.

Asked by Senator Kurt Vialet whether the Dept. of Planning and Natural Resources was only now realizing that the Paul E. Joseph Stadium area is a flood zone, Mr. Grum said yes. Mr. Vialet asked wasn't the area always listed as a floodplain, Mr. Grum also said yes, but added that the floodplain was being changed significantly, ostensibly with the development of the stadium.

"So we, after spending \$16 million in the ground, now, just two months ago, DPNR has realized that we need to request this conditional letter of map revision? After spending \$16 million on the ground, we have just decided that?" asked an incredulous Vialet. Mr. Grum said a building permit for the stadium was submitted in May, and it was pulled by DPNR, which then requested the CLOMR.

"I just want to know who in DPNR just finally realized that we needed this permit after they had originally issued the permit for the work to take place. You can't spend \$16 million and then come back and say, 'oh, we think we have a problem.'"

Mr. Grum said the delay should not cost the government any additional funds. "Colleagues today, mark the day," Mr. Jackson said. "No additional funding for Paul E. Joseph."

Mr. Grum said \$17.8 million, including retainages owed, have been expended on front end engineering investigation, design, and construction of the Paul E. Joseph Stadium to date.

Relative to the CLOMR application, Mr. Grum said, "On Wednesday of last week we received a lengthy response, but two sentences summarize the status. 'We are currently reviewing your application we received November 11th. We should complete our review within the next few weeks and send you a formal response requesting additional information,' and 'Please note that the average processing time for applications from start to finish is about 6 months, with some simpler cases requiring less time and some more complex cases requiring more time.'

"Given that progress is halted until the CLOMR is accepted and the building permit is re-issued, the balance of the construction will continue in May of 2021. This pushes the expected completion date for the \$27 million project to June 2022," Mr. Grum said.

The stadium has seen lengthy delays beginning with the Mapp administration. We documented them [here](#).