

The Virgin Islands Consortium

A Bill authorizing the Board of Directors of Government Hospitals and Health Facilities Corporation to make an offer to purchase Plot No. 7 Estate Diamond Ruby, St. Croix, for the purpose of reconstructing and expanding the Governor Juan F. Luis Hospital

Government / **Published On December 10, 2020 06:23 AM /**

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During a Committee of Finance hearing, lawmakers received a status update on the "Envision Tomorrow Homeowner Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Program," the Disaster Recovery projects and considered several Bills including Bill No. 33-0429, an Act Authorizing the Board of Directors of Government Hospitals and Health Facilities

Corporation to make an offer to purchase Plot No. 7 Estate Diamond Ruby, St. Croix, for the purpose of reconstructing and expanding the Governor Juan F. Luis Hospital and Medical Center (JFL); and providing the funding for the purchase sponsored by Senator Kenneth Gittens.

As stated by Interim Chief Executive Officer Dyma B. Williams testimony, read by Chivonne Thomas, Esq. Chief Legal Counsel of JFL, the land JFL anticipation to acquire is approximately 3.6552 acres, and located at Plot No. 7 Estate Diamond Ruby, and would become the Southeast quadrant of JFL's boundary line.

The hospital requests that the re-appropriation of \$1 million in funding, previously allocated in Act No. 7697, Bill No. 30-0501, for behavioral health-related renovations. As a result of the hurricanes that ravaged the Virgin Islands in 2017, FEMA deemed that JFL is eligible for a full rebuild, which included a temporary structure to house the hospital functions while the new hospital is being built.

According to Ms. Williams, the re-allocation of funding will provide enough to cover over 70% of the land's purchase price. She further added that JFL is also requesting any funding the Legislature which can provide to cover the remaining amount of \$400,000. Ms. Williams said, "our vision is that this land will allow for us to expedite the process of constructing the new, permanent, JFL hospital." the vision JFL has for the land will allow for them to expedite the process of constructing the new, permanent, JFL hospital." "The land purchase provides JFL the opportunity to create a structure that would encompass the needs of the community as a whole as soon as plausible," Ms. Williams added.

Up to present, the JFL Board approved Flad, a national planning and design firm committed to creating environments that enhance human potential according to their website as the Architectural and Engineering company for the permanent JFL hospital. "Based on research and discussions with healthcare builders, including Flad, the design of the permanent JFL hospital will take 18 to 24 months. The demolition and the remediation of the current JFL building will also take about 18 months," said Ms. Williams.

Furthermore, Anthony David Thomas, Commissioner of the Department of Property and Procurement (DPP), mentioned in his testimony, which was read by Vincent Richards, Deputy Commissioner of DPP's Property and Printing Division, that DPP supported the measure and understands that it seeks to authorize the purchase of real property and aspires to appropriate funding consequently. "The Department will support programs that serve the People of the Virgin Islands' best interests and welfare or endeavors that provide for or allocate resources to the various agencies and departments to effectively fulfill their respective mandates," said Mr. Thomas.

However, DPP added that an area of concern for their department is that the measure sets an offer price before all requisite appraisals by Title 31 of the Virgin Islands Code would have been completed. Title 31 of the Virgin Islands Code sketches out a thorough process for the acquisition of real property, which begins with the Governor's determination that a particular property is needed for a public purpose. Because of this, DPP told senators that the Bill requires revision to ensure it is enforceable if approved.

Nevertheless, the Chairman of the committee, Sen. Kurt Violet, asked for JFL to get the additional appraisals necessary in order for the Legislature to see what the figure would be to acquire the property. Moreover, per Sen. Violet, Bill No. 33-0429 will be held in committee pending further amendments and will be moved out as an amendment in the nature of a substitute as amended; and special order it to the floor if they have all the pertinent information before the legislatures the last session in December.

The following measures were also passed during the hearing:

Bill No. 33-0348, "An Act making an appropriation of \$75,000 from the Centennial Special Fund to the Department of Education for the Charlotte Amalie High School's centennial activities" Proposed by Senator Donna Frett-Gregory

Bill No. 33-0355, "An Act amending Title 11 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 23, relating to the Small Business Development Agency by adding a section 1266 to provide an income tax deduction to small businesses that employ persons with disabilities" Proposed by Senator Stedman Hodge, Jr.

However, Bill No. 33-0451, "An Act amending Title 33 Virgin Islands Code chapter 111 to add section 3066a enacting the Virgin Islands Government Employees Retirement System Stabilization Fund" Proposed by Senator Kurt A. Violet was removed from the agenda at the call of the chair.