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Housing Authority Breaks Ground on Estate Donoe Redevelopment Project

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Kyle Murphy **January 15, 2021**

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Render of the new Estate Donoe community, whose groundbreaking was held on Thurs. Jan. 14, 2021. By. THE VI HOUSING AUTHORITY

ST. THOMAS — The Virgin Islands Housing Authority broke ground on the Estate Donoe redevelopment project on Thursday morning in a groundbreaking ceremony that was held both in-person and live-streamed on Facebook.

This project is the first phase of a larger effort aimed at replacing and completely reinventing the Tutu High Rise and Donoe public housing that were irreparably damaged by Hurricanes Marilyn, Irma and Maria.

Eighty-four families, many that were displaced because of Hurricanes Irma and Maria, will have access to the new units when the project is completed. The units are designed to be affordable to low-income families. Sixty of the 84 units will be available to families earning 30 percent of the area's median income. The remaining 24 units will be available to families earning 60 percent of the area's median income. All units will be subsidized.

"Today we start to build something," said Governor Albert Bryan during the ceremony. He asked those in attendance to put in 57 million into their calculators and divide it by 84. He did this to show the cost per unit, \$678,000, that has been invested. Mr. Bryan explained that this number shows the commitment to build proper housing in the Virgin Islands. "If we are going to do it we are going to do it right," the governor said.

Mr. Bryan acknowledged that a lot of work needs to be done, stating, "Today it is shovels but next year it will be ribbons and scissors."

Senate President Donna Frett-Gregory, said, "Today is indeed a good day in the Virgin Islands, a day of promise and hope," adding, "this project is an example of what we can accomplish with private-public partnerships."

The community has special ties to two members of the current Legislature. Ms. Frett-Gregory shared stories about when she moved to Donoe in either 1973 or '74. "Much of my upbringing took place right here on these grounds," she said. Mr. Bryan said that investing in these communities "will produce the next Donna-Frett Gregorys."

Senator Marvin Blyden, who worked in Donoe over 20 years ago, spoke about how special the people of Donoe made the community for him.

The project's total cost tops \$1.1 billion over the course of 10 years, with funding being provided through a mix of public and private dollars. The Donoe project, for example, will cost roughly \$58 million, some \$27 million of which will be funded by Hunt Capital Partners. Additionally, the V.I. Housing Authority is securing financing with Popular and Federal Home Loan Bank-Affordable Housing Program funds.

Two companies that will assist with the project from the private sector are Pennrose and Jackson Development Company.

Pennrose, to whom the Donoe land will be leased, said it has completed 265 development projects, building 18,000 rental units since its inception in 1971, according to the company's website. Pennrose has done work in 18 states but the Donoe effort will be its first project in the USVI.

Pennrose's Senior Vice President of Development, Ivy Dench Carter, grew up in the Virgin Islands. During her speech, she said when she heard about the opportunity to help in the disaster recovery process, she was "like the kid in class that always wanted to answer the question. That's my project."

Ms. Dench-Carter said, "I can truly say that this has been a collaborative private-public partnership."

Jackson Development is self-described on its website as a USVI Limited Liability Company. "JDC develops real estate and provides development services to real estate owners. Our focus is the development of vibrant, thriving communities funded with traditional debt and equity coupled

with tax advantaged programs and public financing," reads the description.

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