

The Virgin Islands Consortium

FEMA Acting Administrator Says He's Willing to Work With USVI to Push Disaster Recovery Forward

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Luis Hospital Project Manager Yvonne Thomas, who led a tour of the facility on Friday, updates FEMA Administrator Peter Gaynor on the project's progress. By. Government House

Acting FEMA Administrator Peter Gaynor told local leaders on Friday during a meeting at Government House on St. Croix that he's willing to work with the U.S. Virgin Islands to push the territory's recovery forward following the 2017 storms.

That's according to a Government House release, which made known that Mr. Gaynor, who was in the territory on Friday, met with Governor Albert Bryan, who attended the meeting via teleconference from Washington, D.C., Office of Disaster Recovery Director Adrienne L. Williams-Octalien, and V.I.T.E.M.A. Director Daryl Jaschen.

Also part of the meeting was FEMA's USVI Recovery Director Jacquelyn Heyliger. The meeting's main focus, according to the release, was the expediting of the territory's major storm recovery projects, which has been moving at a snail's pace, including healthcare facilities, road repair work, school facilities, housing and power.

The Friday meeting, according to Government House, was a continuation of discussions between the Bryan administration and Mr. Gaynor. In October, the governor and his senior staff met with Mr. Gaynor in Washington, D.C., and invited him to the territory to continue the discussion and to see firsthand the status of the recovery.

During the Friday meeting, Mr. Bryan expressed his gratitude for FEMA's continued support in the recovery process, but also conveyed his frustration with the slow pace of the critical work to restore the U.S. Virgin Islands' hospitals and schools and to fix the territory's roads, Government House said.

The governor cited issues related to local FEMA staff turnover coupled with being required to revisit decisions on projects that have already been vetted as exacerbating an already slow federal disaster recovery process, according to the release. Mr. Bryan also emphasized the need to finalize key decisions related to the STEP program so that funding can be released to pay contractors that are owed.

Government House said Mr. Gaynor on Friday said he's willing to work with the territory to push the projects forward and expedite progress.

Mrs. Williams-Octalien indicated that Friday's meeting with Mr. Gaynor would help spur the territory's recovery from the devastating hurricanes in 2017, according to Government House.

"FEMA made commitments and settled on goals to finish school inspections to begin the rebuilding process and to get major road projects finalized so repairs can proceed," Mrs. Williams-Octalien said after the meeting.

Following the meeting, Juan Luis Hospital (J.F.L.) Acting CEO Dyma Williams and J.F.L. Project Manager Yvonne Williams led Mrs. Williams-Octalien, Mr. Gaynor, and Ms. Heyliger on an extensive tour of the medical facility, the Cardiac Center, and the modular units, Government House said.

J.F.L. Leadership is finalizing contracts to complete the installation of the furniture and necessary medical equipment to complete the construction. The anticipated opening of the temporary modular hospital is set for the summer of 2020. While this is a temporary solution, the path to a permanent healthcare facility is being undertaken simultaneously as \$10 million has been obligated by FEMA for the design and architectural engineering for the replacement of J.F.L.