

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Senate President Pushes D.P.W. for Strategic Plan with Timelines

Government / **Published On June 29, 2021 07:27 PM /**

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Senate President Donna Frett-Gregory wanted to see a more strategic and detailed plan during the Department of Public Works budget hearing on Tuesday and explained to Derek Gabriel, Commissioner of Public Works exactly what he needs to provide next time he appears before the Senate.

She first made her issue with the presentation known when she said “I didn’t see in the nice booklet that you prepared where you had any timelines or where the projects were in fact prioritized so I need to get a clear understanding what is the strategic plan you have

around these projects, this 700 million dollars plus in projects.”

Mr. Gabriel mentioned that the priorities start with Governor Albert Bryan’s top 100 projects but one of the issues that he has experienced is that Department of Public Works engineers “chasing projects through procurement, so we are trying to build a more robust procurement team to actually handle those projects.” He added that sometimes it takes anywhere from 60-120 days to finalize contracts.

The answer was not satisfactory for Ms. Frett-Gregory and she said “I hear you but you still are not giving me what I need ... you need to establish a strategic plan.. We have to put a timeline around these projects. How are we holding ourselves accountable?” She added “I really think you need to develop a strategic plan, you need to determine which ones are the low-hanging fruits, which ones are not... we need to see some light at the end of the tunnel when it comes to these projects because you can move the goal post but how do you know what your moving if you don’t have timelines in this presentation.”

The Senate President switched issues temporarily only to come back to the point during her second round of questioning, “before I wrap up I have to come back to these projects Commissioner and I’m not going to ask it through the chair, I am going to expect that we see something the next time you come before the legislature where we are able to see projects pulling out of their project database that are realistic as it relates to timelines around those projects, which ones are the low hanging fruits, which ones are going to take us another year, 2-3 years out so we could really have a perspective as to exactly where these projects are.”

After hearing this Mr. Gabriel expressed that the Department has been organizing the projects in a similar fashion “We have been doing what you’ve been describing. We have been going through the governor’s top 100 projects so we are working through the low-hanging fruit, a lot of our community projects...so our focus right now is pulling that low hanging fruit, focusing on projects that have obligated P.W.’s (Project Worksheets) or have obligated or local or federal funds.”

He added that the next tranche of projects that will be obligated are government buildings and highways and then “our schools, hospitals and our bigger government buildings.”

Ms. Frett-Gregory still wanted more from the Commissioner in his next presentation to the Senate body, “I was very specific in my request, you presented before us today a document that says project database for the Department of Public Works and that’s what I was referencing... it’s wonderful to make a presentation of this manner but we need to

see some timelines, we need to see which ones are going to move off by the end of this year and which ones are going to move off by the end of the next year... this document that's in front of us doesn't really provide us with anything other than this is the database of all of the projects."

She then said she would continue the conversation with the Commissioner offline.

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