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Government Lumber for Home Repair and Construction Sitting at the Back of Sunshine Mall is Moved to Abandoned Alexander Hamilton School

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VIHFA lumber, which had been placed at the back of the Sunshine Mall in Frederiksted, has been relocated to the abandoned Alexander Henderson Elementary School. By. VIHFA

ST. CROIX — The V.I. Housing Finance Authority has relocated excess lumber that has been sitting at the back of Sunshine Mall in Frederiksted for a protracted period of time after being purchased to repair homes following the 2017 storms. The FEMA-provided funds were made available through the Emergency Repair Program.

The excess lumber, relocated to the abandoned Alexander Henderson Elementary School campus, will remain in place until the V.I. Housing Finance Authority starts using them for what the authority says will be the reconstruction of 200 houses as part of the EnVision Homeowner and Rental Rehabilitation Program. The authority said it received approval from FEMA in July.

V.I.F.H.A. said applicants in the program were being notified of their status through their case managers as construction is scheduled to begin in late November under a new request for proposal.

The authority said that before a lease it executed with the owners of Sunshine Mall expired, the owners indicated their decision not to renew, resulting in the removal of the lumber. "The authority then entered discussions with the Department of Property and Procurement and the Virgin Islands Department of Education to use the Alexander Henderson Elementary School campus to store the material while homes in the EnVision program await repair," stated the release.

The release further stated that in June 2021, a memorandum of understanding was executed by all three parties — D.O.E., V.I.H.F.A. and P&P — establishing an agreement for the materials to be stored for one year, with an option to renew, if needed. The agreement indicates there is no exchange of funds, subsequently saving V.I.H.F.A. nearly \$100,000 per year in storage fees, according to the release.

V.I.H.F.A, citing Dept. of Education officials, said the decision to close the Alexander Henderson School under the current administration was due to "a series of air-quality, structural and environmental issues that had not been resolved after a number of mitigation efforts."

According to the release, D.O.E. also maintains that the Alexander Henderson Elementary School campus is "unsuitable to operate as a school" and further supports the MOU stating that Henderson's "grounds provide adequate space to store supplies that are being used to repair and/or to rebuild homes for many St. Croix families through the V. I. Housing Finance Authority."

V.I.H.F.A. said the lumber is secured and will be appropriately protected with weather-proof tarps. A company has been hired to provide 24-hour security at the school campus. In addition, the lumber stored is not being offered for material sale, according to the release.

The authority said it will be using the lumber material for its construction projects, mainly the EnVision Program and new home construction headed by the Homeownership division.