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Governor Bryan Plans to Move Into Catherineberg Once Repaired, But the Estate is Slated to Become a Museum

Government / **Published On December 03, 2021 05:24 AM /**

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Estate Catherineberg, St. Thomas.

Governor Albert Bryan indicated on Monday that he would move into Estate Catherineberg once it is repaired, reiterating what was shared during a West Indian Company (WICO) board meeting in March 2019 [when the board announced](#) WICO would pay the monthly rental cost of \$3,500 for a condo Mr. Bryan stays in when in St. Thomas.

The question relative to the governor's residence was posed to Mr. Bryan by the Consortium as repairs at Gov't House on St. Thomas are just about completed. There was talk that the facility had no living quarters, but Mr. Bryan refuted the claim, stating that he has decided to use the living

quarters for office space instead.

"The residence is equipped to be a residence or an office," he said. "We have a way to have living quarters in there but we are using it for offices."

Asked if he would stay at Gov't House on St. Thomas when in the district once repairs are completed, Mr. Bryan said the plan is to revitalize Catherineberg. "Those repairs are in design at this point but WICO is having a little delay due to their dealing with Covid and no cruise ships for a year," the governor said.

Catherineberg, however, is slated to become a museum according to a bill that became law [in June 2018](#). The law removed ownership of the estate from WICO, which is owned by the government, and placed it under direct control of the Government of the Virgin Islands through a \$6.65 million sale.

Former Governor Kenneth Mapp had vetoed the bill and said at the time that even if his veto was overridden by the Legislature he would not implement it. Those fighting words led to swift rebuke from lawmakers at the time, including former Senator Janette Millin Young, who stated, "This statement shows his utter disdain and disrespect for the Legislature and the people it represents. Senators and the public should join together in rebuking the notion that a governor — a chief executive — can publicly state that he will choose what laws he will follow. He needs to understand, unequivocally, that the U.S. Virgin Islands, as all U.S. jurisdictions, abide by two major doctrines — separation of powers and checks and balance."

Senators then overrode the veto 13-2, making the measure law of the land. The question remains whether the government ever moved on implementing the law, including the \$6.5 million purchase transaction.

The law calls for WICO to sell the mansion to the Government of the Virgin Islands using taxes that WICO owes to the government as an offset. According to WICO's CEO at the time, Clifford Graham — who testified at the hearing in favor of the sale — the company owed the government \$6.65 million in taxes.

"If Bill No. 32-0002 is approved, going forward the government would receive a PILOT [payment in lieu of taxes] of \$250,000 per year, which WICO's budget can accommodate," Mr. Graham said during a May 2018 hearing. (He later clarified that while \$250,000 payment would still be difficult to meet, it was much more attainable than the sum of \$700,000, which WICO was unable to pay for years.)

During his testimony in May 2018, Mr. Graham pointed to multiple reasons for the noncompliance, including the opening of the Crown Bay port in 2006, payroll for its 70 employees, costs relative to the upgrades of the facility, for which WICO floated a bond of over \$11 million, as well as the cost to maintain the facility — with Mr. Graham estimating annual costs anywhere from \$220,000 to \$60,000.

The matter regarding the governor's official residence has been a long-running issue, and it dominated the Mapp administration from the outset when it was revealed that WICO was paying [\\$12,500 a month](#) for the Estate Nazareth villa the former governor stayed in while in St. Thomas upon taking office. In total, WICO spent \$107,563.56 for the 4.5 months that Mr. Mapp stayed at the Estate Nazareth villa.

