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Temporary St. Croix Hospital, Called JFL North, to Open This Summer, Territorial Hospital Board Says

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JFL North, the 50,000 square foot temporary hospital on St. Croix will open this summer, according to Christopher Finch, chairman of the territorial hospital board. By. ERNICE GILBERT/ V.I. CONSORTIUM

St. Croix's temporary hospital, the facility called JFL North whose opening has seen numerous delays, will be open for use this summer, said Christopher Finch, chairman of the territorial hospital board during a Senate hearing Friday.

"The much-anticipated completion of JFL North, the number one priority construction project, is slated for this summer," Mr. Finch said during a hearing in the Committee on Health, Hospitals and Human Services, chaired by Senator Novelle Francis. "Presently the construction of the

[cement mechanical unit] (CMU) building, which is an essential component that will enable JFL North to provide patient care for the residents and visitors to the island of St. Croix, is underway and will be completed by July 2022."

The CMU houses all the technical support for the infrastructure of JFL North, according to then-acting JFL CEO Dyma Williams who in May 2021 [said](#) the worst-case scenario for JFL North's completion was April 2022.

"The CMU building is a structure that will house the critically important mechanical systems such as the water distribution equipment, the fire protection systems, the medical gas delivery systems, and the oxygen distribution systems," Mr. Finch said Friday. He said there will be other projects ongoing but those won't impact JFL North's opening. The other projects include the construction of critical administration space, materials storage, medical waste storage and handling, as well as additional parking areas to support the interim operations of JFL North.

Part of the reason for the delays at JFL North was a plan by the hospital to connect the facility to the current hospital's oxygen system, a decision Ms. Williams said last year was made to hasten the process of opening.

The plan backfired.

"We had a first phase approach where the medical gases were supposed to be piped in from our current system," Ms. Williams said at the time. However, the hospital brought a company to evaluate the feasibility of using the current system, and "they determined that it would not in fact be safe to hook up JFL North, the new hospital, to the existing medical gas system," Ms. Williams said.

She added, "We had always anticipated phase B, which would have been the buildout of the oxygen generator, the construction, the connections, the utilities, the trenching." Ms. Williams described the buildout as a "very technically complex build, so it takes time."

Mr. Finch told senators that the territorial board was as frustrated as anyone with the delays at JFL North. "I assure this Committee that we are fully aware of the disappointment and frustration that JFL North is not yet open," he said.

"We are doing all we can to complete it as quickly as we can. The board shares the community's frustration deeply. Originally, we planned for the Hospital Redevelopment Team to work only on the other recovery construction projects. We added JFL North to their duties to ensure we had a special focus of experienced professionals completing the project. Rarely a day goes by that I am not in communication with [the Hospital Development Team Executive Director, Darryl Smalls]. He comes to St. Croix weekly to oversee this work. If there is any way to finish it quicker, we will do so."

If JFL North opens this summer, it would be exactly five years following Hurricane Maria's impact on St. Croix. The temporary facility is expected to meet St. Croix's medical needs until the new hospital is built.