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WAPA in Line to Benefit Significantly From Grant Funding For Electricity Improvements on St. Croix

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WAPA's Richmond powerplant. By. ERNICE GILBERT/ V.I. CONSORTIUM

The V.I. Housing Finance Authority has completed its last round of public hearings and will submit a final document to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) outlining projects that can enhance and improve electrical systems on St Croix.

The action plan will explain how \$67 million in Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funds from HUD will be used.

Public input garnered during the 45-day comment period, which opened on November 11 and will end on December 25, will be incorporated into the final document. The authority plans to present the full application to HUD by March 2023.

VIHFA said while significant progress has been made in restoring and enhancing local power systems since Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017, the CDBG-DR Electrical System Improvement funds address other remaining or proposed restoration and improvement costs not already covered through other sources of funding.

VIFHA project engineer, Odari Thomas said the largest allocation of the \$67 million is geared towards helping the V.I. Water and Power Authority procure new generators for its Estate Richmond Power Plant on St. Croix.

VIHFA is optimistic that the investment of \$53 million, or 78.34 percent of the budget to setup the generation system will cut emissions by 90 percent over time.

If successful in acquiring the grant, the project aims to make the plant's electrical capacity resilient enough to withstand adverse weather effects like hurricanes and earthquakes.

"Currently, the Richmond Power Plant has approximately 80 megawatts of nameplate plate capacity. Unfortunately, a lot of that capacity is outdated and inefficient and ultimately unreliable, which is the major factor," Mr. Thomas said.

The Richmond project, he said, has been identified as a way to improve the generation capacity on the island of St Croix and the community that it serves by making substantial improvements to the facility.

VIHFA said \$10 million or 14.78 percent will be invested in community innovation projects, another \$1,270,350 million (1.88 percent) will be used for planning and \$3,382,650 (5 percent) will be used on administration expenses.

The Community Innovation Program will be administered by VIHFA and will give organizations an opportunity to propose ideas that address local power generation needs and improvements.

Selected groups who would have identified a need, will receive technical assistance and capacity building resources to help manage the funding and meet HUD requirements.

"We're hoping that it yields some tangible and impressive projects," Mr. Thomas remarked.

Once the final version of the action plan is submitted to HUD with the addition of public comments and input from various stakeholders, and it is approved, VIFHA will accept applications for funding the projects identified.

Comments and feedback can be emailed using the subject label "CDBG-DR Electrical Power System Improvements Action Plan" or "CDBG-DR EPSEI." Email addresses are: media@vihfa.gov and InfrastructureTeam@vihfa.gov.