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Senator Fonseca Among Property Owners Violating Historic Preservation Rules

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Senator Ray Fonseca. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

Sitting USVI Senator Ray Fonseca is one of several property owners who remain in violation of regulations of the St. Thomas/St. John Historic Preservation Committee. This was revealed by HPC Coordinator Patton Mulford when members of the HPC convened their monthly meeting on Tuesday.

Mulford confirmed to the committee that a property owned by the senator was yet to be repainted, despite Fonseca being cited for illegal use of color. According to Mulford, Fonseca had verbally indicated that he would approach the committee to address the concerns which had been previously raised. However, action to address the issue remains pending.

Several other business owners also remain in violation of regulations of the HPC, despite being issued violation letters. Mr. Mulford stated that while those outstanding violations have not been addressed, new violation notices have been issued.

"Eden Jewelers", "VI Icecream Company", "Mountain Top", "Little Switzerland Jewelers", "Jackson Jewelers", "Bikes Smith", "Biso Minimart" and "Caribbean Jewelers" were among those with new violations, according to the committee. Signage, colors, and shuttering violations were observed by committee member David Knight from looking at images of the buildings. He called for the committee to get a handle on the violators, pointing out that the violators' sheet dating back to 2019 had not been updated.

Some of the existing violators are "Trident Jewelers", "On Time Watch Repair" and Clive Rivers, who had been accused of Illegal demolition. When asked about the status of the Rivers matter, Mr. Mulford informed that it is a legal issue. State Historic Preservation Office Director Sean Krigger chimed in, stating, "that's one where the Committee issued the violation notice and the violator responded back with a challenge that the Committee did not have jurisdiction," he said. Mr. Krigger added that legal assistance was required because the matter has to be dealt with through a solicitor general's office.

HPC Coordinator Mulford proposed that the committee seek to reduce the number of violations by facilitating a town hall meeting to educate store owners and vendors about the regulations. Committee member David Knight noted that the suggestion could be considered and advised that a proposal be put on next month's agenda for discussion by the entire Commission. While Mr. Knight asserted that the issue should not only focus on one district, he highlighted that the committee is simply charged with enforcing the regulations as opposed to creating them. Committee member Enrique Rodriguez was in agreement with this observation, noting that while he doesn't believe their presence is necessary at a public consultation, he is not opposed to a virtual presentation for the benefit of providing the public with information.

The committee, which is part of the Historic Preservation Commission, voted on Tuesday, approving several applications for business signage, paint, and shutters. These included applications for a change in shutter color by Michael Walder, signage approval for the French Academy of Performing Arts and a request by Landon Bunn to change the color of an acquired building. While Mr. Krigger recalled previous concerns regarding the roof of the acquired building, it was stated that Mr. Bunn plans to address the issue within the next 4-5 months.

Meanwhile, it took some time before the committee could reach a consensus on a request by Jennifer L. Duboi Stevens of Cyril V. Francois Associates to extend an existing upper wall from the eastern to the southern end of the property. While committee members discussed various options which considered design elements, safety and practicality, Mr. Knight advised that caution be taken before adding a modern design on top of what he pointed out was an old and historic wall. Mr. Knight displayed a historic black and white photo of the location during the Danish colonial period, which confirmed that the lower wall was indeed part of the early design of the area. However, a white picket fence ran on top of it, as opposed to the chain-link fence which is presently in place.

Mr. Knight argued that extending the upper wall down the southern end of the property would change the landscape of the area.

According to Knight, visually the buildings on that side of the property appear more vernacular and older in design than the more modern structures on the northern side. Similar concerns were

shared by Committee member Kurt Marsh, Jr. However, Director Krigger maintained that the wall should be extended, contending that the atmosphere of the courtyard has already been changed with the addition of new modern buildings. Krigger further opined that continuing the wall would be a better design service for the site than to put a picket fence.

Ms. Stevens opposed the picket fence idea, arguing that it is not durable and would present maintenance issues. Committee member Kurt Marsh Jr. added that he was less concerned with the wall and more concerned with the state of the buildings, which he believes aren't in the best shape. However, Ms. Stevens promised that a revamp of the buildings is in the pipeline. Eventually, all members voted in favor of a motion to defer voting on the wall extension until a more comprehensive package is presented and a site visit is conducted.

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