

The Virgin Islands Consortium

New Vending Kiosks and Public Restrooms Open in Charlotte Amalie - Latest in Revitalization Plans for Downtown Areas

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Beverly Telesford **April 18, 2023**



The new vendors plaza on the St. Thomas waterfront. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

Sixteen brightly colored Kiosks now stand in the space which once occupied ragged blue tents that housed vendors on the St. Thomas Waterfront, heralding the latest step in planned facelifts for the territory's commercial centers.

"There are just so many other good things that are coming down the pipe. Ladies and gentlemen, we have a downtown revitalization project in each of our downtown plans," Governor Albert Bryan said during his address at the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new

Vendors Plaza on Monday, alluding to the facility being just the tip of the iceberg.

The revitalization plans show “that this administration is business-friendly, opening up new opportunities to our local people on Main Street that never had a chance to be there before,” the governor continued, and “bring residential living back to our towns...as busy as you see this is now, 5:30, 6 o’clock at night, it’s a ghost town. We need to bring the tourists out at night.”

Mr. Bryan also welcomed the opening of new public restrooms across from the new vending kiosks. Officials at the Department of Public Works, including Commissioner Derek Gabriel, underscored the importance of the project to the territory’s capital, noting that members of the public have been clamoring for restrooms over the years.

Acting Commissioner at the Department of Property and Procurement Lisa Alejandro, noted the importance of recovery projects throughout the territory and the need to develop the built landscape in a way that improves the USVI’s tourism product and promotes economic development.

At Monday’s ribbon-cutting, Department of Licensing & Consumer Affairs (DLCA) Richard Evangelista noted that one of the first directives he received upon accepting his appointment to the post from Governor Bryan in 2019 was to transform the image of Vendors Plaza, something he says he prioritized. In March 2020, when the Plaza closed due to the pandemic, DLCA capitalized on the opportunity to build something new.

“In preparation for today’s ceremony, Senate President Novelle Francis and the members of the then 34th Legislature of the Virgin Islands, amended the law to transfer the management of the new Vendors Plaza to the Department of Property and Procurement,” Mr. Evangelista said. As of January 2023, the Department of Property and Procurement holds responsibility for the kiosks, from leasing to maintenance.

Senate President Novelle Francis called Monday a “good and historic day,” saying that the vendors plying their trade had to endure sub-optimal conditions for “far too many years.” The tents and canopies “would not be the best situation for them, our tourism product and our territory...let’s be honest, it was somewhat of an eyesore at times,” he continued.

Mr. Francis was thankful that the project was at its completion point, noting the many delays and challenges leading up to the ribbon-cutting ceremony.

All speakers expressed gratitude and appreciation to all the stakeholders which made the project possible, with special emphasis on Mr. Evangelista, the DLCA commissioner and the workers in his department.

The kiosks are designed to withstand the forces of hurricanes up to Category 3 in strength, and are expected to ameliorate many of the problems weather conditions caused to the previous fragile tent structures. The new structures can also be locked and secured, saving vendors the chore of breaking down tents each night and carting away supplies only to return the next day to set up everything again and repeat the process. Additionally, each kiosk has a power supply for lighting, a three-foot roof overhang around the kiosk to provide shade, two openings with roller doors on each side and storage drawers. A Banco Popular ATM sits adjacent to the new restrooms.

During his remarks, Mr. Evangelista reminisced about how this area had transformed over the years. "To prepare for today, I spent some time speaking to vendors who were transferred from the waterfront and the alleyways, on or about January 1992, to the current location we know as Vendors Plaza," he said. "Back then they sold their merchandise under umbrellas with wooden arms, covered with 'sunbrella' type material, sewn by Miss Collette Monroe who was in the audience today," Mr. Evangelista continued. "Eventually the vendors transferred to collapsible tents with matching covers... which later transformed into collapsible tent frames covered with blue, black or brown tarpaulin," he recalled.