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Fixed Cost Offer for New Schneider Hospital Expected in September; Work to Begin Within 24 Months

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The Schneider Regional Medical Center. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM

The Territorial Hospital Redevelopment Team (THRT) is expecting to receive a fixed cost offer by September for the construction of the Schneider Regional Medical Center, according to THRT Executive Director of Facilities and Capital Development, Darryl Smalls.

In a statement before the Senate Committee on Disaster Recovery, Infrastructure, and Planning on Monday, Smalls acknowledged that the redevelopment of the Schneider Hospital has been their most challenging project so far. He noted that years of intense negotiations and sustained efforts were required to demonstrate the extent of damages and reach a consensus for full replacement.

In August last year, the Federal Emergency Management Agency approved the hospital's replacement, which triggered the process of determining the cost of replacing the hurricane-damaged facility. Smalls conveyed his expectations that both THRT and FEMA would agree on a way forward by June 23rd, subsequently leading to a fixed cost offer by September. According to Smalls, construction could potentially commence within 24 months after receiving this offer.

Smalls further disclosed that the cost determination process for the Juan F. Luis Hospital had established a framework that guides the calculation of the ultimate replacement cost for the Schneider Regional Medical Center.

After Smalls' testimony, senators who make up the 35th Legislature initiated a round of questions, with committee chair Milton Potter expressing concerns about community involvement in the project. Potter asked, "Is there a space for local input and involvement in the development of that project?"

In response, Smalls reassured Potter that public engagement is planned during the design phase. Although he mentioned that hospital designs typically have little room for variation, Smalls emphasized the importance of community involvement, stating, "we do want to enlighten the community."

Smalls also clarified the fixed cost offer's provisions, affirming that once the final cost is determined, no additional funding will be allocated. He explained that experts would consider all aspects of the current facility and the costs of rebuilding it in today's market. Other factors, such as shipping costs, cost increases compared to the mainland, and the contract duration, will also be taken into account.

Senator Donna Frett-Gregory inquired about potential changes to the new facility's footprint. Smalls explained that the existing sites will be used for reconstruction and the design would consider current and future health care needs, including the number of beds required.

Smalls also updated lawmakers on the status of the Charlotte Kimelman Cancer Institute and the Myrah Keating Smith Community Health Center in St. John — both components of the Schneider Regional Medical Center. He reported successful completion of the selective demolition phase for the severely hurricane-affected Cancer Institute, with a public solicitation issued for contractor services. The construction is targeted to begin by September 2023 and complete by December 2024.

For the Myrah Keating Smith Community Health Center, Smalls expressed confidence in clearing the final hurdle to receive a fixed cost offer from FEMA. He announced that the Independent Expert Panel completed their review earlier than expected, and the formal fixed cost offer should be received by June 19th, 2023. Once received, a solicitation will be issued for construction proposals. As a large project, exceeding \$25 million, the proposal must undergo several reviews and gain Congressional approval for funding.