

The Virgin Islands Consortium

WAPA Breaks New Ground with Underground Power Project in Hannah's Rest

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Janeke Simon **May 20, 2023**



ST. CROIX — Representatives from the Water and Power Authority presented details of an upcoming project at a Coastal Zone Management (CZM) Committee meeting on Thursday. The project aims to move electricity lines and transformers underground in the Hannah's Rest community in Frederiksted, marking an unprecedented move in a fully residential area.

As part of their federal consistency request, the representatives briefed the committee on the necessity of the federal government's compliance with the territory's Coastal Zone Management program for this initiative.

Amy Dempsey, representing WAPA, announced that the project is slated for completion in twelve months. "This is the first time we are undertaking an undergrounding project in a completely residential area," she said.

FXB Engineering President Pete Bonnes explained that the approach for this project has been informed by lessons learned from previous endeavors, particularly the Golden Grove project. The focus will be to minimize disruption and disturbance to the residential community as much as possible.

"Considering the residential nature of the area, the work will be done during normal business hours from Monday to Friday. We aim to avoid work on weekends, nights, and holidays unless absolutely necessary," said Bonnes. He further assured that contractors would adhere to strict mitigation measures to maintain a high standard of work.

The planned project is expected to affect approximately 275 properties, but any electricity supply disruptions are only anticipated towards the end of the project during the transition from overhead to underground infrastructure. Bonnes assured residents that any interruptions would be minimal, lasting hours rather than days.

However, WAPA faced criticism for poor communication regarding the planned undergrounding projects, leading to resentment from western St. Croix communities who felt neglected and overlooked. CZM Committee Chair Masserae Webster speculated that better communication from WAPA could have prevented this misunderstanding.

In response to CZM environmental planner Anita Gibbs' query about road conditions and access, WAPA's electrical design engineer Belgrave Stedman assured that most infrastructure was already in place, with minor crossings being the only requirement for the west side of the road.

Regarding the project's second phase, Bonnes stated that it will not commence next year but rather, the focus will shift eastward.

The CZM Committee is expected to schedule another meeting within a month to decide on WAPA's federal consistency request.