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GERS Board Raises Concerns Over Unpaid Rent from VIPD and DOJ

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The Government Employees' Retirement System Board of Trustees wants to know whether they can rely on the V.I. Police Department – and other government agencies – to pay their rent.

That was a key question up for discussion during Thursday's board meeting, as recently appointed administrator Angel Dawson noted that negotiations were currently ongoing to lease empty space owned by GERS to house the VIPD's records and archives department.

Responding to concerns about the VIPD paying rent on time, Mr. Dawson assured board trustees, "Well, you know, we have ways of making people pay. So we are optimistic that we will have a good relationship with...the police department, and not to mention that it should provide us with an added measure of security."

Those reassurances were not enough to mollify everyone at the table. Board trustee Andre Dorsey contended that GERS was having issues collecting payments from the V.I. Department of Justice. Other board members noted that other government agencies were also delinquent, however Mr. Dawson pointed out that several entities of the government paid their bills on time.

During his administrator's report, Mr. Dawson also shared a series of plans for the Havensight Mall, which include the erection of several bronze statues to depict and honor the Virgin Islands' iconic "coal women." Mall tenants, Mr. Dawson says, are excited about the project, and it is hoped that the work would "inject some historical significance" while at the same time "providing a cultural experience to...visitors."

Mr. Dawson also reported on other progress made in the development project, including having recently obtained the relevant permits for the construction of a generator house, and just last week having developed the scope of work for the redevelopment of Havensight's Building #3. Tenants of the building, he noted, had already been apprised of the upcoming work.

A meeting last week to further discuss issues relating to the development project included officials from the V.I. Water and Power Authority, who were present to discuss rental and electricity collections for July 2023. Mr. Dorsey suggested that moving forward, all agreements with government or quasi-governmental agencies include a mechanism by which GERS can be paid directly. "We need to figure out a mechanism internally, that we get our money off the top," he asserted, suggesting that the Legislature be approached if statutory amendments would need to be made to give effect to this change.

Later in the meeting, a motion was made – and passed – to request that the V.I. Legislature appropriate sufficient funds to pay the arrears of WAPA, the hospitals, and other government agencies that are in significant arrears to GERS, particularly for contributions. Whether this the decision will meet with legislative approval remains to be seen.