

COMMITTEE RECEIVES UPDATE ON CHARLOTTE AMALIE DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

Date : November 22, 2016

ST. THOMAS- The Committee on Economic Development, Agriculture and Planning, chaired by Sen. Janette Millin Young received an update on Tuesday concerning the suspension of the Charlotte Amalie Downtown Revitalization Project.

Chairman Millin Young scheduled today's Committee meeting because she requested and is still awaiting correspondence from the Departments of Public Works, Property & Procurement on the status of this project. "The delay of this project impacts the day-to-day business in the downtown area and directly affects the heart of the V.I. economy."

On November 7, 2016, the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) notified the Government of the Virgin Islands of its decision to suspend the contract awarded to Tip Top Construction. According to Federal regulation 23 CFR 635.125, all contracts exceeding the amount of \$10,000 shall contain suitable provisions for termination by the State/Territory, including the manner by which the termination will be effected and the basis for settlement.

President of the St. Thomas-St. John Chamber of Commerce, Sabastiano Paiewonski-Castinelli stated, "If Tip Top Construction cannot fulfill their contractual obligations in full compliance with federal regulations that it is in our best interest to secure another contract in order to complete this project."

The Teaming Agreement and intent to subcontract between Tip Top Construction and Prestige Building Company, LLC, was not disclosed throughout the bidding process or after the contract was awarded by the Government of the Virgin Islands. Private sector entities such as the Chamber of Commerce (COC) and Downtown Revitalization Inc., (DRI) gave testimony on their challenges with maintaining communication with the Departments of Public Works (DPW) and Property & Procurement.

"As a private sector entity, we have attempted to work in total collaboration with the DPW to make the flow of information as smooth and easy as possible for Main Street businesses, residents and visitors," said Gautam Daswani, President of DRI. "The DRI is concerned and willing to assist in all efforts to restore and reauthorize funding for this project."

Wystan Benjamin, Former Highway Program Manager of the Department of Public Works, submitted his testimony seeking closure for his unexplained termination. While employed by the DPW led his team by assessing and awarding contracts based on the lowest, responsible bidder.

Attorney General Claude O. Walker also informed the Committee that he discussed the letter received from the FHWA with the Commissioners of Public Works and Property & Procurement, but has no knowledge of a plan of action in light of the contract suspension.

The Committee took no action, as the meeting served as a status update on the project.

The Committee of the Whole will convene today at 6:00 p.m. at the Earle B. Ottley Legislative Hall.

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