Re: Update on DPNR Disaster Recovery Programs, Initiatives, and Projects

Good day Senator Sarauw, other members of the 34th Legislature’s Committee on Disaster Recovery and Infrastructure, non-committee members and legislative staff present, and members of the viewing and listening public, my name is Jean-Pierre L. Oriol, Commissioner for the Department of Planning & Natural Resources (DPNR). Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on the Department’s programs, initiatives and projects related to our recovery from the 2017 storms. Whether it is a direct assistance program, infrastructure repair, hazard mitigation or coordination initiative, DPNR is involved in several aspects of the recovery effort for the territory.

DIRECT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

DPNR is responsible for the implementation of two direct assistance programs - The Hurricane Fisheries Disaster Relief Program (Hurricane Disaster Relief Assistance (vi.gov)) and the VI Historic Recovery Program (VISHPOS-FORMAL-SOLICITATION-FOR-STEP-1-APPLICATIONS-2021.pdf). Both programs aim to provide assistance to individuals for losses incurred as a result of the impacts of Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

FISHERIES RELIEF PROGRAM – The Hurricane Fisheries Disaster Relief Program was launched in June 2020 and of March 3, 2021 we have received 356 applications requesting $4,514,727 in funds. The Department has fully processed 274 applications liquidating $3,029,285 with an additional $404,437 (27 applications) in queue. There are currently 21 applications deemed incomplete, and 34 in review. DPNR is ending the application phase on March 31, 2021. We will then begin discussions with the fishing community on potential reprogramming of funds related to the recovery of the fishery.
VI HISTORIC RECOVERY PROGRAM – The VI Historic Recovery Program was launched in November 2020 and the eligibility phase of the program is open until March 31, 2021. Thus far DPNR has received 24 applications – 18 in STT and 6 in STX – with an estimated $3.7M requested. As this program is a reimbursement program, DPNR is working with potential nonprofit groups to execute the program consistent with the award guidelines. In addition to the direct assistance funding, DPNR is providing slightly more than $1M in funding for the restoration of Government House, and will also be using $1M towards the restoration of its future office space in Estate Sub Base.

INFRASTRUCTURE REPAIR PROGRAMS
PROJECT WORKSHEETS
Provided to you as supplemental documentation is a complete listing of all 43 DPNR Project Worksheets (PWs) in processing with FEMA. Of the 43 PWs, only three (3) PWs are unobligated – the Baa Library, STT Office Vehicle Damages and STX Libraries. Seven (7) of the facility repairs were reduced 100% for insurance proceeds, meaning that our local funds would have to cover the permanent repairs. Repairs to two of the facilities are completed, and we currently have three public solicitations for repairs to the Environmental Enforcement Offices in Anna’s Hope, St. Croix, as well as the exterior parking repairs for the Charles W. Turnbull Library. For the purposes of the discussion this afternoon, I will highlight the PWs defined as major actions (> $125,000 in repairs).

STT District
- Charles W. Turnbull Library (PW #1174): The Fixed Cost Offer with a federal share of $2.9M was accepted on December 31, 2020 and the project was obligated on January 19, 2021. The SOW involves the replacement of the roof, ceiling tiles and solar panels, as well as mold mitigation. We will be having a meeting on Tuesday March 9, 2021 with the Office of Disaster Recovery and the Jaredian Design Group regarding the preparation of bid documents to be reviewed by DPW’s Capital Improvement Projects branch and then submission to the Department of Property and Procurement (DPP) for public bid.

- The Enid M. Baa Library (PW #1239): This project is pending final FEMA review and has not yet been obligated. The Fixed Cost Offer will likely have a federal share of $568k, which will be used for repairs related to water intrusion and wind-driven damages. Although the PW has not yet been awarded, DPNR anticipates the contract for architectural and engineering (A&E) services for this facility to be issued within the next two weeks.

- Fort Christian Museum (PW #1036): An obligation with a federal share of $51,445 specifically for the A&E Services to determine the extent of final damages was made on July 1, 2020. The Department began soliciting for A&E services in December 2020 conducting walk-thrus with five A&E firms. Due to the changes in procurement laws passed by the 33rd Legislature, the A&E services go through the DPP public bid procedure and thus the scope of work is being transmitted to DPP for release.
STX District

- **Brugal Facility (PW #0759):** The Fixed Cost Offer with a federal share of $2.76M was accepted on December 17, 2020 and the project was obligated on January 19, 2021. The Department intends to repair the roof and secure the facility and is developing the scope for a “428” project to submit for an alternate use of the funds.

- **Fort Frederik (PW #1073):** The Fixed Cost Offer with a federal share of $6.2M was accepted on January 4, 2021 and the project was obligated on January 19, 2021. The funding will be used to do a complete renovation of the facility, similar to the renovation of Fort Christian four years ago. The SOW for A&E Services has been drafted and is in the process of being sent to DPP for public bid.

- **STX Public Libraries (PW #0765):** This project is pending final FEMA review and has not yet been obligated. The Fixed Cost Offer will likely have a federal share of $1.8M for the repairs to the Florence Williams and Athalie Petersen Libraries in STX. Although the PW has not yet been awarded, the SOW for the Petersen Library is nearly complete, and we will be securing professional services for the development of the SOW for the Florence Williams library using award funds.

STJ District

- **Sprauve Library (PW #0955):** This award was accepted as a “Standard Lane” project with a federal share of $226k on April 9, 2020 and the project was obligated on April 18, 2020. The funding will be used to complete repairs to minor roof damages, as well as several nonstructural repairs throughout the facility. The SOW has been completed and is being processed through to DPP for public bid.

- **STJ Office Building (PW #0436):** This project was accepted as a “Standard Lane” project with a federal share of $207k on November 20, 2020. The funding will be used to replace the roof structure in its entirety and to complete interior repairs needed as a result of water intrusion and wind-driven damages. The Department has completed walk-thrus with four A&E firms for the preparation of the designs for the roof, as well as the construction bid documents. The respondents will have until March 19, 2021 to submit their proposals to the department, and we anticipate completing the contracting requirements by mid-April.

HAZARD MITIGATION PROGRAMS

The Department is the recipient of four (4) different awards relating to our response to the 2017 Storms and our resilience to future events. These awards include the following: $4.2M Award from NOAA’s Marine Debris Program; $7.3M Award from FEMA Hazard Mitigation for Code Enforcement; $960k Award from FEMA Flood Mitigation for the updating of Flood Regulations; and $800k from FEMA Hazard Mitigation for the completion of stormwater management plans across the territory.

**NOAA Marine Debris Award ($4.2M)**

This award contains three tasks – 1. Removal of the derelict vessels in Krum Bay, St. Thomas, 2. Removal of derelict vessels across the territory not mitigated by the US Coast Guard as
part of their mission assignment in 2018, and 3. Promoting community clean-ups to remove non-vessel debris that remained following the storms of 2017.

Task 1. Krum Bay Removal – in 2019 the Department put this project out to bid twice, and both times the proposals came in over $7M, over three times the amount obligated for this task. DPNR is pursuing other sources of funding to fill in the funding gaps and complete this project.

Task 2. Derelict Vessel Removal – DPNR completed solicitations for both the STT/STJ and STX districts respectively and in November 2020 selected the contractors. The contract for the STT/STJ task was executed on March 1, 2021 and the Contractor will be responsible for removing approximately 30 derelict vessels between STT and STJ. Mobilization is set to being within two weeks. The contract for the STX task is not yet executed, but the Contractor will be responsible for removing 12 vessels in the nearshore waters. Due to the contractor’s current work schedule, they will not be able to mobilize for this project before June 1, 2021.

Task 3. Community Clean-up Events – DPNR is making available to citizens/citizen groups sub-awards up to $100k for the removal of non-vessel marine debris. In addition to typical household trash, this would include removal of appliances, construction debris, etc. that remain in our coastal areas. Thus far, DPNR has awarded six (6) awards totaling $114k across the three main islands. We are currently in discussions with the Department of Sports, Parks and Recreation on how we can support their “clean beaches” initiative.

**FEMA CODE ENFORCEMENT GRANT ($7.3M)**
This award was provided to the Department to respond to the rebuilding that would be taking place throughout the territory following the storms of 2017. We have hired 18 additional staff, which constitutes a mix of inspectors, plan reviewers and mid-level managers. The award also provided funding for eight (8) vehicles, as well as operating expenses for the implementation of the award. The original term of the award is four years, with a potential for three-year extension.

**FEMA FLOOD MITIGATION GRANT ($960k)**
This award was provided to the Department to update territorial laws and rules and regulations regarding flood hazard areas, bringing them more in line with the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) administered by FEMA. DPNR executed a contract for professional services for the revision to the territorial flood regulations in early 2020 and completed the revisions in January 2021. The revised regulations were signed into law by then Acting Governor Roach on February 17, 2021. DPNR has requested (still awaiting approval) of a two-year extension on this award in order to fund some additional policy changes, as well as implement some on-the-ground flood mitigation projects.

**TERRITORIAL WATERSHED PLANS ($800k)**
In 2019 DPNR submitted an application to FEMA’s Hazard Mitigation Program to develop watershed plans for eight major watersheds across the territory with the goal of reducing repetitive loss as a result of floods. DPNR was awarded $800k to implement this project and contracted with a consulting firm specializing in the development of watershed plans. The project is currently underway with the Contractor collecting geospatial information with the
department. At the end of this month, the Contractor will be hosting an inter-agency meeting to provide details on the project approach and request additional data that may not have been provided by the Department. The goal of this project is to complete the plans as soon as possible and provide the recommendations listed to the Department of Public Works (DPW) as the implement design of the different roadway systems as part of the recovery, installing the required infrastructure that will minimize susceptibility to floods.

COORDINATION INITIATIVES
As DPNR is tasked with the permitting of the various infrastructure projects taking place across the Territory, my staff is involved in a number of scheduled coordination meetings with several agencies to ensure DPNR concerns are properly addressed in applications, as well as for the timely processing of applications. We have developed an electronic review platform for the review of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) concurrence letters; we are involved in planning and construction meetings with the VI Housing Authority and the Juan F. Luis Hospital; we have coordinated a procedure with the VI Housing Finance Authority for the submission, review and payment of EnVision Tomorrow applications; and we are providing on-site consultation to agencies for VI State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), just to name a few. We are working closely with our sister agencies, as well as the Office of Disaster Recovery, who coordinates many of the meetings to ensure a streamlined process.

This concludes my update as to the status of DPNR Disaster Recovery related projects and initiatives. I would like to thank Deputy Commissioner Diane Capehart for her efforts with our project worksheets as we have all but three awarded from FEMA, as well as my other Senior Management Team members and staff who have placed an emphasis on disaster recovery projects. I would also like to thank the ODR, DPW and DPP teams for their assistance in navigating through the many processes so that we can complete our projects. Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony and I am here to answer any questions that you may have at this time.