Good afternoon, Senator Gittens, members of the Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture, other members of the 34th Legislature, the Virgin Islands Economic Development Authority ("USVIEDA" or "the Authority") team, and the viewing and listening audience. I am Wayne L. Biggs, Jr., Chief Executive Officer of the USVIEDA. With me today are Tracy Lynch Bhola, Esq., General Counsel; Kelly Thompson Webbe, Interim Chief Financial Officer; Margarita Greenidge-Benjamin, Managing Director, Economic Development; Nadine Marchena Kean, Managing Director, Enterprise Zone Commission; Monique T. Samuel, Interim Director of Lending; Shanell Petersen, Managing Director, Marketing and 2040 Vision; Wendy Wheeler, Human Resources Manager; Cusa Holloway, Incubator Program Manager; and Joy Penn, Senior Compliance Officer.

My team and I are happy to provide a status report on the accomplishments and activities of USVIEDA for Fiscal Years ("FY") 2020 and 2021 (October 1, 2019 through February 1, 2021), and are available to answer inquiries you or your colleagues may have.
USVIEDA Organizational Structure

The Authority is an umbrella entity created to assume, integrate, and unify the functions of its four (4) main pillars.

- The Virgin Islands Economic Development Commission (“EDC”) facilitates investment by administering and regulating tax incentives that encourage businesses to start, relocate or expand in the Territory.

- The Virgin Islands Enterprise Zone Commission (“EZC”) uses community development tools to revitalize once-vibrant towns and neighborhoods that are now considered distressed. Each year this division seeks to build a more diverse community to support sustainable economic growth and resiliency.

- The Economic Development Bank for the United States Virgin Islands (“EDB”) provides equity infusion to small businesses, as well as loan guarantees to local commercial banks to reduce risk to the banks. Also housed within the EDB is the Incubator Program (“Incubator”), which provides management
training and technical assistance to new companies and start-ups so they can
develop into full-fledged businesses.

• The Virgin Islands Economic Development Park Corporation ("EDPC"), a
public corporation that acquires and operates industrial parks in the
Territory, complements EDC activities by offering commercial rental space to
investors. This is a self-sustaining pillar of the USVIEDA, supported by rent
collections from tenants.

These four pillars are supported by USVIEDA’s administrative departments,
which include: administration and finance, legal, human resources, marketing and
the executive offices of the Chief Executive Officer and the Assistant Chief Executive
Officer/Chief Operating Officer.

The Authority is governed under one Executive Board ("Board") comprised
of seven (7) members to achieve maximum efficiency and reduce the cost of
operations, avoid duplication of services, and implement comprehensive programs
for the economic development of the Territory. Currently, the Board is composed
of six (6) members with one (1) vacant position.
At present, USVIEDA has a total of 39 team members, with 21 in the St. Thomas/St. John District and 18 in the St. Croix District. The organizational structure of the Authority currently has a leadership team of three (3) executive members and four (4) senior managers. Currently, as part of a strategic planning process, the Authority’s management team is reviewing the organizational chart to determine if revisions are necessary to achieve greater alignment with the organization’s operations and goals.

**USVIEDA’s COVID-19 Response**

The Authority’s credo is one of innovation, adaptability and efficiency to advance its very critical mandate to grow, develop and diversify the Territory’s economy, thereby improving the quality of place and the quality of life for residents. This was even more evident during FY 2020—and the momentum has not slowed in FY 2021. The COVID-19 pandemic created a global public health and economic crisis that severely impacted the Territory’s revenues. USVIEDA received a budget reduction of 15% or $799,236.45 in FY 2020. Additionally, USVIEDA only
received 50% or $500K of the $1M supplemental appropriation for marketing. Despite these challenges, USVIEDA continues to serve the local community and pursue new investment by administering all its programs while safeguarding the health and welfare of our team and clients.

The Authority was proactive in its stance against the serious health and safety risks posed by COVID-19. A voluntary telecommuting platform was implemented prior to the Governor’s State of Emergency Declaration, and more technology was incorporated into operations. Despite adjusting to the “new normal” of working remotely amidst the fiscal challenges faced by the Territory and this agency, USVIEDA continues to be fully operational with no service interruptions. Board meetings occur as scheduled with no cancelations during FY 2020 when the adjustment period for COVID-19 was at its most challenging. Team members remain accessible to the public. Client/stakeholder engagements continue. In fact, USVIEDA’s services to the business community have been enhanced by the team’s innovations, which include weekly webinars, increased local and client-specific outreach activities, and the dissemination of business surveys to assess the needs that have arisen because of COVID-19. As a result, the
Authority provided much needed assistance to the business community and accomplished a significant number of its planned objectives during FY 2020 and going into the first half of FY 2021. These include, but are not limited to, successfully launching Vision 2040, engaging in activities to foster economic diversification and attract new business investment, and continually supporting our small business community. I am excited to describe the following USVIEDA successes and activities, and how they will serve to build a more diverse, sustainable, and resilient economy.

**Vision 2040**

In his 2019 State of the Territory address, the Honorable Governor Albert Bryan Jr. designated USVIEDA to lead the comprehensive economic development initiative known as the U.S. Virgin Islands Vision 2040 (“Vision 2040”). The goal of Vision 2040 was an ambitious one that had not been previously undertaken by any other administration or single agency in our history—to formulate a long-term, multifaceted economic vision for the Territory that encapsulates the experiences,
concerns, needs, and recommendations of a wide range of stakeholders. Simply put, our target was to capture the voices of as many representative groups within and outside of the Territory—residents of all ages from high school students to senior citizens, Virgin Islanders who have moved away, our elected officials, representatives from the public, private, and non-profit sectors, and members of the business community. To accomplish this monumental task, USVIEDA secured grant funding totaling $1.595M from the United States Economic Development Administration and the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority ("VIHFA")/Community Development Block Grant for Disaster Recovery ("CDBG-DR").

Once grant funding was received, Vision 2040’s progress was fast-tracked. Camoin Associates, Inc. was selected as the Vision 2040 Consultant following a competitive bid selection process. Weekly consultant meetings, a fine-tuned outreach strategy, and a well mapped-out and tight timeline led us to this point—near completion of the first phase of Vision 2040, a transformative 20-year economic development plan and a target competitive industry analysis. This is a
culmination of a marketing campaign and data collection activities that included the following:

- A public kick-off presentation;
- Two (2) video commercials;
- One hundred eighty (180) promotional radio spots;
- Six (6) radio interviews;
- Electronic billboard and print advertising;
- Influencer promotion;
- A social media page and website launch to keep the community connected to the Vision 2040 process;
- Vision 2040 subscriber list email blasts;
- Five (5) published news articles;
- A Territory-wide public forum;
- Four (4) taskforce meetings that consisted of representatives from the public, private and non-profit sectors;
- Three (3) focus group sessions;
- Five (5) industry working group meetings in the STEAM sectors, which are Services, Technology, Energy, Agriculture and Manufacturing;

- Over forty (40) stakeholder interviews;

- Three (3) island-specific town halls;

- Three (3) island-specific virtual open houses;

- A live open house event that was aired on television and radio, as well as livestreamed on Zoom and Facebook;

- Two (2) town halls for Virgin Islanders in the diaspora;

- A Virgin Islands Association, Inc. (“VIADC”) meeting; and

- The distribution of three (3) targeted surveys:
  - A community survey for current Virgin Islands’ residents. The surveys were specific to St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John;
  - A diaspora survey for Virgin Islanders who live abroad; and
  - A survey of USVI businesses.

For statistical purposes, survey participation was robust.
The community survey garnered over 1,900 total responses from residents, with 1,117 from St. Croix, 201 from St. John, and 601 from St. Thomas.

The diaspora survey collected over 700 responses. Fifty-one percent (51%) of these respondents indicated that they had left the Territory from St. Croix, 44% indicated they had left from St. Thomas, and 5% indicated they had left from St. John.

The business survey received over 450 responses with 37% from St. Croix, 40% from St. Thomas, and 12% from St. John.

Each survey gathered information about what is perceived as the Territory’s strengths, weaknesses and opportunities. Including the perspectives of each of these groups—current residents, those who have moved away, and business owners—is vital to developing a comprehensive plan that plots a course to a more prosperous future. As the lead economic development agency in the Territory, we recognize that this plan is indeed key to shaping an economic environment that nurtures businesses and supports a community where people would want to live and work.
I am pleased to announce that the first draft of the plan is currently under review, is expected to be finalized by the end of February, and thereafter released to the public. Research and analysis completed for the plan include:

- An economic base assessment;
- An economic development incentives inventory and assessment;
- An economic SWOT analysis;
- An innovation and entrepreneurial assessment;
- A business relocation analysis;
- Targeted industry identification; and
- Twenty-year goal targets.

In addition to the economic development plan, Vision 2040 has three (3) other phases, which include a global marketing campaign, an equity capital formation plan, and an energy sector analysis. Work will commence on these areas shortly, and it is anticipated that they will be completed this fiscal year.

**Economic Diversification**
The financial challenges that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic prove that economic diversification is the key to resiliency. One of Vision 2040’s goals is to inform the community about the sectors that have been selected by residents as areas for economic growth. As this long-term strategic planning process progresses and residents determine the future they envision for the Territory, USVIEDA continues to seek opportunities for diversification. I will now describe some of the activities that the Authority is actively engaged in to diversify the economy.

The USVI is surrounded by the ocean, an abundant natural resource that can play a major role in its economy. Opportunities for economic development within this vein include sustainable food sources through commercial fisheries, enhancing the marine tourism economy with floating retail establishments and restaurants/bars, ocean energy production, aquaculture, and the marine charter industry. Act 8301 designated the Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources (“DPNR”), with cooperation and assistance from the Office of Management and Budget’s Bureau of Economic Research (“BER”) and USVIEDA, to create a plan for a sustainable blue economy in the Territory. USVIEDA along with
representatives from DPNR, DER and the Office of the Governor met with Bluetide PR, which is working on a strategic implementation plan, funded by the US EDA, on ocean resources in the USVI/Puerto Rico region.

While the development of the Blue Economy Plan continues, the Territory is already poised to seize opportunities arising in our region. USVIEDA has participated on a multiagency Marine Workforce Group to attract the marine vessels that can no longer enter the British Virgin Islands due to that port’s COVID-19 closure to non-BVI vessels. USVIEDA also participated in the yacht show hosted by the Virgin Islands Professional Charter Association and was featured on a website to attract charters to the Territory.

Further diversification will abound with the designation of the Virgin Islands South Shore Trade Zone on St. Croix through Act 8376. This fiscal year, USVIEDA will begin drafting rules and regulations for this new incentive program, which stands to usher in increased manufacturing, transshipment, and industrial development opportunities in the Territory, thereby fueling job creation and expanding entrepreneurship.
In regard to manufacturing, USVIEDA has already been in regular communication with several entities that have expressed interest in locating operations to the Territory. In fact, two (2) such entities in negotiations with the Authority to lease manufacturing space at its William D. Roebuck Industrial Park are:

- A manufacturer of SARS-CoV-2 Rapid Antigen (Oral) Tests; and
- A hemp product manufacturer.

A third area that can be a boon to the economy is in food security. In FY 2020, EZC completed the Agro-Processing Feasibility Study utilizing a Department of Interior (“DOI”) Technical Assistance Program (“TAP”) grant. With the consent of DOI, cost savings from the grant were repurposed to host the first annual business conference for farmers and fishers in both the St. Croix District and the St. Thomas/St. John District, in collaboration with the Virgin Islands Departments of Agriculture and Planning and Natural Resources. One hundred eighty (180) farmers and fishers across the Territory spoke with government officials and industry experts about best practices and the current state of farming and fishing in the region and voted on the crops that should be processed in the food
processing plant. The crops that received the highest votes were banana, lemongrass, coconut and avocado.

Subsequently, Act 8385 appropriated $2M from the St. Croix Capital Improvement Fund to the Enterprise Zone Commission to construct a state-of-the-art, certified, clean kitchen facility, with storage and classroom spaces for teaching and capacity building for Virgin Islands food entrepreneurs. The clean kitchen facility will also be used as a production ground for value-added products that can be exported outside of the Territory, thus creating a sustainable export industry that may be ripe for global expansion. The first step to implementing this initiative is to locate a space. Team members have visited two (2) sites in Frederiksted. One site is under consideration and we are awaiting the estimate on repairs and renovations. Additionally, a grant request will also be submitted for this particular project.

Business Attraction and Investment
The COVID-19 pandemic did not stop USVIEDA’s efforts to attract new investment to our shores. As the rest of the world adapted to a new way of doing business, the Authority also changed the way it markets the Territory as a viable option for potential investors. Through a combination of advertising and sponsorships, social media, participation in virtual events, and the facilitation of COVID-friendly investor site visits, USVIEDA accomplished the following:

- In FY 2020, the Executive Office and the Marketing Department presented to over 900 family offices at three (3) major family office and high net worth conferences in New York City, Dallas, and Miami, garnering 174 investor leads.

- This past September, USVIEDA and the Department of Tourism participated in the 24th Annual International African American Hotel Ownership & Investment Summit & Trade Show, hosted by the National Association of Black Hotel Owners, Operators and Developers (“NABHOOD”), which was held virtually. There were approximately 300 conference attendees and USVIEDA staff met one-on-one with three (3) hoteliers during the week-long event.
During FY 2020, the Marketing team hosted a total of 16 site visits of potential investors in the hospitality, high value manufacturing and financial services sectors. So far this fiscal year, one (1) investor site visit has occurred and there may be five (5) potential site visits in the second quarter of FY 2021 in the areas of designated services, manufacturing, healthcare facilities, housing development, and hospitality.

In regard to USVIEDA’s Lead Generation Program, there are currently 35 Hot Projects in our database. Hot Projects are defined as eligible entities for the VIEDC tax incentive program that are currently in an active dialogue with the USVIEDA team. Their potential investment is known and they have expressed interest in relocating to the Territory in the next 12 months. These Hot Projects fall within the following sectors: marina management, energy, manufacturing, hospitality and hotel/resort development, designated services, real estate development, agritech, and technology/security.

Throughout FY 2021, USVIEDA will continue to ramp up its marketing efforts and adjust as necessary to COVID-19 protocols in order to maximize on both virtual
and live events to increase business attraction. At this time, however, I can report the results of past marketing efforts.

In FY 2020, the VIEDC tax incentive program received 11 applications for benefits, which represent a potential future economic impact of a minimum of 298 jobs created or retained, over $17M in annual wages, approximately $32.6M in capital investment and, over a five-year period, approximately $33.4M in tax revenue for the Territory. Of the total number of applications received, four (4) were new applicants, which by themselves represent the potential of a minimum of 49 jobs, over $1.9M in annual wages, approximately $27.5M in investment and, over a five-year period, $5M in taxes. Also during FY 2020, 14 Certificates of Tax Incentives were executed.

In the first quarter of FY 2021, six (6) applications were received for the VIEDC tax incentive program, with two (2) of them being new complete applications. Based upon projections of these two (2) new applicants, the Territory stands to realize potential future economic impact of a minimum of 11 jobs to be created/retained, $680K to be paid in wages and $200K to be made in capital investment. Projected total taxes over a five-year period is approximately $2.1M.
Also within this quarter, two (2) tax incentive certificates were executed. Based upon the commitments made by the Beneficiaries of these two (2) executed certificates, the Territory will realize new and continued employment at a minimum of 242 full-time employees, approximately $58.2M in capital investment, and $135K in charitable contributions annually. It is also estimated that the Territory will potentially generate direct taxes over a five-year period of approximately $1.3M should the business operations materialize as projected. I can also report that at present the total number of VIEDC Beneficiaries is at 69.

In addition to the VIEDC applications, USVIEDA has also received one (1) application for the Sustainable Tourism through Arts-based Revenue Stream Program (“STARS”) and one (1) application for the Hotel Development Program (“HDA”) this fiscal year. It should be noted that USVIEDA’s Legal Department, Executive Office, and EDC staff, drafted the rules and regulations for HDA and Tax Increment Financing (“TIF”). These documents were circulated for public comment, approved by the USVIEDA Governing Board and transmitted to the Governor.

I am also pleased to report that the application process for the Authority’s tax incentive programs has been made more convenient for potential investors.
with the launch of the VIEDC online application in FY 2020. The online system allows EDC staff and applicants to track the status of a prospective business investor’s application and submit supporting documents electronically. Investors can also save and complete their application over time on the system. EDC application fees can also be paid online.

**Small Business Support and Community Engagement**

Included within USVIEDA’s mandate is to support our Territory’s small businesses, which are the backbone of the economy. With the onset of the COVID-19 impact in the middle of FY 2020, it became even more apparent how vitally important USVIEDA’s support is to the small business community. Therefore, the Authority sought new ways to support small businesses.

One of USVIEDA’s first responses to COVID-19 was when the Incubator Program conducted two (2) surveys to assess the ongoing impact of the pandemic on the local small business community. The first survey started on March 24, 2020 and ended on April 5, 2020, and garnered participation from 342 small business
owners with 185 based in St. Thomas, 106 based in St. Croix and 51 based in St. John. The second survey, which started on June 11, 2020 and ended on July 3, 2020, collected responses from 274 small business owners with 128 based in St. Thomas, 104 based in St. Croix, and 42 based in St. John. Participants were further categorized in the following business industry groups: Accommodations and Food Service; Retail; Arts/Entertainment/Recreation; and Professional and Technical Services. Survey results indicated that almost all respondents were impacted by COVID-19. The areas of most concern for business owners were the financial impact on operations and liquidity; a decrease in consumer spending; a global recession; and a reduction in workforce.

As demonstrated by the survey responses, financing assistance is critical to the success of a small business. In FY 2020, the Economic Development Bank approved seven (7) new loans totaling $1.3M, which represented the potential of creating 27 new jobs and retaining 10. In comparison, the amount of approved loans so far—in just one quarter of this fiscal—has already outdistanced FY 2020’s numbers. During the first quarter of FY 2021, EDB has approved eight (8) new loans totaling almost $1.5M, which can potentially create 19 new jobs and retain 53.
Moreover, in the second quarter of FY 2021, EDB has 15 pending loans under review in the pipeline totaling over $1.6M.

USVIEDA also successfully reactivated EDB’s United States Small Business Administration (“SBA”) preferred lender status, which enables EDB to offer the full range of SBA loan products, including the Paycheck Protection Program (“PPP”). USVIEDA collaborated with SBDC and SBA to actively promote PPP to small businesses as early as March 2020. It should be noted that EDB continued to facilitate PPP loans after most of the other financial institutions in the Territory had ended their participation, which allowed our small businesses extra time to access this much needed capital. As a result, EDB facilitated 69 PPP loans throughout the Territory valued at $545,810 to qualified small businesses before SBA’s deadline of August 8, 2020. A breakdown of loans made with the total value by island are as follows:

- St. Croix: 30 loans - $251,846
- St. John: 8 loans - $51,240
- St. Thomas: 31 loans - $242,724
The EDB continues to receive inquiries from the business community regarding requests for PPP loans or other COVID-19 related financial relief programs. USVIEDA looks forward to working with local and federal partners, including this body, to provide local businesses with access to resources for their continued viability.

In addition to financing, small businesses need other critical resources—and they need to know where to find them. To meet this demand, the Marketing Department launched weekly virtual small business resource webinars in conjunction with other USVIEDA departments and divisions, local and federal sister government agencies, non-profit organizations, and private partners, to inform the community about COVID-19 small business assistance, financing options, and best practices that reach an average of 100 participants weekly. Some of the topics covered in the webinars include:

- USVIEDA Resources for Businesses during COVID-19 and Beyond;
- Small Business Administration ("SBA") resources, such as the Paycheck Protection Program ("PPP") and the Economic Injury Disaster Loan ("EIDL");
- Services Offered by the Export/Import Bank of the United States ("EXIM")
On October 19, 2020, USVIEDA in partnership with the VI Small Business Development Center ("VISBDC"), University of the Virgin Islands’ Center for Excellence in Leadership and Learning ("UVI–CELL"), and the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs ("DLCA") launched StartUp Space, an app that hosts territory-wide small business resources in one convenient location. A series of week-long events were executed to introduce the platform to the Territory’s small businesses and startups. During that week, there were over 200 virtual attendees and one-on-ones with small business owners and representatives from EDB, DLCA, and SBDC. USVIEDA will manage the site and work with private and public partners to update information. The app will eventually include a portal for realtor and site selection information to assist businesses relocating to the Territory. Networking and mentorship opportunities will also be available in the future. USVIEDA has seen
an approximate increase of 28% percent in traffic to its website and social media pages.

Starting this month, USVIEDA will offer free online courses and entrepreneurship training to the public. A four-month e-marketing course in collaboration with the International Economic Development Council ("IEDC") begins this evening at 5:30 p.m. The Incubator Program, in partnership with SFT Consultants, will offer two (2) entrepreneurship training sessions. The first, a USVI Apparel Forum, will take place on February 10, 2021, and the second, a Cost Pricing Forum, will take place on February 24, 2021. Both entrepreneurship training sessions begin at 5:00 p.m. With the continuation of the weekly webinars, free trainings and course offerings, and the launch of StartUp Space, there is the potential for increased interest for investment in the Territory, greater and easier access to much needed resources for local small businesses, and an enhanced campaign to educate the community about USVIEDA’s programs and services.

Growth is also key to a business’ survival. Through its programs and services, the Authority has provided several avenues for businesses to either launch or take their operations to the next level. In FY 2020, our Marketing Department and the
Incubator Program facilitated the Caribbean Innovation Challenge, a collaborative initiative with Mercy Corps/MicroMentor and Bacardi Limited. All participants were granted access to free mentoring to assist their businesses. Twenty-five (25) local businesses received $68K in grants.

In December, the Enterprise Zone Commission in partnership with the Virgin Islands Council on the Arts launched the first-ever “Made in the USVI” pop-up shop in St. Croix and, for a third consecutive year, reopened the St. Thomas location. Each store opened for nine days and featured products from 42 local small manufacturers who earned over $45K in total sales, with over $15,800 earned in St. Croix and over $30K earned in St. Thomas. By contrast, last year’s sales in the sole location on St. Thomas over a much longer period of five weeks was $10K. This is a significant increase of over four and a half times the total revenues earned, and in St. Thomas alone over three times more than what was earned last year. This clearly demonstrates a rising demand, and pop-up shop openings are scheduled in March on St. Croix, in April on St. Thomas and, for the first time, in July on St. John.

The “Made in the USVI” Pop-Up Shops provide a very timely and critical opportunity since most of these companies did not have the regular outlet to sell
their products last year due to COVID-19. These micro-companies have amongst them an artisan who had just started their own business six (6) months before, another who had lost their job due to the pandemic and turned to a hobby as a means of survival, and several seasoned entrepreneurs who had to reinvent and innovate to bring a much needed revenue stream.

The pop-up shops demonstrated how challenging it can be for supply to meet demand. Therefore, EZC will continue to work with these vendors through its Accelerator Program so they can increase and improve production capacity and expand their client base. Workshops for these clients have already begun. We have had working sessions with the Export/Import Bank of the United States ("EXIM") and the State Trade Expansion Program ("STEP").

I am happy to announce that at this very moment the Made in the USVI website is being launched! Made possible through grant funding from STEP, the EZC has expanded upon the Made in the USVI Pop-Up Shops to offer a website featuring our local small manufacturers, which will provide them an avenue to export their goods throughout the world. The website will initially feature nine (9) companies with products in the areas of art, jewelry and apparel, spa, home and
I encourage the members of this body and the listening and viewing audience to support our local manufacturers by visiting the website at www.madeintheusvi.com.

Finally and equally as critical to supporting the small business community as all the other factors previously discussed is the preparation and nurturing of the next generation of entrepreneurs. USVIEDA has made this a special focus through its EntrepreNow Program, which was created in 2016 through a partnership between EZC, the Public Defender’s Office, and the non-profit organization Youth Arise. This six-week summer program aims to address issues of delinquency affecting young men between the ages of 15-19 in the Territory and foster a spirit of entrepreneurship. However, the COVID-19 pandemic caused us to change the length and delivery of the program in August of 2020. EntrepreNow was held virtually for one week owed in large part to strong collaboration with Omnisystems, a longtime supporter of the program. To be more impactful, this year’s cohort consisted of EntrepreNow graduates to reinforce the lessons that were taught to them in prior years and monitor their academic and professional progress. Though formal instruction has ended, the participants recently filmed a commercial as part
of a final project that will provide them with practical business experience and compensation. This project incorporated yet another Virgin Islander, John Wheatley, the filmmaker/instructor, and exposed them to everything from pre-production to editing. I am also excited to share that one of last year’s program highlights was realized mainly through the efforts of ViVid Streaming President and EntreprenNow mentor Rashidi Clenance, who arranged for the participants to virtually meet a special guest speaker, Tim Duncan, on the last day of instruction. On behalf of the USVIEDA/EZC team and the Gentlemen of EntreprenNow, I would like to extend a big THANK YOU to the entire Omnisystems team, as well as Mr. Wheatley, Mr. Clenance and Mr. Duncan.

At this time I would like to pause for a brief video presentation of the past year’s highlights.

Fiscal Year 2021 Planned Activities

The Authority recognizes that to achieve results it must continue to be innovative, adaptable and efficient, particularly at this challenging time in history
when the global economy and societal norms are undergoing rapid change. It is imperative that a deliberate strategy be executed to maximize upon a leaner budget, leverage new and existing partnerships and programs, and utilize the full talents of USVIEDA’s dynamic team. Hence, USVIEDA will undertake the following initiatives this fiscal year to help build a more resilient and sustainable economy.

1. Employ an innovative marketing strategy to attract new investment to our shores and inject revenues into the economy by capitalizing on the EDC tax incentive program, as well as other economic development tools such as TIF, HDA, STARS, the Qualified Opportunity Zone ("QOZ") Program, and the South Shore Trade Zone. Targeted industries will include ultra-high net worth companies and individuals, pharmaceuticals, high-value manufacturing, hotels/resorts, and financial services.

2. Review EDC statutes for potential reform so that this tax incentive program is more aligned with today’s business environment. Some recommendations have previously been shared with the 33rd Legislature and the Authority looks forward to working with this body regarding those and others in the future.
3. Continue bringing all EDC Beneficiaries to three-year compliance review cycles.

4. Provide the small business community with access to financial and technical resources they will need to overcome the COVID-19 challenges, support entrepreneurship, and encourage innovation.

5. Facilitate MBA-style case studies of USVIEDA small business clients for UVI’s Entrepreneurship program with SFT Consultants (“SFT”). The selected clients will represent the St. Croix district and the St. Thomas/St. John district. SFT will perform a financial analysis of each business and assess how it can expand or improve profitability. Depending upon enrollment, case studies will begin in the Fall 2021 semester.

6. Increase access to capital for small businesses by partnering with local financial institutions to reinvigorate the State Small Business Credit Initiative (“SSBCI”) Loan Guarantee program and propose legislation to consolidate local revolving loan funds.

7. Apply for funding through the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Business Development Grant program for a food incubator feasibility study.
8. Identify locations for processing plants in both Frederiksted and the Savanne-Downstreet Enterprise Zones, and provide technical assistance to farmers through the agronomist.

9. Complete an Art Feasibility Study. The community plans for the towns of Christiansted and the Garden Street-Upstreet Neighborhoods both indicated an arts-related theme as one of their anchors. The study will examine specific projects in these communities to determine if the ideas are feasible, self-sustaining and have strong potential to revitalize the zones. Thereafter, grant funding will be pursued to assist in executing the recommended actions.

10. Create a multiple ownership–abandoned property solution in fulfillment of the DOI-TAP grant.

11. Continue discussions with EXIM Bank regarding EDB access to its Working Capital Loan Guarantee and Trade Credit Insurance Programs.

12. Continue a targeted local public relations campaign that will build community awareness about USVIEDA’s programs and services through webinars, advertisements, podcasts, and informational sessions.
13. Continue repairs and infrastructural improvements at all EDPC properties once access to FEMA funding is obtained.

14. Increase overall EDPC tenant occupancy to 100%.

15. Complete all phases of the Vision 2040 master plan with a view toward implementation.

16. Create a new strategic plan for the Authority that addresses challenges and opportunities in changing global economies.

USVIEDA is cognizant that it must fulfill a very critical mandate at a time when the Territory’s revenues have been severely impacted by the COVID-19 crisis and the world must adjust to the “new normal”. The Authority will continue to be innovative and collaborative as we aggressively seek to expand and support this economy. There will be a heavier reliance on technology, more selectivity in planned or sponsored events, and ongoing evaluation to determine if strategic realignment is needed. Prudence will continue to be exercised as the Authority makes the most of its limited resources. Indeed the Authority has done an excellent job of responsibly managing the government’s financial resources, as evidenced by
earning the distinction of an eleventh consecutive unqualified audit opinion after
the completion of its FY 2019 independent financial audit.

The Virgin Islands Economic Development Authority could not boast all of these
successes without the contributions of a talented, committed, and resourceful
team of individuals. I would like to thank the USVIEDA Governing Board for their
leadership, and the entire USVIEDA team for their hard work and dedication.
USVIEDA also appreciates the support of this august body and the Honorable
Governor Albert Bryan Jr. and his administration. I look forward to continued
collaboration in the future.

Thank you. My team and I await your questions.