

# St. Thomas U.S. Virgin Islands

A ULI Advisory Services Panel Report

August 25–30, 2019



**ULI** Urban Land  
Institute  
Advisory Services



# St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands

## Advancing an Equitable, Resilient Territory

A ULI Advisory Services Panel Report

August 25–30, 2019



Urban Land Institute  
2001 L Street, NW  
Suite 200  
Washington, DC 20036-4948  
[uli.org](http://uli.org)

# About the Urban Land Institute

**THE URBAN LAND INSTITUTE** is a global, member-driven organization comprising more than 45,000 real estate and urban development professionals dedicated to advancing the Institute's mission of providing leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide.

ULI's interdisciplinary membership represents all aspects of the industry, including developers, property owners, investors, architects, urban planners, public officials, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, and academics. Established in 1936, the Institute has a presence in the Americas, Europe, and Asia Pacific region, with members in 80 countries.

ULI's extraordinary impact on land use decision-making is based on its members' sharing expertise on a variety of factors affecting the built environment, including urbanization, demographic and population changes, new economic drivers, technology advancements, and environmental concerns.

Peer-to-peer learning is achieved through the knowledge shared by members at thousands of convenings each year that reinforce ULI's position as a global authority on land use and real estate. In 2018 alone, more than 2,200 events were held in about 330 cities around the world.

Drawing on the work of its members, the Institute recognizes and shares best practices in urban design and development for the benefit of communities around the globe.

More information is available at [uli.org](http://uli.org). Follow ULI on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram.

**COVER PHOTO:** Laura Magruder/ULI

© 2019 by the Urban Land Institute

2001 L Street, NW | Suite 200 | Washington, DC 20036-4948

All rights reserved. Reproduction or use of the whole or any part of the contents of this publication without written permission of the copyright holder is prohibited.

# About ULI Advisory Services

**THE GOAL OF THE ULI ADVISORY SERVICES** program is to bring the finest expertise in the real estate field to bear on complex land use planning and development projects, programs, and policies.

Since 1947, this program has assembled well over 700 ULI-member teams to help sponsors find creative, practical solutions for issues such as downtown redevelopment, land management strategies, evaluation of development potential, growth management, community revitalization, brownfield redevelopment, military base reuse, provision of low-cost and affordable housing, and asset management strategies, among other matters. A wide variety of public, private, and nonprofit organizations have contracted for ULI's advisory services.

Each panel team is composed of highly qualified professionals who volunteer their time to ULI. They are chosen for their knowledge of the panel topic and are screened to ensure their objectivity. ULI's interdisciplinary panel teams provide a holistic look at development problems. A respected ULI member who has previous panel experience chairs each panel.

The agenda for a five-day panel assignment is intensive. It includes an in-depth briefing day composed of a tour of the site and meetings with sponsor representatives, a day of hour-long interviews of typically 50 to 100 key community representatives, and two days of formulating recommendations. Long nights of discussion precede the panel's conclusions. On the final day on site, the panel makes an oral presentation of its findings and conclusions to the sponsor. A written report is prepared and published.

Because the sponsoring entities are responsible for significant preparation before the panel's visit, including sending extensive briefing materials to each member and arranging for the panel to meet with key local community members and stakeholders in the project under consideration, participants in ULI's five-day panel assignments are able to make accurate assessments of a sponsor's issues and to provide recommendations in a compressed amount of time.

A major strength of the program is ULI's unique ability to draw on the knowledge and expertise of its members, including land developers and owners, public officials, academics,

representatives of financial institutions, and others. In fulfillment of the mission of the Urban Land Institute, this Advisory Services panel report is intended to provide objective advice that will promote the responsible use of land to enhance the environment.

## ULI Program Staff

### **Paul Bernard**

Executive Vice President, Advisory Services

### **Thomas W. Eitler**

Senior Vice President, Advisory Services

### **Deborah Kerson Bilek**

Vice President, Advisory Services

### **Paul Angelone**

Director, Advisory Services

### **Lauren Callaghan**

Director, Advisory Services

### **Jacqueline Canales**

Director, Advisory Services

### **Georgia Gempler**

Senior Associate, Advisory Services

### **James A. Mulligan**

Senior Editor

### **Laura Glassman, Publications Professionals LLC**

Manuscript Editor

### **Brandon Weil**

Art Director

### **Deanna Pineda, Muse Advertising Design**

Graphic Designer

### **Craig Chapman**

Senior Director, Publishing Operations



# Acknowledgments

On behalf of the Urban Land Institute, the panel would like to thank the sponsor organization Virgin Islands Housing Authority as well as partner agencies including the Housing Finance Authority, the Economic Development Authority, and the Governor's Office of Albert Bryan Jr. for their support of this effort.

Special appreciation goes to the Housing Authority staff, in particular Robert Graham, chief executive officer; Lydia Pelle, chief operating officer; Glenice Paris, executive administrative assistant; and Stacy Vincent, president, Community Development Consultants, for their preparation, support, and coordination leading up to and during the panel.

In addition, the panel would like to thank the more than 100 residents, business and community leaders, and representatives from across St. Thomas who shared their perspectives, experiences, and insights with the panel over the week.

# Contents

2

ULI Panel and  
Project Staff

3

Executive Summary

8

Background and the  
Panel's Assignment

19

Resilience and Recovery

24

Equitable Economic  
Development

32

Housing

39

Built Environment, Placemaking,  
and Mobility

51

Governance

55

Conclusion

57

Appendix: Table of  
Recommendations

61

About the Panel



# ULI Panel and Project Staff

## Panel Chair

### **Adam Weers**

Principal  
Trammell Crow Company  
Washington, D.C.

## Panel Members

### **Neil Albert**

President and Executive Director  
DowntownDC BID  
Washington, D.C.

### **Dan Anderton**

Senior Planner/Landscape Architect  
Dewberry  
Germantown, Maryland

### **Allison Anolik**

Senior Transportation Planner  
AECOM  
Raleigh, North Carolina

### **R. David Gibbs**

Renewable Energy Consultant  
Brooklyn, New York

### **Marion Mollegen McFadden**

Senior Vice President, Public Policy  
Senior Adviser, Resilience  
Enterprise Community Partners  
Washington, D.C.

### **Tyrone Rachal**

President  
Red Rock Global Capital Partners  
Atlanta, Georgia

## ULI Project Staff

### **Paul Bernard**

Executive Vice President, Advisory Services

### **Jacqueline Canales**

Director, Advisory Services

### **Grace Hill**

Manager, Meetings and Events, Business Operations

### **Georgia Gempler**

Senior Associate, Advisory Services

### **Laura Magruder**

Contracted Photographer



## Executive Summary

### ULI WAS ASKED TO CONSIDER AND PROVIDE STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE FOLLOWING:

- Helping new communities become more resilient and reduce consumption of natural resources;
- Creating an equitable economic development vision for the next five, 10, and 15 years;
- Integrating the existing affordable housing stock into the surrounding neighborhood; and
- Creating a cultural theme and design principles to tie the area together and brand it as a unique location.

The panel's work builds upon the work of an earlier ULI Advisory Services panel conducted in 2018 in St. Croix, which provided recommendations relating to building the island's economic development, creating affordable housing, and improving transportation links and resiliency strategies. The islands' environments and cultural makeup and needs are similar but separate due to geographic separation. The panel's recommendations are a combination of specific plans and conceptual design suggestions for areas within its study area along with a suite of recommendations that broadly fall within the following five categories:

1. Recovery and resilience;
2. Economic development;

3. Housing;
4. Built environment, placemaking, and mobility; and
5. Governance.

### Addressing Recovery and Resilience

**Approach:** Harness Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funding to jump-start community resilience. Use the opportunity to make key shifts in the structuring and delivery of power in St. Thomas.

Recognizing resilience as a key economic infrastructure, the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) has demonstrated a longstanding



LAURA MAGRUDER/ULI

Virgin Islands Housing Authority employees clear debris at the Paul M. Pearson Gardens housing site after Hurricane Dorian.

commitment to sustainability and climate resilience. Any effort to rebuild should be founded in building to higher standards and not just re-creating the previous framework for resources that proved insufficient when stressed by extreme weather events.

The high cost of fuel in the USVI has hampered its economic growth, quality of life, and overall resilience. Energy is one of the major factors affecting economic development, health, education, transportation, quality of life, and the environment. People understand the importance of having access to affordable, reliable energy, but the fuel source is also a critical priority.

### Key Recommendations:

- **Harness CDBG-DR funding to jump-start community resilience** and invest in energy alternatives including Solarize St. Thomas and focusing rebuilding efforts around integrated resilience measures to improve facilities.
- **Strengthen commitments to USVI’s enactment of the Climate Change Adaptation Policy.** As a result of this collaboration between the conservation and fisheries communities and the Departments of Planning and Natural Resources and Labor, the Virgin Islands Climate Change Adaption Policy addresses multiple sectors, including energy, agriculture, health, and critical infrastructure.
- **Recognize resilience as a key economic infrastructure.** Expand existing commitments to climate resilience by strengthening commitments to energy alternatives and supporting resiliency in new developments, particularly resilient initiatives backed with publicly supported partnerships.
- **Explore decoupling and privatization of portions of the utility** through the sale of the generation or distribution infrastructure to a utility company with the technical

and financial means to transform the electricity system throughout the territory. In conjunction with this effort, **establish a public utility commission to lead regulation of utilities** on behalf of USVI citizens.

## Addressing Economic Development

**Approach:** Focus on economic development investments at all scales in an effort to achieve greater diversification within the economy. The panel recommends investment in the downtown district paired with enhancements to tourism and small business development.

Tourism is the USVI’s largest employer, making the territory especially vulnerable to tourism-specific fluctuations. It is imperative that St. Thomas develop an equitable economic development plan that recognizes the value of human capital and the creation and growth of local small business activity.

St. Thomas has a generational opportunity to catalyze and leverage the responsible growth and diversification of its economy through an intentional, transformative economic development planning process involved with the development of the USVI 2040 Economic Development Plan.

From analysis of the study area, the panel offers the following recommendations that it believes would be of value to the study area and to the USVI 2040 Economic Development Plan initiative in addressing key economic challenges throughout the territory.

### Key Recommendations:

- **Bolster Charlotte Amalie.** Support Charlotte Amalie as an economic catalyst by supporting and formally establishing a central business improvement district.
- **Foster pathways to small business entrepreneurship.** Take a small business approach as key in supporting equitable economic development that will most benefit residents.
- **Enhance tourism offerings.** Enrich the visitor experience and create opportunities for overnight stays benefitting the local economy.
- **Explore market-rate housing.** Create pathways for sustaining area activity and diversifying the housing market.
- **Be intentional about workforce training and placement.** Develop local hiring and development requirements to meet the territory’s skill set needs.

- **Create opportunities for public housing residents and other low-income residents.** Expand small business and create pipelines to rehabilitation and construction work with the arrival of CDBG-DR funds.
- **Use creative financing tools and partnerships.** Support implementation of a more equitable approach to economic development through creative partnerships.

## Addressing Housing

**Approach:** Use CDBG-DR funding as a catalyst for revitalization of public housing and creation of greater cohesion with the surrounding community.

Because of decades of declining federal subsidies, the Virgin Islands Housing Authority (VIHA) has not had sufficient resources to modernize the bulk of its properties. Nor has it received the necessary funds to protect and repair its properties from natural hazards and climate change. The increasing frequency and intensity of natural disasters make one thing clear: the future will bring more storms and more damage to the island, so rebuilding with an eye toward the future is vital.

As might be expected, many residents feel the burden of the cumulative impact of successive natural disasters and recurring structural challenges that manifests in many ways that are analogous to symptoms of trauma. Rebuilding offers the chance to address not only problems caused by the storms, but also some of the challenges that began beforehand and were exacerbated by natural disasters.

Because housing is one of the most fundamental human needs, the failure of the federal government to provide modernization and recovery funds in a timely manner negatively affects residents' physical and mental health. Throughout the study, the panel was impressed with the resilient spirit and dynamic character that came through as panel members met with local stakeholders, including residents of VIHA properties, homeowners, business owners, and government leaders.

With the panel's focus on key VIHA assets, it found the territory in a key position to revitalize public housing with an eye toward modernization, integration with the surrounding community, and strengthening social networks to assist residents in the advancement of the territory.

Given the depth of the panel's analysis, the recommended approach centered on key housing and community challenges as follows:

## Key Recommendations:

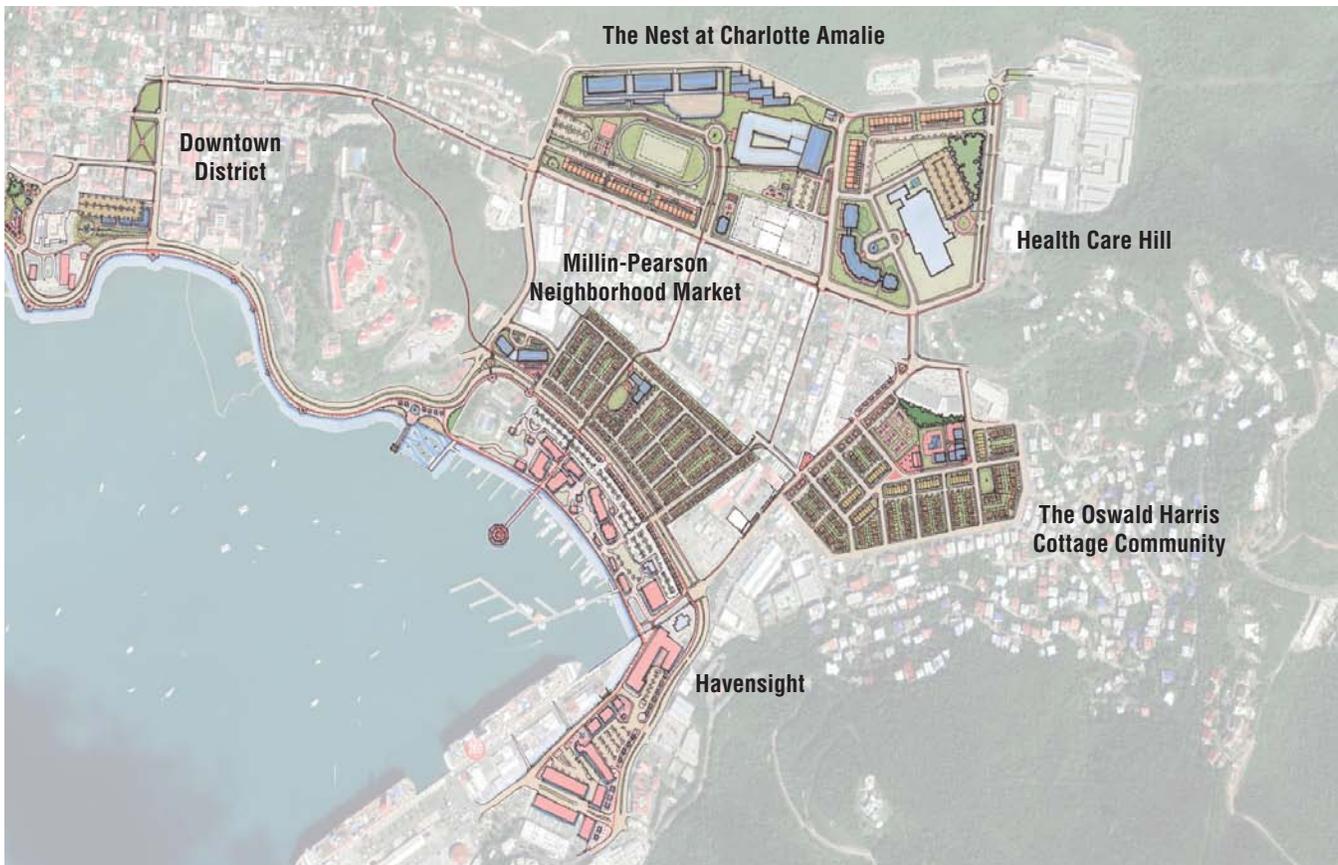
- **Totally revitalize public housing.** Seize the opportunity to design improved mixed-income and mixed-use communities by supporting increased density within the study area. Construct multifamily residences that are appropriately scaled, and incorporate retail and community space within walking distance to amenities.
- **Address blighted properties with rehab grants and code enforcement.** Create a robust plan to provide grants to seniors and property owners with disabilities, allowing them to make repairs, and designate immediate measures to enforce codes.
- **Focus on revitalization without displacement.** Make it a practice to revitalize within the study area while limiting displacement and creating open indoor and outdoor multiuse space for the community.
- **Ensure that revitalized areas include play spaces for children.** Foster greater community through creating places for the youngest residents.
- **Enhance service, civic, and social networks.** Build trust and social capital by creating conversations and networks to foster distinguishably rich civic culture allowing for continuous community engagement.
- **Recognize the connectivity and integration of health and housing through the prioritization and implementation of recommendations from the 2019 Community Needs Assessment.** Support community health challenges as a mechanism to tackle the needs of and achieve tangible outcomes for the most vulnerable populations.

## Addressing the Built Environment, Placemaking, and Mobility

**Approach:** Improve quality of life through reunifying and connecting surrounding communities by placing residential at the core of the vision. Within the greater scope of the downtown Charlotte Amalie district, the panel's conceptual drawings make an effort to use the built environment, placemaking, and mobility enhancements to bridge its various areas.

## Key Recommendations:

- **Recognize and celebrate St. Thomas's unique culture** by tying themes into placemaking. Leverage key opportunities to acknowledge the inherent value of the existing community and tie in cultural themes and design principles throughout the areas of downtown Charlotte Amalie,



DAN ANDERTON/ULI

*Built environment vision.*

Havensight, and the VIHA properties to brand them as a unique location.

- **Improve health and quality of life through mobility enhancements.** Encourage a culture less reliant on use of personal vehicles by enhancing modes of connection between neighborhoods, enabling the USVI to be eligible for federal transportation funds for transportation alternatives, and improving the bike and pedestrian experiences.
- **Reinforce built environment concepts.** The conceptual vision reinforces the vitality of the overall community by enhancing existing strengths within its districts. The concept demonstrates key placemaking and mobility recommendations throughout, allowing for greater connectivity within the districts, and primes the area as “St. Thomas’s Front Door.” Although the visuals are limited to the overall study area for the panel, the approach strengthens the experience along Veterans Drive by leveraging enhancements to the corridor and setting up a promenade to the airport and port sites located to the west.

- **The Nest at Charlotte Amalie**—Enrich key education facilities as an anchor within the neighborhood and boost residential appeal to the greater neighborhood.
- **Health Care Hill**—Augment and consolidate the hospital site, adding complementary uses such as senior housing and accessory medical uses.
- **The Oswald Harris Cottage Community**—Generate multifamily housing density that complements its surrounding context while aligning key commercial assets along Veterans Drive and incorporating community facilities centrally.
- **Millin-Pearson Neighborhood Market**—Reposition and mirror commercial activity along Veterans Drive by promoting accessibility to and from the waterfront. Modernize Millin residential community and create outdoor improvements throughout the site.
- **Havensight**—Cultivate an enhanced vending experience along the streetfront together with modifications to parking strategy and attention to treatment of pedestrian and bicycling infrastructure.

- **Downtown District**—Cultivate the pedestrian experience along Veterans Drive, thereby attracting more connectivity between residential and commercial centers by investments in transportation, parking facilities, and shade structures. Enrich the Emancipation Garden park environment allowing for visibility along Veterans Drive and creating space for community and events sponsored by the business improvement district.

## Addressing Governance

**Approach:** Evaluate structural and governance barriers, implementing reform and ensuring a high level of delivery and implementation in the context of the disaster recovery funding and new administration.

Some USVI impediments have to do with structural and organizational barriers to progress within the USVI government itself. Although many of these challenges are longstanding and are neither the creation nor the fault of current government officials and administrators, they are real and prevalent: the time for reforming, addressing, and restructuring them is now.

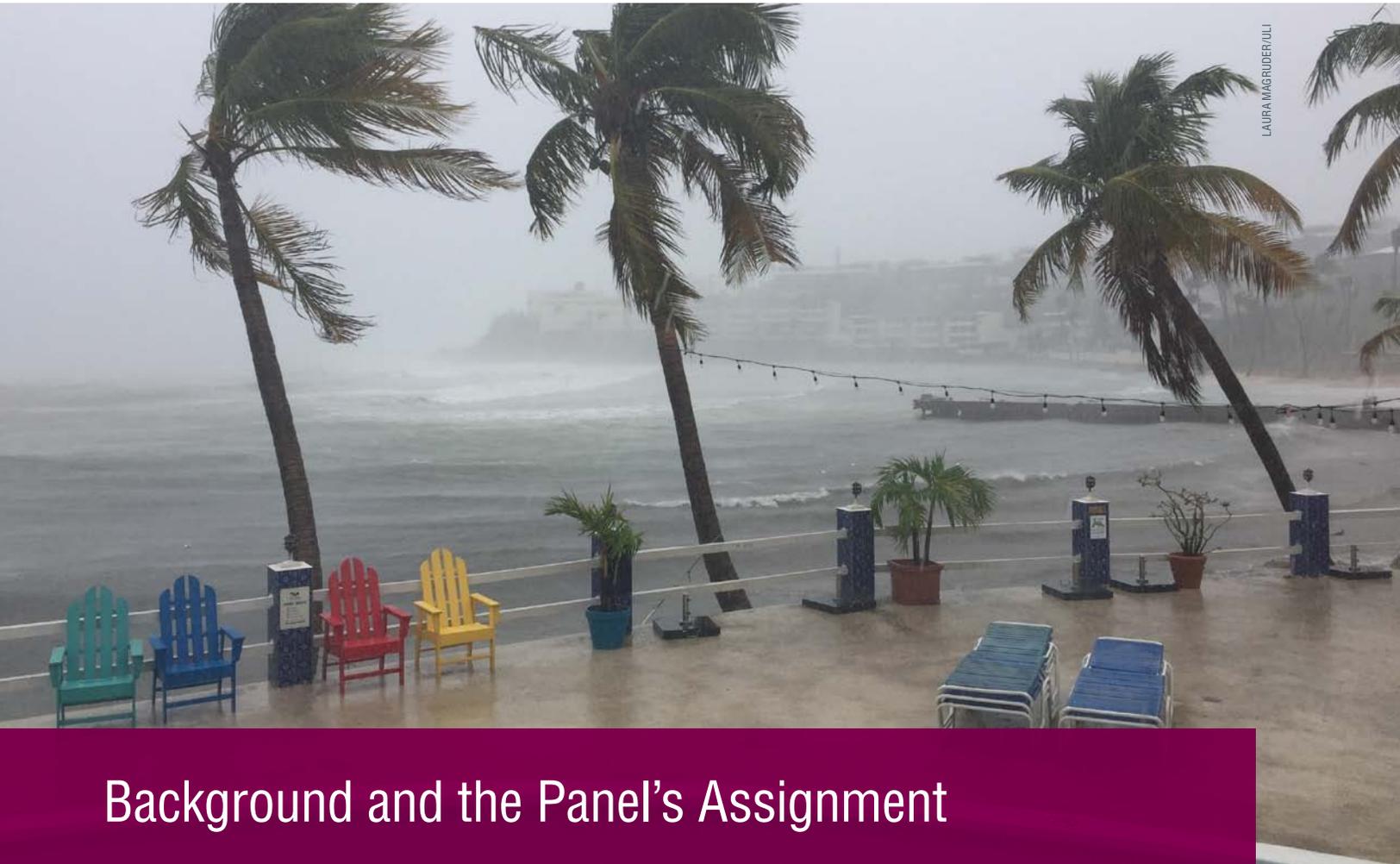
The current USVI government has an opportunity to accept this reality for what it is and acknowledge that whereas the links may be inaccurate, the rhetoric may be deplorable, and the motivations may be questionable, the current governance challenge, if responded to in a material way, can provide a road map to justify a demand for access to more recovery dollars in a more timely manner as a result of the USVI's response. Simply put, there are times in dealing with governmental gatekeepers when it is prudent to be disagreeable but responsive.

This section provides suggestions to the leadership of the VIH and the USVI government on how to address the issues mentioned above.

### Key Recommendations:

- **Improve coordination among agencies.** Better serve and support VIHA's mission by increasing coordination with other economic development and housing agencies through enhancing an economic development and disaster recovery cluster under the purview of the governor.
- **Reinforce comprehensive planning functions within the territory.** Create and regularly update a comprehensive plan to promote greater development and land use control that allows greater efficiency and opportunities to leverage cohesion.

- **Position for attraction of skilled talent.** Create a new at-will category of mid-level management workers to attract the most qualified skilled talent. Incentivize youth graduating from the University of the Virgin Islands and those across the diaspora to serve the territory.
- **Engage community.** Increase engagement and participation of residents in planning for housing and economic development issues in the territory through an office on community engagement.
- **Bolster confidence in leadership.** Ensure that appropriately skilled individuals, regardless of political affiliation, are well suited for and performing within their positions through new civil service classification for management workers, extending to independent agencies such as VIHA. Best practices include the following:
  - Pursue honesty and transparency in communication and benchmarking throughout processes.
  - Ensure strategic and organized planning occurs at all levels of government.
  - Enlist a skilled team that supports and meets critical needs to position the strategic vision for success.
  - Demonstrate delivery and implementation on strategic vision at multiple scales.

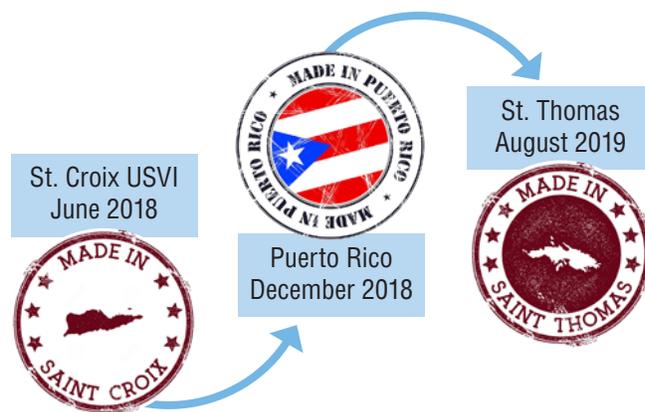


## Background and the Panel’s Assignment

**THE URBAN LAND INSTITUTE’S ADVISORY SERVICES PANEL TEAM** has made a strategic effort over the past two years to bring its member expertise to the Caribbean in response to the 2017 storms that laid bare the area’s acute needs and caused so much devastation in the region. This resolve led to a series of Advisory Services panels in the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) and Puerto Rico over the past 14 months—the first in St. Croix in June 2018, followed by another in Puerto Rico in December 2018, and the third of which is the St. Thomas panel of August 2019.

Unique to this panel and as noted later in this section, category 1 Hurricane Dorian occurred during the panel week. While it disrupted the process, it afforded the panel an opportunity to see firsthand the collective community resilience of St. Thomas.

Although each panel effort is a stand-alone, independent initiative with sponsorship, scope, and focus areas unique to the local context, given the territories’ shared challenges that exist and have persisted for years, as well as the shared tragedy of natural disasters that occur with frequency and severity, these recent Advisory Services panels across the Caribbean are united by connective themes around recovery and resilience



*Sequence of ULI Advisory Services panels in the Caribbean following the 2017 storms.*

---

**“ULI is eager to return to the USVI and continue the work we started with last year’s panel in St. Croix. For this trip, our sponsor team at the VIHA has asked us to consider a number of items related to economic development, housing, and placemaking within a study area on St. Thomas with its own unique opportunities and challenges. Our panel is eager to dive in on these specific topics and to continue ULI’s broader work to assist communities throughout the Caribbean in their ongoing efforts at recovery and resilience.”**

—ULI panel

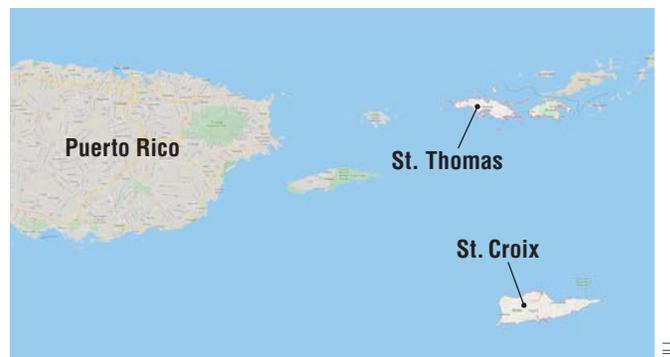
---

that have allowed a shared vision to emerge and enabled each successive panel to learn and evolve from those that came before.

## U.S. Virgin Islands

The USVI is an unincorporated territory of the United States, located between the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, 1,100 miles from North America and 40 miles east of Puerto Rico. The territory has about one-fifth the population and twice the land area of Washington, D.C. The USVI comprises three main islands. St. Thomas’s population is estimated at 51,634 (in an area of 32 square miles), St. Croix’s at 49,109 (84 square miles), and St. John’s at 4,170 (20 square miles). The USVI population has steadily decreased since 2000, largely because of emigration to the mainland United States. In July 2018, the World Factbook estimated the USVI’s population as 106,977, down from 108,600 in 2000.

The Eastern Caribbean location of the Virgin Islands makes the area vulnerable to short- and long-term physical and economic damage from storms, including a hurricane season lasting from June through the end of November. Although the USVI had contended with Hurricane Marilyn in 1995 and Hurricane Hugo in 1989, in neither of those instances did all three of the major islands take a direct hit. Hurricane Hugo passed directly over St. Croix, whereas Marilyn hit St. Thomas and St. John.



Location map.

Unfortunately, on September 6, 2017, Hurricane Irma passed directly over St. Thomas as a category 5 hurricane, while St. Croix took a direct hit from the second and following category 5 hurricane, Hurricane Maria, on September 20, 2017. To further exacerbate the challenges brought on by the 2017 hurricanes, Puerto Rico was also effectively out of commission after Maria, so the USVI could not expect any help from the nearby island U.S. territory. According to the USVI Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) Action Plan approved by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in March 2019, the current total damage to the territory from the 2017 storms is now estimated at \$11.25 billion.

Shortly after the team’s arrival on island, what was originally Tropical Storm Dorian strengthened into Hurricane Dorian, and early on the panel’s fourth working day, the storm took an unexpected turn directly over St. Thomas. The panel learned what USVI residents have long understood of the unpredictability that occurs throughout the hurricane season. By the time Dorian touched St. Thomas directly, it was a category 1 storm and, while in no way equivalent to the devastating effects of the back-to-back category 5 storms that hit in 2017, it did manage to disrupt the panel process. The panel was ultimately unable to give the final presentation during the week, which led to an adjusted panel process.

## The Panel’s Assignment

The sponsor identified a study area extending from Havensight to downtown Charlotte Amalie and incorporating VIHA properties Lucinda A. Millin Senior Housing, Paul M. Pearson Gardens, and Oswald Harris Court as the focus of this Advisory Services panel.

Specifically, the panel’s charge included providing strategic recommendations on

- Integrating the existing affordable housing stock, given the context of the surrounding neighborhood;

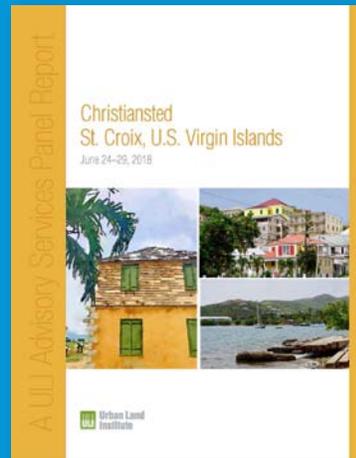
## CHRISTIANSTED, ST. CROIX, ADVISORY SERVICES PANEL

In June 2018, the Virgin Islands Housing Authority (VIHA) commissioned a ULI Advisory Services panel for St. Croix’s central business district, Christiansted. The St. Croix panel identified near- to long-term recommendations and laid out replicable strategies that can be implemented across St. Croix and throughout USVI.

The panel developed five guiding calls to action, summarized below:

1. Engage—build transparency and openness in your processes and all interaction among government, citizens, and the private sector. This is the first way to break out of misperceptions and cycles of distrust.
2. Build sustainable infrastructure.
3. Create jobs—a sustainable job strategy and incremental and diverse equitable economic development approaches are critical to ensure a sustainable future.
4. Leverage your existing strengths, whether historic preservation, entrepreneurship, history and culture, natural landscape, further opportunities for connectivity, or others.
5. Build people, particularly the next generation.

Recommendations included how to strengthen Christiansted by incorporating a modern-day and innovative approach to public housing and how to enhance community vibrancy and create stronger connectivity to, from, and within the downtown. Since the St. Croix Advisory Services panel in June 2018, implementation has begun on the key recommendations summarized in the table:



The report can be found at <https://americas.uli.org/advisory-service-panels/christiansted-st-croix-advisory-services-panel/>.

### Summary of St. Croix Advisory Services Panel Recommendations

|                                | Recommendation  | Sponsor progress  |
|--------------------------------|---|---|
| Equitable economic development | Focus on smaller, sustainable, equitable, and incremental investments.  | The sponsor has sustained a collaborative planning partnership with the Territory’s Economic Development Authority (EDA) to foster sustainable investment in the economic diversification of the study area with smaller boutique hotels and waterfront retail supported with appropriately designed affordable rental housing and homeownership.   |
| Equitable economic development | Foster an agribusiness sector.  | Recommendations from the St. Croix Advisory Services panel are being considered by the Department of Agriculture to increase investment, diversification, and scale for small agribusinesses.   |
| Housing                        | Phase new construction around the development of the panel’s proposed waterfront park.  | The sponsor has engaged a national developer to coordinate master planning using national best practices and reimagined affordable housing as the catalyst to transform Christiansted. The sponsor hosted several charrettes to obtain feedback from residents, community, stakeholders, and government entities on design suggestions to improve waterfront access, transportation, and economic integration with workforce housing. |
| Housing                        | Use new construction as a pilot for new designs, construction methods, and development that export less capital.  | The sponsor has incorporated the St. Croix Advisory Services panel recommendations into its public housing portfolio repositioning plan, which calls for redesign and construction of over 750 units of housing as smaller communities to improve livability, safety, and economic mobility for residents.  |
| Placekeeping                   | Develop parks, waterfront and greenways, public plazas, public outdoor markets, and other public spaces to enhance the human experience for residents and visitors. | ULI’s recommendation is fundamental to the sustainable revitalization of the study area. The sponsor is encouraging and supporting enhanced planning by the EDA and the government’s Opportunity Zone Task Force that will develop signature economic development projects as well as public spaces for parks and recreational spaces with the expansion of waterfront access by residents and visitors.                              |

Source: VIHA.

- Creating an equitable economic development vision projecting toward the next five, 10, and 15 years;
- Helping new communities become more resilient and reduce consumption of natural resources; and
- Creating a cultural theme and design principles to tie the area together and brand it as a unique location.

## Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, Central Business District

Despite overall population density throughout St. John, St. Croix, and St. Thomas being relatively low, heightened activity appears around the central business district of Charlotte Amalie. As a center for commercial activity, Charlotte Amalie serves as a hub featuring attractions such as Vendor’s Plaza, Fort Christian National Historic Landmark, Emancipation Garden, and Franklin D. Roosevelt Park. This area is primarily visited by tourists coming in by air or cruise ship seeking grand historic architecture, landmarks, arts and culture, as well as duty-free shopping.

Alongside the commercial activity, the area offers residences on the upper floors of many commercial properties and a mix of offices uses with a concentration of nearby government facilities, including the legislature building, which also establishes the area as a primary job center on St. Thomas.

Although the cluster of cultural attractions and jobs offers many advantages, the Charlotte Amalie district has suffered from lack of investment because of post-hurricane economics with additional challenges including perceptions about public safety, traffic congestion and lack of parking, vacant storefronts, and deteriorating buildings.



Commercial district corridor in Charlotte Amalie.

## Havensight

The Havensight area includes the Havensight dock, also known as WICO—owned by the West Indian Company, Havensight Mall, and the Marina at Yacht Haven Grande, a commercial area founded in the mid-1800s by the Danes (the former owners of the territory) and expanded upon in the mid-1950s by the U.S. Navy. According to Virgin Islands Bureau of Tourism reports, Havensight is one of the busiest cruise ship ports in the world. The area attracts 1.9 million tourists entering St. Thomas at the port annually from all the major cruise lines. The Virgin Islands Bureau of Economic Research Annual Tourism Indicators signal that cruise connectivity is critical to the territory: cruise passengers represent 70 percent of all visitors to the USVI.

Havensight is approximately one mile, a 20-minute walk, from Charlotte Amalie, and connected for pedestrians by walking through the Yacht Haven Grande Marina commercial district. The proximity from Havensight to the territorial capital of Charlotte Amalie presents key opportunities as the nexus of two commercial and amenity-rich locations.



Overview of the panel’s geographical study area in St. Thomas.



The dock, mall, and commercial uses linking the Havensight dock through Yacht Haven Grande to Charlotte Amalie.

## USVI Housing Authority Sites

The municipal councils of St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John passed an ordinance, created in 1941 and formally established by the Virgin Islands legislature in 1962, empowering a municipal Virgin Islands Housing Authority as a single agency with tri-island jurisdiction. Currently the organization owns and manages, alongside organizational partners, approximately 2,950 affordable housing apartments on St. Thomas (eight communities, 50 percent of the units) and St. Croix (15 communities, 50 percent of the units). VIHA administers approximately 2,047 housing choice vouchers on St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John. VIHA is responsible for planning, financing, constructing, maintaining, and managing public housing developments on the islands of St. Croix and St. Thomas, which is approximately 15 percent of the total territorial housing stock.

As is familiar to many jurisdictions on the mainland, the need for public housing is considerable, but the majority of properties currently available as public housing are outdated and unable to meet the needs of existing and prospective residents. As of August 2019, over 900 households were on the waiting list to receive a housing choice voucher.

In accordance with affordable housing transformation strategies, VIHA is working with the territory, Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority (VIHFA) and other stakeholders to comprehensively reposition the affordable housing assets using HUD's Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) program, CDBG-DR funds, and tax credit allocations to rebuild resiliency into long-term sustainable communities.

As part of this transformational process, it is critical for VIHA to pool resources with other investors, comprehensively plan

for innovation, and harness opportunities based on other public and private investments.

## Panel Engagement Process

The panel week began an intense process of immersion into learning as much as possible about the study area and gathering feedback from local stakeholders and a broad set of community members. This included a comprehensive tour that afforded the panel an opportunity to meet and talk with residents and business owners in the Sugar Estate neighborhood, a largely single-family district with in-home business that bounds the northwest portion of the general study area VIHA sites.

The panel spent time on the northern portion of the study area containing the Charlotte Amalie High School (CAHS) and Lockhart Elementary School, Roy L. Schneider Hospital, Charlotte Kimelman Cancer Institute, and the Sugar Estate Senior Residence. Last, the panel spent time visiting the commercial corridors where neighborhood shopping, cruise ship, and dock activity take place, as well as visiting historic downtown Charlotte Amalie sites including Vendor's Plaza and Main Street.

As a critical complement to the tours, the team was able to experience in-person and in-depth interviews and conversations while on the ground in various locations throughout the study area. As mentioned previously, the incremental nature of this panel and the recent ULI experience in St. Croix led the panel to experiment with new and enhanced forms of outreach and engagement to ensure that community participation came from as broad and diverse a group as possible. This outreach took the form of communications such as press releases, flyers, and



*A perspective view of VIHA properties, including Paul M. Pearson Gardens and Oswald Harris Court.*



*The panel's study area included portions of the Sugar Estate neighborhood and the housing sites of Lucinda A. Millin Homes, Paul M. Pearson Gardens, and Oswald Harris Court.*

## VIHA STUDY AREA PROPERTIES

VIHA identified the sites of Lucinda A. Millin Homes, Paul M. Pearson Gardens, and Oswald Harris Court to examine housing redevelopment with a larger revitalization scale that will have a greater impact and will affect the lives of generations of residents and stakeholders. An overview of the properties and their respective facility specifications are below.



*The Oswald Harris Court property, named posthumously for a St. Thomas legislator who was a champion for the “little man” and a fearless, aggressive fighter for human rights. One of the largest USVI public housing units, the facility provides public housing and has a section for senior citizens of St. Thomas.*



*The Paul M. Pearson Gardens property, named for USVI’s first civilian governor, who inspired the territory’s first affordable housing effort.*



*The property of Lucinda A. Millin Homes, named for an educator and the first woman to be elected senator, who during her tenure fought vigorously for improved living conditions for the elderly.*

## Study Area Properties

|                         | Construction date | Dwelling units | Dwelling (sq ft) | Acreage | Number of buildings |
|-------------------------|-------------------|----------------|------------------|---------|---------------------|
| Paul M. Pearson Gardens | 1952              | 120            | 255,060          | 10.7    | 15                  |
| Lucinda A. Millin Homes | 1968              | 85             | 49,123           | 1.8     | 1                   |
| Oswald Harris Court     | 1959              | 297            | 225,060          | 19.1    | 45                  |

**Source:** Virgin Islands Housing Authority, [www.vihousing.org/communities/stt-communities.html](http://www.vihousing.org/communities/stt-communities.html).

radio advertisements and interviews to complement the efforts of the VIHA sponsor team to engage stakeholders.

As is typical for Advisory Services panels, the team spent a full day doing interviews with a variety of stakeholders from the public sector, the private sector, and the community, all of whom provided a wealth of feedback and information. In addition, the ULI team was able to add additional engagement activities that included listening sessions with government officials and community members outside the panel interview

day, as well as hosting a three-hour open interview as part of the panel interview day, where community members could come and sit with the panelists as part of group interviews.

## Engagement Findings

The feedback the panel received through its various engagement methods was invaluable data and input for the panel’s recommendations. Through an intense intake process and aggregation of a significant and broad amount of



LAURA MAGRUDER/ULI



LAURA MAGRUDER/ULI

The panel met with local community members Cheryl Knight Hendricks (at left, in left photo) and Rosalie Simmonds Ballentine (at right, in right photo) to learn about the history of the Sugar Estate neighborhood in St. Thomas.

information, several key themes began to coalesce as the team members compared notes and compiled information.

Some of the more positive themes and obvious opportunities for success include the following:

- Desire for small and local business opportunities, with an emphasis on ownership;
- Desire for tourism extensions;
- Desire for a revitalized downtown;
- Desire for connection and community (walkability);
- Desire for pursuit of potential for partnerships; and
- Desire for reform and restructuring of government.

Some of the more challenging themes and opportunities for improvement follow:

- Universal agreement exists that severe market inefficiencies are at play in St. Thomas that are generating acute pressures on residents and driving up the cost of living. The panel heard repeated, consistent, and strong feedback about the cost of basic food and grocery staples, the cost of mobility-related items such as gas and insurance, and of course, the severe pressures caused by the cost of power and water as well as the housing dynamics resulting in a lack of affordable rental properties.
- A significant trust gap exists between residents and government, and sincere efforts must be made to rebuild trust. This feedback was particularly strong in the context

of discussions of the public housing neighborhoods within the study area and was connected to widely held fears about displacement of residents and a lack of engagement with the community in advance of setting development plans.

- A range of connected themes raised concerns over the government’s ability to deliver the basic services that most residents expect to see. This includes expectations in the context of public housing and the supportive services that are needed, or perceived to be needed, by residents, as well as in the broader context of other constituents whose concerns include the administration and enforcement of the government’s taxing functions, public works, and cleanup functions, and a particular emphasis on the proliferation of vacant and blighted properties throughout the study area.

The following pages highlight efforts Advisory Services led to engage the community in the panel process. It serves as a model to lift voices in envisioning the community post-recovery.

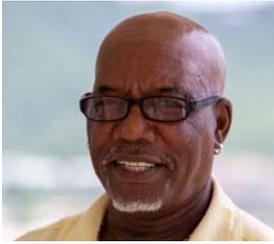


Paul M. Pearson Gardens

# Community Voices

Picturing Community Engagement in St. Thomas





**SINCE 1947**, the ULI Advisory Services program has helped communities worldwide find strategic, practical solutions for the most challenging issues facing today's urban, suburban, and rural areas. Serving as a panel of experts, ULI members provide clear, innovative solutions to kick-start critical conversations and help communities gain fresh insight and move forward to improve the lives of their people.



A key part of the Advisory Services process involves hearing from the community through stakeholder interviews. Over its weeklong visit, the panel hears from 80 to 120 local stakeholders and gains key insights.



During the August 2019 panel in St. Thomas, ULI engaged in additional efforts to celebrate the contributions of the community members who shared their experiences with the panel through a community portrait project. Participants were given the opportunity to have a portrait taken by a professional photographer and share their thoughts about the panel and their lives in St. Thomas.



The portrait project is an example of what community engagement can look like in St. Thomas. The success of the project highlights the need for more engagement and the community's desire for more regular engagement from USVI institutions.



“ I am grateful for the opportunity to voice my needs, hopes, and wants for our community housing developments. **I believe our community can be peaceful and thrive.**”

—VIHA resident





**STORYTELLING** can help present and frame the economic and real estate cases for value creation from open space and parks, engage new champions, and connect disparate communities. Engaging community members through storytelling can lead to creative placemaking and more robust community relationships.



A 2018 Advisory Services panel in St. Croix, also sponsored by the Virgin Islands Housing Authority (VIHA), focused on post-hurricane recovery and community resilience. In early 2019, members of that panel led an effort with the St. Croix Foundation, Enterprise Community Partners, and ULI to bring the nonprofit StoryCorps project to the island. StoryCorps uses audio recordings to preserve and share the stories of Americans.

StoryCorps recorded interviews with Cruzans about their lives and community. The storytelling project engaged community members as they articulated their dreams for the island's future and became more connected to its development. The StoryCorps project is an example of creative placemaking that roots community development in local engagement. The stories of St. Thomians should be gathered to influence decision-making as projects in St. Thomas move forward.



Lucinda A. Millin Homes



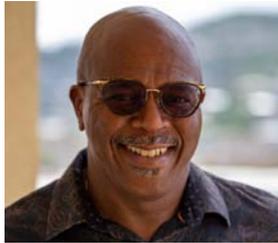
“ I am a Virgin Islander and want the best for my home and its people. I hope that these events will cause them to see that they need to rely more on themselves and not principally on support from the federal government. **We need to be more self-reliant.**”

—St. Thomas resident



“ My aspiration for St. Thomas and my community is to see Charlotte Amalie come back to life again—  
**for everyone to have a place in the progress and development of downtown’s upgrade.**”

—St. Thomas resident



Oswald Harris Court



2001 L Street, NW  
 Suite 200  
 Washington, DC 20036-4948





LAURA MAGRUDER/OLI

## Resilience and Recovery

**IN THE PAST DECADE, THE USVI ECONOMY** was on a downward trajectory, experiencing a decline of 14 percent in gross domestic product between 2006 and 2016; public debt had mounted to 74 percent of gross domestic product, according to the Virgin Islands Bureau of Economic Research.

Many in the USVI attribute a key economic downward shift to the Hovensa Oil Refinery shutdown. A 2013 Virgin Islands Bureau of Economic Research report calculated the refinery closure caused an annual decline of approximately \$140 million in territory tax revenues. In addition to focusing on large-scale business attraction investment, like many remote island communities, the USVI depends on fuel oil for the generation of electricity. Hovensa could not operate economically; the refinery was designed to burn oil to generate the heat for refining, and switching to liquefied natural gas would take years and as much as \$1 billion, according to a Virgin Islands–commissioned report by Duff & Phelps.

Many displaced Hovensa workers and their families left St. Croix for mainland jobs or opportunities or had to compete for scarce living-wage jobs. The closure left a significant gap in the USVI economy, increasing the territory’s dependence even more on tourism.

In July 2018, the territory approved an agreement with Limetree Bay Terminals, a British petroleum company, to resume oil refining operations on St. Croix. The reopening of the refinery is expected to bring millions of dollars back into the local economy, providing support to new and existing businesses and re-creating 1,300 construction jobs and 700 long-term positions in addition to those residents already employed at Limetree’s oil terminal storage facility.

During the time Hovensa was shut down, the USVI lost its primary import/export base, thereby turning the economy into one that was primarily locally focused, with the exception of tourism, according to a USVI Department of Labor report.

The oil refinery shutdown coupled with the following economic challenges have hampered the territory's economic prosperity for decades:

- **High cost of goods and materials:** Because of a remote location, the islands are at the end of the supply chain, resulting in a particularly high cost of imported goods and materials.
- **High utility costs:** The cost of power in the territory is almost three times the U.S. average, leading to both a higher cost of living and of doing business, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.
- **Residency-tax exemption eligibility:** Regulatory challenges are associated with the 2004 Jobs Act residency and income source requirements for tax exemption eligibility. Only income generated from outside the territory is eligible for exemptions, and the Internal Revenue Service's physical presence requirement for tax residency in the USVI is 50 percent higher than for any state. These restrictions are especially burdensome to businesses that require a mobile sales force.
- **Declining population:** The economy is also hindered by a population that has been declining since 2000, largely as a result of emigration to the mainland United States.
- **Suitably skilled workforce:** In a 2015 survey distributed by the USVI Bureau of Economic Research to 81 local businesses, half or more rated the local workforce as "poor" in 11 of 12 categories of evaluation, including entry-level skills, professionalism, productivity, and computer skills. Certified vocational training of territory residents is limited. The availability of skilled labor

---

**“If the territory had solid waste fees in place, it would have earned well over \$30 million from receiving storm debris and which could have assisted in strengthening the infrastructure. We need to be more self-reliant.”**

—St. Thomas resident

---

continues to preempt the relocation, growth, and creation of new, high-value businesses in the Virgin Islands.

Recognizing resilience as a key economic infrastructure, the USVI has demonstrated a longstanding commitment to sustainability and climate resilience. Any effort to rebuild should be founded in building better and not just back to the previous standards that proved insufficient when stressed by extreme weather events.

The panel recommends that all rebuilding efforts should consider the following integrated resilience measures to improve a facility's ability to withstand weather events such as the 2017 category 5 storm:

- Telecommunications through Solar-powered Mesh-network Information Locators (SMILs);
- Information kiosks for Safari public transportation stops through shade structures that provide public internet access, local information, phone charging, visual wayfinder, and connections to key information;
- Emergency wireless telecommunications network, locator, and community-based networks;
- Water assurance through cisterns and small water filtration system; and
- Elevation of residential structures two to three feet above floodplain.

## Energy

The high cost of fuel in the USVI has hampered its economic growth, quality of life, and overall resilience. Energy is one of the major factors affecting economic development, health, education, transportation, quality of life, and the environment. People understand the importance of having access to affordable, reliable energy, but the fuel source is also a critical priority.

In 2010 the USVI's clean energy goals were announced: reducing fossil fuel-based energy consumption by 60 percent by 2025 and generating 30 percent of peak capacity from renewables by 2025.

In 2012, the USVI made further progress by enacting the Climate Change Adaption Policy, the result of collaboration between the Conservation and Fisheries Departments and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Labor as a response to the ongoing and projected impacts of climate change in the region. The projected impacts included temperatures rising 1° to 5°C (1.8° to 9°F) by the 2080s, 25 percent increase in droughts

---

## ST. THOMAS ENERGY PROFILE

St. Thomas, St. John, and Water Island have a combined peak electricity demand of 88 megawatts served by a single electrical grid run by the Water and Power Authority (WAPA). WAPA provides electricity to a total of 54,000 customers (45,000 residential and 9,000 commercial) across the territory. In fiscal year 2015, WAPA's operating expenses were \$333.7 million, of which \$231.5 million (69.4 percent) was fuel costs. The residential and commercial electricity rates in the USVI tend to be 40 to 67 percent higher than the Caribbean regional average of \$0.33 per kilowatt-hour (kWh). Electricity rates in 2015 were \$0.47 per kWh, but at the peak of oil price costs, rates increased to \$0.57 per kWh. These high rates in addition to an unreliable grid have been driving residential and commercial customers to install their own generation systems, thereby decreasing WAPA's electricity sales, which dropped by 15 percent between 2010 and 2016.

**Source:** U.S. Energy Information Administration.

---

by the 2080s, accompanied by changes in rainfall patterns resulting in heavier rain events leading to flooding and soil erosion, a potential one- to two-meter rise in sea level by the end of the century, and a greater likelihood of category 4 and 5 hurricanes.

As a result of this collaboration, the Virgin Islands Climate Change Adaption Policy addresses multiple sectors, including the following:

- Beach and shoreline stability, coastal and marine ecosystems, forestry and biodiversity, and fisheries;
- Tourism;
- Insurance and banking;
- Food security and agriculture;
- Human health;
- Critical infrastructure, human settlements, and water resources; and
- Energy.

By 2015 nearly 1,500 solar water heating and photovoltaic (PV) systems had been installed throughout the territory, accounting for almost 15 megawatts of distributed systems feeding into the WAPA grid. These systems reduced fossil fuel use by 20 percent and supplied about 12 percent of peak demand. Energy

efficiency upgrades on 11 schools produced an energy cost-savings of \$1.3 million the first year and \$1.7 million the second year, resulting in the government authorizing \$35 million to install lighting and water retrofits in 34 more schools. And solar hot water systems are required for all new construction and government buildings until 2020.

WAPA recently procured three seven-megawatt liquid propane gas turbines to increase energy generation efficiency and upgrade to a more renewable energy compatible system while continuing to implement strategies not only to reduce fossil fuel consumption with energy efficiency measures and by harnessing renewable resources, but also to build out a more resilient utility grid by decentralizing power generation and making the transmission network more robust. Unfortunately, WAPA does not have the capital to undertake the changes at the scale required to significantly reduce electricity costs and increase reliability.

WAPA's largest challenge is aggregating the capital needed to make the improvements to the electrical system needed to strengthen the grid and switch to renewable distributed generation. The costs of these improvements have been passed on to the consumers, while putting WAPA heavily in debt. The upgrades to the WAPA system have increased the debt by an additional \$160 million, making the total debt approximately \$500 million.

As a debt-burdened government-owned utility, WAPA has less ability to raise money in the capital markets than privately owned regulated utilities. Until this hurdle is overcome, the high cost of electricity will continue to be a drag on sustainable economic development of St. Thomas and the rest of the territory.

However, some of WAPA's progress has proven to be successful, demonstrated by the recovery that occurred after Hurricane Dorian in August 2019, when practically 99 percent of the electrical infrastructure was re-electrified islandwide only 24 hours after the storm. The initiatives that were implemented post-Maria and post-Irma proved themselves to be successful.

To aid in overcoming the energy challenge, the panel recommends harnessing the CDBG-DR funding to jump-start community resilience. The post-Hurricane Maria disaster and recovery funding from federal government agencies like the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and HUD may make the Sustainability and Climate Adaptation goals set almost a decade ago a reality.

## Solarize St. Thomas

The CDBG-DR funding for the USVI represents an opportunity to move toward community resilience and potentially the implementation of renewable energy projects. According to the Rocky Mountain Institute, in locations with high electricity costs, as renewable energy system prices drop, more people will have the ability to implement them. However, this exacerbates existing inequities: people with more means will have the ability to shift to renewable energy sources, whereas people with less means will not.

With the CDBG-DR funding, VIHA may be able to install solar power on low- and moderate-income housing. In doing so across various subdivisions and communities, VIHA could potentially become a power-producing entity and create storage-ready systems. Initially, VIHA would feed power back to the grid. By formulating a power purchase agreement with the local utility, VIHA could sell solar-produced energy to WAPA. During a storm, the VIHA system could decouple from the WAPA grid and become a micro-grid within the housing communities, thereby creating resilience not only within each community but for the whole island.

Getting community buy-in for installing renewable energy-based emergency power systems across new housing developments, existing critical facilities such as hospitals and senior housing facilities, and communal institutions such as community centers and schools through a Solarize St. Thomas program would support and amplify the existing Solarize St. John initiative, allowing more residents of the USVI to use clean and renewable energy sources. This effort should include measures such as ensuring that new construction should use

new solar PV panel mounting methods (“PV net”), in which solar panels are mounted onto roofing.

The generation capacity at new housing developments is summarized in the accompanying chart.

## Waste-to-Energy and Fuel Energy Alternatives

It is important to diversify St. Thomas’s energy portfolio and not simply rely on solar energy. The St. Thomas landfill represents another renewable energy opportunity. Organic waste can be transformed through biomass gasification into biofuel. The amount of organic waste in the landfill, particularly sargassum seaweed, is significant. The biomass gasification process is essentially a waste-to-energy system and becomes a closed-loop system. The result is energy, and the gasification process produces no emissions.

Waste at the landfill can also be used to create biochar. Biochar can be used as a sand substitute in concrete. The cost of concrete in the USVI is high. Using biochar in concrete can reduce the cost of concrete, making actual construction costs go down by a potentially substantial amount. The island of Martinique has a biomass plant that survived Hurricane Maria undamaged. Biochar technology is resilient and should be looked at in the future.

A more resilient distributed power generation system or “smart grid,” managing the existing waste stream, and mining the landfill can lessen dependency on imported diesel, generate revenue for St. Thomas by processing plastic from surrounding islands, and allow for fixed-price agreements with

Solar Generation Capacity at Proposed New Housing Projects

| Housing type                   | Kilowatts generated per unit | Number of units | Total generation capacity                   |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------|---|
| Cottage                        | ~6                           | 50              | 300 kW                                      |
| Duplex                         | ~12                          | 20              | 240 kW                                      |
| Triplex                        | ~16                          | 20              | 320 kW                                      |
| 120 ft × 40 ft                 | ~49                          | 10              | 490 kW                                      |
| Havensight school              | ~140                         | 1               | 140 kW                                      |
| Total generation capacity (PV) |                              |                 | 1.5 MW<br>(2.2 GWh/year = \$1 million/year) |

Source: R. David Gibbs/ULI.

cruise lines. Decisions that embrace energy alternatives would advance the resiliency of the island, such as the co-location of (50–100 tons/day @ 1.5–3 MW) biomass gasification for processing organic solid waste plus (20 tons/day @ 750 K gal/yr synthetic diesel) advanced pyrolysis for processing plastics into synthetic diesel fuel.

The panel recommends addressing the following:

- **Decoupling and privatization:** Explore the sale of the energy generation or distribution infrastructure to a utility company with the technical and financial means to transform the electricity system throughout the territory.
- **Public utility commission:** Restructure the Public Services Commission as a commission that leads the regulation of utilities for the benefit of USVI citizens.



LAURA MAGRUDER/ULI

# Equitable Economic Development

**TOURISM IS THE USVI'S LARGEST EMPLOYER**, making the territory especially vulnerable to tourism-specific fluctuations. It is imperative that St. Thomas develop an equitable economic development plan that recognizes the value of human capital and the creation and growth of local small business activity. St. Thomas has an opportunity to catalyze and leverage the responsible growth and diversification of its economy through an intentional, transformative economic development planning process involved with the development of the USVI 2040 Economic Development Plan led by the U.S. Virgin Islands Economic Development Authority.

From analysis of the study area, the panel offers the following recommendations that it believes would be of value to the study area and to the 2040 plan initiative in addressing key economic challenges throughout the territory.

## Mitigating Construction, Development, and Workforce Challenges

The panel solicited feedback from many stakeholders in the construction, development, and workforce areas of the private sector as well as from public-sector participants who have long grappled with the prohibitive cost barrier to construction in USVI.

Some of the key aspects of this barrier that appear to be USVI-specific and are worthy of mention, given their severity and connection to recovery efforts, include the following:

- Lack of mandates or enforcement of mandates for local business participation in contracting and construction efforts funded in full or in part by local or federal incentive or recovery dollars;
- Lack of mandates or enforcement of mandates for local hiring in construction activities funded in part or in full by local or federal incentive or recovery dollars;
- Lack of mandates or enforcement of mandates for partnerships between local service-provider partners with



LAURA MAGRUDER/JULI

*The high cost of construction in the Virgin Islands limits development opportunities.*

the contractors and construction activities funded in part or in full by local or federal incentive or recovery dollars; and

- Apparent monopolistic behavior and price gouging within certain contracting trades, material suppliers, shippers, and service providers.

As learned from other jurisdictions' disaster-recovery experiences, the cost of construction following a natural disaster correlates to skyrocketing of material costs. Materials become scarcer once the billions of dollars of federal grants make it from Washington to St. Thomas. Heavy equipment such as cranes is likely to be in short supply. Considering this dynamic, every effort must be made now to identify opportunities to increase supply of materials and reduce construction costs.

The panel recommends meeting with local suppliers, such as Home Depot, to determine opportunities for cost savings, such as large bulk purchases of key materials. Identify chokepoints in the supply chain and support competition. For example, use CDBG-DR funds for economic development activities that encourage expansion of existing local businesses and open up multiple suppliers or producers of major materials such as concrete and metal roofing. Work with the territory's attorney general's office and HUD's Office of Community Planning and Development, Office of General Counsel, Office of the Inspector General, and HUD Technical Assistance providers to establish best practices in contracting that can protect against unfavorable terms to the territory.

St. Thomas's need for construction workers is going to expand exponentially with the arrival of CDBG-DR funds. HUD's dollars include a requirement that opportunities for employment and job training be directed to public housing residents and other low-income residents to the maximum extent feasible.

This requirement is known as section 3 because it was created by section 3 of the HUD act, and it is the single greatest opportunity for the territory to ensure that residents benefit from the influx of dollars. Section 3 allows residents to increase their skills and income, setting themselves up for work in the trades. Careful attention to this requirement may result in changing the lives of work-capable residents and dramatically increase VIHA's ability to serve additional families when current residents are able to afford non-VIHA housing or remain in place and pay higher rents.

The panel recommends USVI leadership work with HUD to design best practices in section 3. As mentioned earlier, work with a social services provider or tenant leaders to assess the skills and interests of work-capable tenants. Convene on-island builders to assess skills gaps in the construction field. Convene a subset of on-island construction workers to get their feedback on previous section 3 efforts, concentrating on obstacles workers encountered in getting to work on time, being prepared to work, and then faced over the course of employment. Match dedicated CDBG-DR dollars for workforce development to foreseeable future jobs flowing from recovery programs, including new housing construction, housing rehabilitation, and mitigation measures such as infrastructure projects and elevation of residential properties in the floodplain.

## Intentional Workforce Training and Placement

The territory has been losing population for some time. The population loss accelerated after the 2017 hurricanes. The recent hurricanes do not fully account for the shrinking population and the resulting decreasing pool of eligible workers, but years of stagnant or declining economies, weak electrical and water infrastructure, and the high cost of living have led to an exodus of residents to the mainland.

Young people who leave to study abroad are not returning home in sufficient numbers to help with the creation of new industries and expand existing ones. In addition, youth who choose not to attend college are not given the tools needed to participate in construction and other technical industries. Given the importance of small business and talent, the panel recommends that St. Thomas strengthen local hiring and development requirements as a catalyst for community revitalization and economic development.

Providing more local education and training opportunities to connect the workforce to job opportunities within St. Thomas's economic development strategy should be done with intention.

The Virgin Islands Economic Development Authority, through coordination with other public-sector partners, is in the best position to facilitate neighborhood and St. Thomas-wide economic development efforts. Through this coordination, the public sector can leverage additional partners for territory-wide economic development efforts through U.S. Small Business Association, U.S. Economic Development Authority, U.S. Department of Labor, and others.

This effort requires working with partners to create a workforce pipeline by implementing the following strategies:

- Developing a feeder system between local schools and vocational opportunities;
- Providing job training opportunities in response to economic development business attraction and community needs;
- Creating a formal job placement program leveraging CDBG-DR Section 3 requirements; and
- Leveraging cross-training programs that align with economic development strategy (e.g., advanced manufacturing, medical services, tourism and related services).

St. Thomas should also encourage the connection between large corporate business attraction targets and local businesses to encourage job placement, partnership opportunities, and ongoing apprenticeship.

## Pathways to Entrepreneurship

While the 2040 economic development plan will highlight opportunities for identifying target industries and how to attract large businesses to St. Thomas, a wealth of opportunities currently exist to build local talent in support of small business growth and creation. In addition, the benefits of an aggressive small business platform and workforce development concentration will accrue to the residents of St. Thomas and serve them for years to come. Increased efforts around small business creation can make workforce development investment a key theme in the 2040 economic development plan.

Concentration on building the skills of the future and supporting local small business creation is in some sense a more resilient effort that transcends the whims of large company decisions. More important, it provides a more equitable economic development strategy that puts the interests of St. Thomians

first. Furthermore, when investment is made in the ideas and small businesses of today, with proper support those ideas and entities can grow and thereby decrease reliance on tourism.

Small business creation can serve as a viable way to overcome barriers to traditional employment or a lack of employment opportunities. Economic development diversification is a key theme in empowering workforce development training and small business development in a more equitable way. The panel recommends a focus on opportunities that introduce and reinforce pathways to entrepreneurship and small business creation that will lead to economic growth for residents.

In support of fostering increased entrepreneurship and workforce innovation, the panel suggests that St. Thomas take the following steps:

- Establish a workforce development training center that concentrates on current St. Thomas needs and leverages local expertise to provide small business creation opportunities, such as local general contractor trades, local artisans, and tourism support services.
- Allow incubators, coworking spaces, and co-ops that leverage the workforce development training efforts for certain business that need additional technical or fundraising resources.
- Establish spaces that allow local vendors that support the tourism industry to maximize sales opportunities and make transportation of goods easier (e.g., semi-permanent kiosks along the promenade).
- Create and leverage local entrepreneurship in culinary arts that would help support the food and beverage component of the tourism industry (e.g., food truck island and industrial kitchen to expand capacity).
- Leverage basic office equipment to prospective entrepreneurs and an informal networking space to facilitate idea sharing and partnerships.
- Increase small business lending programs and provide tax and regulatory relief for small businesses opening and growing in St. Thomas.
- Track success stories of projects and companies, and measure the economic impact of locally supported businesses to support future policy, program development, and economic development planning strategies.

## Charlotte Amalie as an Economic Catalyst

One of the panel's goals is to support the responsible growth and diversification of the St. Thomas economy in the activity center around Charlotte Amalie while developing downtown neighborhoods through equitable economic development strategies aimed to help build the capacity of the St. Thomas workforce.

Although the Virgin Islands Economic Development Authority is pursuing an active effort to create a holistic vision for economic development through the 2040 plan, the panel would like to call out the ability to focus on strategies that allow for business attraction efforts and investments in human capital to create new businesses and foster small business growth.

### Business Improvement District

Although much of the territory is still in recovery mode from the 2017 hurricanes, Charlotte Amalie as USVI's largest city, with its strategic commercial centers and government office assets, can help lead the recovery and transformation of the territory. A partner in this effort is the proposed business improvement district (BID) effort being promoted by Downtown Revitalization Inc. (DRI), which would encourage and actively facilitate strengthening the local business climate. The group has invited a member of the International Economic Council to visit St. Thomas to discuss how DRI can best proceed and formally establish the BID, customizing the concept to fit the island's needs.

BIDs are mainly nonprofit entities created with the support of property and business owners who agree to pay an additional tax to increase the viability of the area and create a direct connection between business owners and the government. BIDs have been around since 1977 and have led the

---

**“The Virgin Islands are my home, and I’m interested in issues and/or projects that can engender initiatives to improve the quality of life for the community.”**

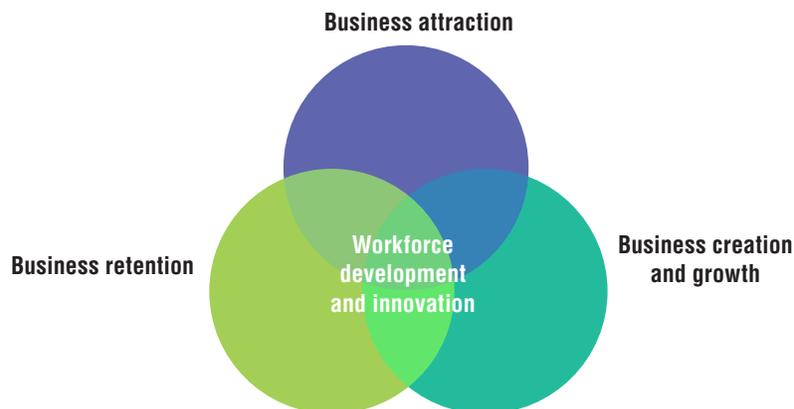
—St. Thomas resident

---

revitalization efforts of many neighborhoods, including Times Square and Downtown DC.

The panel supports formally establishing a BID to serve downtown St. Thomas, including Charlotte Amalie. The panel recommends the following initial roles for the BID:

- **Clean and safe services**—A significant portion of the BID's budget should be used to keep the BID boundaries clean and safe. Activities in this category should include trash pickup (and recycling); graffiti removal; painting; landscaping; and concierge services to visitors, workers, and residents.
- **Placemaking and activation**—The BID could offer a number of events and activities that cater to all, including music events, farmers markets, holiday events, movies, and health and fitness classes.
- **Infrastructure and sustainability**—The BID could work with the government to address transportation issues such as parking, traffic flow, multimodal transportation; creating and maintaining parks and open spaces; and leading on issues of sustainability.



TYRONE RACHAL

*Three pillars of workforce development and innovation include business attraction, retention, and creation and growth.*

## CASE STUDIES: AGRICULTURE AND TOURISM MODELS

### Agriculture as Tourism

Located in St. Croix, USVI, Ridge to Reef Farm is a working farm that takes part in the Caribbean’s tourism industry. Marketing itself as the “premier agritourism site in the Eastern Caribbean,” the farm grows certified organic produce for local consumption.

Ridge to Reef Farm offers tours, farm stays, catered events, and volunteer and work trade opportunities. The farm also partners with outdoor tourism organizations to offer survival skills and island food cultivation classes. Its agritourism offerings are popular with both tourists and locals.

The farm’s produce is sold at a farm store and at farmers markets, and through a community-supported agriculture program, which ensures community interest in the farm’s success and guarantees a base market for the farm.

On St. Thomas, efforts to preserve local food culture and agritourism are advancing. In 2011, the Department of Agriculture supported We Grow Food Inc. to build a new central pavilion and key infrastructure in support of food production at the Bordeaux estate. Since 1997, We Grow Food has sponsored events such as the Last Sunday Farmers Market, known as the Bordeaux Farmers Rastafari Agricultural and Cultural Food Fair.

### The Co-Op Model

Co-ops are businesses jointly owned by their members and are democratically run. According to the International Co-operative Agricultural Organisation, co-ops are rooted in community and based on core values that can include self-help, democracy, equity, and solidarity. In agriculture, co-op members can be employees or customers or can be cooperatives of several farms.

The co-op model is very successful throughout the Caribbean. For example, Haiti has a robust co-op community

with 260 listed agricultural co-ops in 2016. Organizations like the Smallholder Farmers Alliance in Haiti are using the co-op model to encourage equitable small business development for farmers.

St. Croix also has a developing agricultural co-op community. In addition, some organizations on the island are in the process of creating the Virgin Island Farmers Alliance to help the farming community by pooling administrative support and increasing access to grants.

### Community Land Trusts: Collective Ownership and Self-Sufficiency

Community land trusts are nonprofit organizations that give control and stewardship of land to community members. In urban areas, community land trusts are used as an affordable housing strategy, purchasing land to protect the affordability of the buildings on it. The community land trust model originated as a method of helping minority farmers maintain access to farmland.

The New Communities Land Trust was founded in 1969 in Georgia to prevent the displacement of African American farmers. New Communities bought almost 6,000 acres and produced crops through shared land stewardship in addition to creating complementary businesses to make the land trust self-sufficient. Founded during the civil rights movement, New Communities was one of the first community land trust models in the United States.

Today, New Communities Inc. runs Resora, a working farm with educational programming located on a former plantation. The vision of New Communities is to “become a thriving organization that is a global model for community empowerment through agribusiness, education, social awareness and wealth building.”

## Agritourism and Community Farming Models

| Model                             | Examples                                   | Benefits   |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| Community-oriented farming models | Community-supported agriculture (CSA)      | Community interest, base market  |
|                                   | Consumer co-op                             | CSA members pool resources to support farm in times of need, are co-owners |
|                                   | Agricultural co-op                         | Multiple farms pool resources for common needs                             |
|                                   | Worker co-op                               | Equal division of profit and debt, worker buy-in                           |
| Agritourism                       | Tours, farm stays, classes, work exchanges | Enhances tourism offerings, draws customers to farm, generates revenue     |

Source: ULI.

- **Economic development**—The BID should engage in robust research and analysis and provide data to its stakeholders for planning and development purposes. The BID could also serve a lead role in business and retail attraction and attention.
- **Community convener**—Given its nonpolitical status, the BID can serve as the entity that coordinates the delivery of human and social services requested by residents but not currently being delivered in the existing housing developments and the proposed redeveloped communities.

## Market-Rate Housing

The panel heard from residents that shopping on Main Street tends to close down at five p.m. when tourists head back to the ships. They expressed a desire for a more vibrant Main Street, with restaurants, live music, and other entertainment available to be enjoyed by residents and tourists alike. The panel also heard frustration about minimal condominium development in St. Thomas, leaving a shortage of options for people who would like to own property without the burden of keeping up a yard.

The panel recommends working with Main Street property owners to identify sites suited to conversion to market-rate apartments or bed and breakfasts, such as creation or expansion of second-floor unit offerings. Exploration of owners' interest in subdivision of properties into condominium units, meeting a need for low-maintenance, middle-class residential ownership options downtown, should be pursued because it will create a 24/7 attraction to Main Street and serve the needs of new residents.

## Tourism Enhancements

As the location of the largest cruise port, St. Thomas struggles with a tourism population that may stop by local vendors in the area but does not stay the night to generate enough business to create sustaining economic impact for local small business. With this challenge, the panel recommends the pursuit of the “detourism” approach to travel, which promotes slow and sustainable tourism by encouraging travelers to go beyond the usual tourist attractions and destinations and opt for unique experiences that are authentic to a particular place.

Coupling the main premise of detourism, which is inviting visitors to travel through places in an effort to experience their authentic and lesser-known areas, with the advent of an emerging agricultural presence in St. Thomas could leverage existing cultural assets as a measure to combat the dynamics of the cruise industry.



*Kiosks line the promenade along Copacabana Beach in Rio de Janeiro.*

SKELUG208/FLICKR

The panel heard much about the arts and crafts industry in St. Thomas and recommends finding creative measures to maximize its impact within the tourism industry. For example, a measure to enhance the Vendor's Square site could involve repositioning of vendors to allow placemaking areas along the future promenade to draw tourists into the historic downtown area of Charlotte Amalie.

As the entrepreneurs grow out of their current locations, a pipeline of stand-alone sites will be needed for future expansion. The panel recommends an effort to create a licensed kiosk trail from the cruise ship dock all the way to Emancipation Park through relatively inexpensive creation of a “linear” vendors' market. These kiosks would allow vendors to store materials and product in a fixed space along the promenade and target retail amenity offerings to draw links into the historic area (e.g., Copacabana in Rio de Janeiro). Each vendor is a small business, and given the right support, these entrepreneurs can become the local retail stores of the future.

In addition, providing resources for local entrepreneurs to start their own businesses should be a primary focus. As mentioned earlier, an economic development strategy should incorporate a pro-small business attitude to create and support entrepreneurship, business incubation, and coworking opportunities for articulated needs that fit within the economic development strategy.

These small businesses should then be nurtured to take them to the next level with capital investment and business growth opportunities. For example, in Atlanta, any large companies that receive economic incentives are strongly encouraged to seek meaningful partnerships with local subcontractors and product providers. The panel encourages similar business mentorship pathways for St. Thomas.

---

## AVAILABLE FINANCE TOOLS

Many financial tools are available that can help promote and strengthen economic development initiatives; however, having a master blueprint for where the island is headed is also important to ensure the appropriate strategic tools are put in place. The panel recommends St. Thomas explore the following tools:

### Existing financial tools:

- Economic Development Commission tax incentive program
- Enterprise Zone Commission tax incentive program
- Tax increment financing (project based)
- Tax increment financing (district based)
- Hotel development program
- Sustainable Tourism through Arts-based Revenue Stream (STARS)
- Economic Development Bank loans and technical assistance

### Additional eligible financial tools:

- Economic Development Agency (EDA) planning grants
- New Markets Tax Credits program
- Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program
- Federal Opportunity Zone program
- Public/private partnerships (PPPs)

### Eligible small business financial tools:

- SBA 504 Loan Program
- Small business revolving financial institutions
- Publicly funded improvement loan funds
- Angel capital for startup and small business ventures

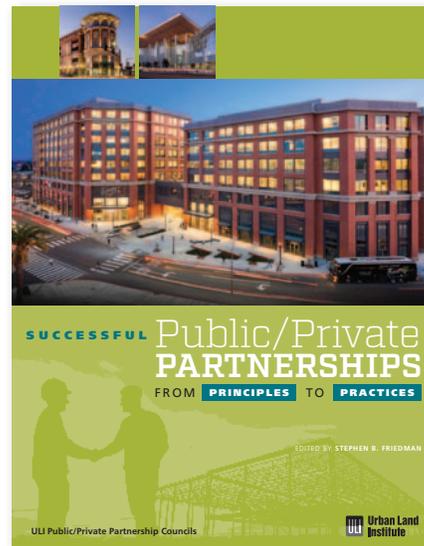
### Financial tools for consideration:

- BID bonds—These bonds are repaid in installments by property owners within a redevelopment area. The payments are typically subject to enforcement through tax foreclosure.
- Contributed land value—Public land conveyances with a portion of the land sales price categorized as either debt or equity in the project.
- Credit enhancement—The public sector can often work with financial intermediaries to offer contingent guarantees and conduit financing vehicles to allow unrated issuers to effectively organize and access lower costs of capital for projects that serve a public good.

- Municipal bonds—In addition to revenue bonds, not-for-profit organizations can be the beneficiary of tax-exempt bonds (sometimes called 501(c)(3) bonds) for their facilities.
- Philanthropic program-related investment (PRI): In addition to philanthropic grants, several foundations offer PRIs to further some aspect of their charitable mission.

In 2016, the Urban Land Institute together with its Public/Private Partnership Council published an updated *Ten Principles for Successful Public/Private Partnerships*, sharing case studies that demonstrate the practice of public/private partnership principles. Those principles are:

1. Creating a shared vision and public purpose;
2. Assembling the development team;
3. Proactive predevelopment for successful PPPs;
4. Creating relationships between developers and public bodies;
5. The “but for” problem and the need to make a fair deal;
6. Assessing fiscal impacts and community benefits of PPPs;
7. Structuring development partnership deals;
8. Evaluating and structuring infrastructure and facility PPPs;
9. Managing risk and sharing success; and
10. Documenting and monitoring deals.



*ULI's Successful Public/Private Partnerships: From Principles to Practices is a helpful resource on the fundamentals of public/private partnerships.*

## Creative Financing Tools

Economic development professionals often tend to maximize their efforts by bringing in large generators of economic activity, such as Porsche North American in Atlanta, Amazon in Northern Virginia, and the like, through the use of large tax incentives and economic development finance tools. Although tax abatements and other incentives are a necessary part of any economic development strategy, opportunities often exist to focus inward and leverage existing economic assets. Following are several strategies that the panel recommends be approached as a tool kit of offerings that leverage investments for greater impact to empower St. Thomas residents.

The financial assistance tool kit can vary over time and from place to place. While many of the financial tools focus on large real estate projects, creative public/private partnerships can focus on capacity building and small businesses. In addition, St. Thomas has the advantage of CDBG-DR funds that are already programmed for workforce development (\$5 million), section 3 hiring guidelines, and building small business capacity.

These small business tools will differ in scope and scale compared to traditional real estate development tools and large-scale business attraction tools. Tax abatements have less to offer to small business owners whose need is startup and expansion capital. However, some financial tools can help with future needs that could be covered under EDA programs currently in use. The financial and regulatory incentive tool kit should be tailor-made to accommodate small business creation and growth while retaining best-in-class business attraction tools.

The public/private partnership is a model for redevelopment of the VIHA sites and is an effective tool to develop, grow, and connect this entrepreneurial ecosystem for the benefit of St. Thomians.

Although much discussion is given to public/private partnerships, jurisdictions should not lose sight of effective public/public partnerships. Top-level attention and support and interdepartmental collaboration are essential for optimal results and efficient execution. Every effort should be made locally within all sectors of government to clear the path as much as possible.

The U.S. Small Business Administration has an existing framework to leverage as St. Thomas creates pathways to local business creation and growth. In addition, the Virgin Islands Small Business Development Center provides a wealth of knowledge and tools for small businesses that are in various stages of development. Also, the Virgin Islands Economic Development Authority has several existing financing programs such as a micro-credit loan program, EDA loan fund, and so on, to create leverage.



## Housing

**THE PANEL HEARD ABOUT COMMUNITY AND INDIVIDUAL CHALLENGES** that have resulted from decades of declining federal funding. Residents struggle with the lack of high-quality affordable and senior housing, the lack of support services, a deteriorating sense of community, nonexistent neighborhood connectivity, and the overall lack of faith in leadership to listen and include community voices in the effort to improve these conditions.

The reality is that VIHA has not had sufficient resources to modernize the bulk of its properties. Nor has it received the funds necessary to protect and repair its properties from natural hazards and climate change. The increasing frequency and intensity of natural disasters make one thing clear: the future will bring more storms and more damage to the island, so rebuilding with an eye toward the future is vital. The following outlines the panel's approach to maximizing the incoming funding to reposition public housing and repair community.

---

**“As a third-generation native of St. Thomas, VI, my family has been through the various hurricanes, natural disasters, and economic turmoil that have hit our territory. I personally had to take time off work on the mainland to attend to my mother’s roof being completely destroyed from Hurricane Marilyn in 1995.”**

—St. Thomas resident

---

## Revitalization of the Housing Stock

Despite limited resources, VIHA has demonstrated a transition toward the stabilization of its housing stock. As referenced earlier in this report, VIHA is working with the territory, VIHFA, and other stakeholders to comprehensively reposition the USVI's affordable housing assets using HUD's RAD program, CDBG-DR, and tax credit allocations to build resiliency into long-term sustainable communities.

In the effort to prepare for this comprehensive shift, VIHA's Asset Repositioning Plan includes a directive on collaboration to accomplish the following systemic goals:

- Capitalize on available community and economic development expertise to leverage global best practices on improvement of the USVI's built environment.
- Maximize federal funding sources to revitalize housing as a catalyst for change and to resolve land use and real estate challenges for more resilient communities.
- Incorporate workforce housing to achieve better outcomes through self-sufficiency models.
- Reduce the footprint of obsolete public housing inventory through phased development, and maximize the strategic use of project-based voucher subsidies.
- Encourage the USVI to partner with experts, such as the Urban Land Institute, to develop workforce housing as part of a larger community and economic development strategy.
- Provide sufficient integrated housing options for the USVI's growing senior population.

To date, VIHA has codeveloped several large-scale new construction projects on St. Thomas and St. Croix. Moving forward, VIHA proposes to use approximately \$300 million in CDBG-DR funds, HUD RAD funds, tax credit equity, and FEMA funds to reposition its units with a focus on retaining adjacency to important community and commercial assets, including schools, hospitals, cruise ship docks, marinas, and shopping centers. The proposed rebuilding strategy occurs against a backdrop of traffic congestion, nearby decaying historic neighborhoods, scarcity of parking spaces, a need for workforce housing units close to employment centers, and reliance on funding that is not fully secured.

The pending arrival of federal rebuilding funds from FEMA and HUD offers VIHA the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to design new communities that draw on the prime location of the

---

## USVI DISASTER RECOVERY ACTION PLAN

An overview of the USVI Disaster Recovery Action Plan includes the following:

- USVI CDBG-DR funds from tranches 1 and 2 (\$1.02 billion) were used toward recovery and improving resilience.
- On September 8, 2017, \$7.39 billion in CDBG-DR funds were made available to assist in long-term recovery from 2017 disasters.
- On February 9, 2018, Congress approved a bill appropriating an additional \$28 billion in CDBG-DR funds, of which \$11 billion was set aside to address the remaining unmet needs, including those of the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico from Hurricane Maria.
- HUD has awarded \$1.86 billion of CDBG-DR USVI funds.
- The total award for the USVI is as follows: tranche 1, \$242,684,000 for unmet needs; tranche 2, \$1,621,058,000 (\$846,870,000 for remaining unmet needs and \$774,188,000 for mitigation).

---

Lucinda Millin, Paul M. Pearson, and Oswald Harris residences to harness new opportunities to better integrate with the surrounding area, attract new residents who can pay higher rents and thus support additional amenities available to all, and incorporate businesses that can generate additional revenues to support the properties.

With a new tranche of almost \$775 million in CDBG-DR Mitigation (MIT) dollars not yet committed under an action plan, substantial opportunity exists to do more than what has already been committed to revitalize public housing and integrate it into neighborhoods with people of all incomes, with a design strategy build resilience against future storms.

Within the built environment vision as detailed later in this report, the panel proposes a total revitalization of public housing. This proposal includes new construction of one-, two-, and three-bedroom homes in multifamily and street-scale properties, surrounded by small-scale retail and community space within close walking distance of major amenities.

The newly developed housing will meet the desire of middle-class St. Thomians to live in town. The higher rents earned from business and non-low-income residential properties will generate a critical source of funding for VIHA to serve its residents' needs and maintain the properties for generations to

come. This mix of housing product and incomes will create the infrastructure for VIHA residents to remain near schools, work, shopping, and medical care while gaining new community facilities and neighbors who may be able to serve as informal mentors and support for economic mobility.

## Revitalization without Displacement

A primary concern of residents interviewed is not being displaced from their homes and neighborhoods, where they have established family and community ties, and having good access to schools, health care, jobs, and shopping. Residents conveyed how disruptive past moves had been on their lives and expressed anxiety about losing their place in the community.

Thus, an essential panel recommendation is enacting a strategy to rebuild without displacement, which involves policies such as a commitment that no residents should be relocated outside the study area (for example farther than a mile), and no residents should have to move more than once. This type of strategy has been successfully embraced on the mainland as a best practice, and it is particularly important for working with vulnerable populations.

## Single-Family Housing Stock

St. Thomas's declining homeownership tells a painful truth of life on St. Thomas: the average cost of living is extremely high. An average family cannot afford to purchase or build a home at today's prices. The escalating cost of land and construction simply price out working-class and middle-class families, removing them and burdening the fabric of the community. The extraordinarily high cost of multifamily building construction means that VIHA and the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority are unable to serve all of the more than 900 people who remain on VIHA's waiting list—individuals in need of a good, stable, healthy place to call home.

Given the high cost of living, St. Thomas's population has declined in recent years, with Hurricanes Irma and Maria providing an extra push to some families to depart for better access to health care, education, work, and housing. Although individuals may have understandably left the island intending to return soon, the reality across the study area is that homes have been left to deteriorate, turning into eyesores and crime magnets for neighbors to deal with.

The panel finds that revitalization within the study area cannot be successful without a robust plan to address deteriorating



JACQUELINE CAVALES/ULI

*The Sugar Estate community in St. Thomas is a single-family neighborhood with many historic properties, including the one pictured here.*

single-family homes, one that includes owners who are unable or unwilling to address them on their own. Given that this area involves multiple property owners, approaching this work will require a sensitive balancing of individuals' property rights with the overall community's rights to be free of blight and crime.

The panel recommends USVI leaders establish a funding pool to identify, enforce, and support rehabilitation through measures that can be advanced using forthcoming HUD CDBG-DR MIT funds for code enforcement and establishment of modern, resilient building codes. Funds can be used by designating an immediate enforcement zone for code enforcement and providing rehabilitation grants for existing residents such as seniors and property owners with disabilities whose incomes or health do not permit them to make repairs.

Processes can allow creative measures such as creating a platform for neighbors to send in photos and addresses of blighted properties with their phones. Measures should be enacted to ensure that rehabilitation grants provide sufficient funding for elevation of all homes in the floodplain, not just when HUD requires it, since the owners will be required to purchase flood insurance as a condition of receipt of federal grant funds and elevation substantially reduces the cost of premiums.

The governor's office and the senate should continue to explore strengthening laws and procedures for code enforcement, and the judicial branch should consider opportunities to streamline the probate and land titling process for inherited properties that have become a community blight. Streamlined processes should include a minimum time frame from notice to taking of the property, with clearly delineated opportunities to remedy the violations, apply for assistance, and seek reconsideration of adverse decisions.

## ENCOURAGING NEIGHBORHOOD REHABILITATION

The task of restoring vacant and abandoned buildings is essential to the vitality, safety, and quality of life for residents in the study area. Absentee owners, fragmented ownership by heirs of the original owners, and a slow and expensive probate process all make this task difficult. The Charlotte Amalie Town Blueprint outlines a process for restoring these properties while respecting the rights of the property owners; the following recommendations build on this process as a foundation and provide additional recommendations for implementation.

Step 1: Establish a pool of funds for rehabilitation. The restoration of abandoned and vacant homes would be eligible for CDBG-DR monies.

Step 2: Work with neighborhood groups to identify vacant buildings. Partnering with schools and vocational training programs, implement a geographic information system to identify and track progress.

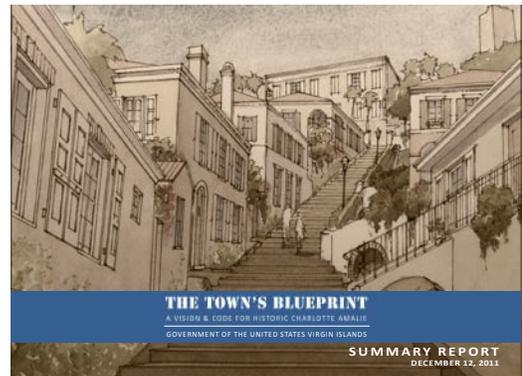
Step 3: Through the proposed planning department, notify the owner(s); file a lien to remediate blight or cover unpaid taxes.

Step 4: Create a rehabilitation plan identifying what is needed to make the building habitable.

Step 5: Through VIHA/VIHFA offer to pay the lien, finance rehabilitation, and amortize this cost back to the owner(s) to allow a portion of future rents to pay for the rehabilitation over time. The offer should be contingent on median income rental

rates to prevent owners from flipping properties, which could contribute to gentrification.

Step 6: If the offer is accepted, perform the rehabilitation. If the offer is not accepted, begin eminent domain proceedings. The process of acquiring and rehabilitating vacant and abandoned homes could be expedited through new legislation that would provide the government authority to expedite the eminent domain process.



The 2011 Charlotte Amalie Town Blueprint includes a form-based code that codifies a vision for historic Charlotte Amalie that in this case can be used to guide the preservation and infill development of the city. Key concepts and procedures from this effort could also be used as a framework for the restoration of properties in single-family neighborhoods.



Homeowners in the Sugar Estate neighborhood can benefit from rehab grants to remodel homes damaged by natural disasters.

According to the requirements of the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in *Kelo v. New London*, properties may be taken only for residential or community open space, not economic development. Once seized, properties should be reserved for residents with incomes at or below 120 percent of area median

income to increase the available stock of homes for working- and middle-class residents of St. Thomas. The panel supports creation of a department within VIHA/VIHFA to identify vacant or abandoned homes, ascertain ownership and other real property interests, and track the progress of each property.

## Enhancing Service, Civic, and Social Networks through Community Engagement

Residents of VIHA properties are separated from surrounding areas rather than living in housing intermingled with other housing stock, causing a sense of isolation within the greater neighborhood. Community members referenced, somewhat nostalgically, “a not too distant” past where neighborhoods across the island exhibited the following cultural norms:

- Everyone knew each other.
- High levels of respect and courtesy were common.

- Good manners and social etiquette usually prevailed.
- Traditions were “passed on.”
- Families dined together, around the table.
- Sports leagues and social clubs thrived.

Such qualities were considered core strengths that held island communities together, differentiating the USVI from other nearby territories. Yet as a result of more modern traditions, coupled with the advent of the recent storms and the evidence of experienced social trauma, a number of these social cultural norms have become frayed. The panel recommends an approach to rebuilding that prioritizes community needs and engagement as outlined in this section of the report.

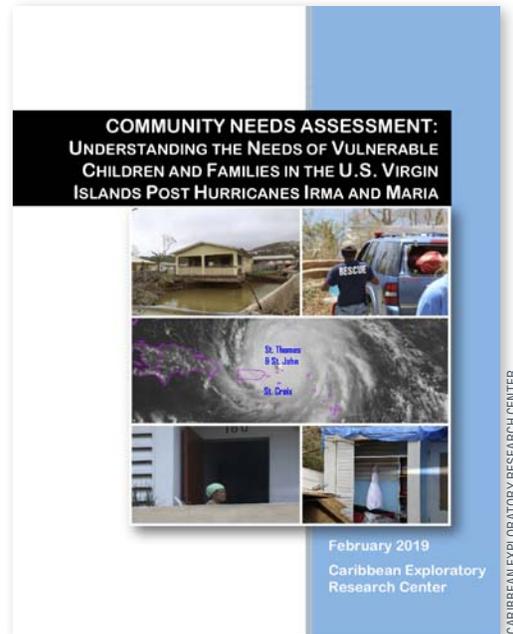
### Prioritize and Implement Recommendations from the 2019 Community Needs Assessment

As might be expected, many residents feel the burden of the cumulative impact of successive natural disasters and recurring structural challenges that manifests itself in many ways that feel analogous to symptoms of trauma. Because housing is one of the most fundamental human needs, the failure of the federal government to provide modernization and recovery funds in a timely manner negatively affects residents’ physical and mental health.

To identify challenges fueled by the increasing frequency and intensity of natural disasters and in an effort to create measures to address them, the University of the Virgin Islands (UVI), through the Caribbean Exploratory Research Center, entered into an agreement with the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands to conduct a community needs assessment. A community-based participatory research approach was used, which included the establishment of a Community Assessment Committee (CAC) and a Project Advisory Committee (PAC). PAC members included heads of key government or semi-autonomous agencies, key personnel from community-based organizations or nongovernmental organizations, a representative of the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands, and members of the core research team.

The following findings of this assessment point to the most vulnerable individuals experiencing challenges in five domains of social determinants of health—education, economic stability, the neighborhood and the built environment, social and community context, and health and health care:

- In the aftermath of Hurricanes Irma and Maria, stress remains a significant health issue for residents in the territory, for both children and adults.



- Stress emerged as a major programming challenge for many in the community, including agencies that provide services to vulnerable children and families that are still in the recovery phase and for whom neither the available services nor staffing levels have returned to normalcy.
- Some families remain displaced, and many continue to deal with home repair challenges, including interacting with insurance companies and contractors involved with FEMA-related repairs.
- The needs of the community are many in the aftermath of Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

Rebuilding offers the chance to address not only problems caused by the storms, but also some of the challenges that began earlier and were exacerbated by natural disasters. The territory, in partnership with the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands, might consider formalizing and funding the CAC or PAC through some form of collaborative or collective impact model to begin methodically prioritizing and tackling these recommendations.

Within the following built environment vision, the panel layers how strategic shifts and partnerships in conjunction with improvements to the built environment can help address community health by allowing for improved educational facilities, hospital consolidation, spaces for business, and increased connectivity. Measures that support community health are included throughout the panel’s vision for modernized housing, including spaces for partnerships with local social service providers, added capacity for assisted

living and support services, and the integration of green spaces accessible to the larger area. Thus, within the context of the social determinants of health, the panel's vision aligns with the report's findings and are offered to

- Improve the overall health of vulnerable children and families by
  - Providing access to quality health care;
  - Providing access to preventive health and behavioral health for children;
  - Repairing health care facilities; and
  - Providing incentives for building the health care capacity in the territory.
- Improve educational outcomes for youth by
  - Rebuilding schools, including libraries, with stable internet connectivity and associated instructional technology;
  - Providing additional academic support for students who have fallen behind due to disruptions; and
  - Providing support services for teachers.
- Increase economic stability of vulnerable families by
  - Re-engineering the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program to assist families to move out of poverty; and
  - Providing certificate programs through UVI CELL to enhance skills of displaced workers.
- Improve neighborhoods and the built environment by
  - Improving health and safety aspects of housing communities; and
  - Supporting vulnerable families to repair damaged homes so they have stable home environments.

## Community Engagement

An ambitious public housing revitalization cannot be carried out by the government and businesses alone, and it must allow time for the building of trust. To achieve any vision of rebuilding an inclusive housing stock, VIHA will need to call on all of its residents, from children to seniors, to contribute their unique skills to the recovery and rebuilding. Therefore, the panel recommends a robust approach to community engagement. Within any engagement process to plan the transformative revitalization of the study area, the needs and rights of existing residents, whether of VIHA properties or private homes, must

come first. Those who have lived in the area through its most challenging times deserve first position in determining how their community should be redesigned.

The panel supports starting small by cataloging and sharing information around social support activities and services broadly within the community. Although numerous opportunities exist, one practical step might be to begin cataloging and sharing all of the USVI's civic and social services through a platform like Aunt Bertha, which is a nationwide network with millions of users, many from community-based organizations, hospitals, health plans, governments, schools, and other service providers.

The panel recommends use of CDBG-DR funds for a nonprofit or tenant leader to conduct the interviews rather than VIHA itself, so residents feel comfortable to reestablish relationships. Maintain a continuous feedback loop, where VIHA, VIHFA, and EDA provide regular updates on progress, such as monthly or bimonthly, allowing residents to offer suggestions for improvement. Be transparent about the process by posting information online so displaced residents who are living off-island but planning to return can participate in the revitalization process.



*The renowned beauty of St. Thomas comes second to the beauty of its people. Every morning, despite having lived through the worst of Mother Nature's wrath in Hurricane Irma just two years ago and category 1 Hurricane Dorian during summer 2019, survivors get out of bed and meet the day with strength and personal resilience. Undeterred by systemic shortcomings heightened by these storms, residents care for their families and loved ones, go to school, work, and appointments, and keep up their homes. As part of the Advisory Services week, ULI engaged a photographer to capture portraits of community members the panel met with throughout the panel week.*

Throughout the study, the panel was impressed with the resilient spirit and dynamic character that came through as members met with local stakeholders, including residents of VIHA properties, homeowners, business owners, and government leaders. Although conversations about service, civic, and social networks may not offer traditional or direct programming opportunities, these conversations and approaches may provide the support for other more tangible initiatives. Perhaps defined strategies for social resilience and cohesion would not only assist in changing the trajectory for economic growth in the UVSI, but also assist in the continuous process of healing.



## Built Environment, Placemaking, and Mobility

**BY PLACING PEOPLE AND HOUSING AT THE CORE OF THE VISION**, the panel finds unique opportunities to foster reunification and coordination within the study area and advance the conceptual plans the panel developed. The panel found that these topics each contained a series of ideas and opportunities that were powerful if pursued in any capacity, but whose potential impact was dramatically magnified when linked to themes such as walkability and connectivity to adjacent neighborhoods.

This preference toward linkages led to a systemic approach to redevelopment of the neighborhoods and areas within the study area, which may be possible on a scale far grander than what the original panel scope intended. Rather than stifle this energy, given the exciting potential the panel tapped into, the panel leaned in and pushed forward with the hopes of revealing the beginnings of real, true, substantial opportunities for reunification within the study area—reunification of neighborhoods and the people who constitute them.

The panel's recommendations and its plan highlight the powerful benefits that can flow from the coordination of recovery efforts and funding to the fullest possible extent. By incorporating additional development areas, beyond

the assignment's original scope, the panel is admittedly pushing the envelope of how FEMA and CDBG-DR funding resources can be used. However, the panel contends that all of the various potential funding categories in these recovery budgets, including housing and economic development, are infrastructure, and as such, should all be coordinated and combined.

As much as possible, the panel is combining housing development with every aspect of recovery funding. In areas with potential for health care funding, such as rebuilding the hospital, the panel is incorporating new housing. In areas with potential for education funding, such as rebuilding CAHS, the panel is incorporating new housing. Even around downtown

Charlotte Amalie, where the historic overlay and form-based code may make new construction more challenging, the panel finds opportunities for the repurposing of vacant structures into housing.

The panel recognizes the unique gift of a study area with such a rich and comprehensive set of uses, activities, and anchor institutions. It takes inspiration from this gift and pours it into the recommendations and plan in the form of a mixed-use neighborhood on a grand scale, one that creates a fully functioning, fully integrated, fully connected, multigenerational ecosystem that can house residents from birth to retirement and provide a wealth of opportunities for education, healing, and economic empowerment at every stage along the way.

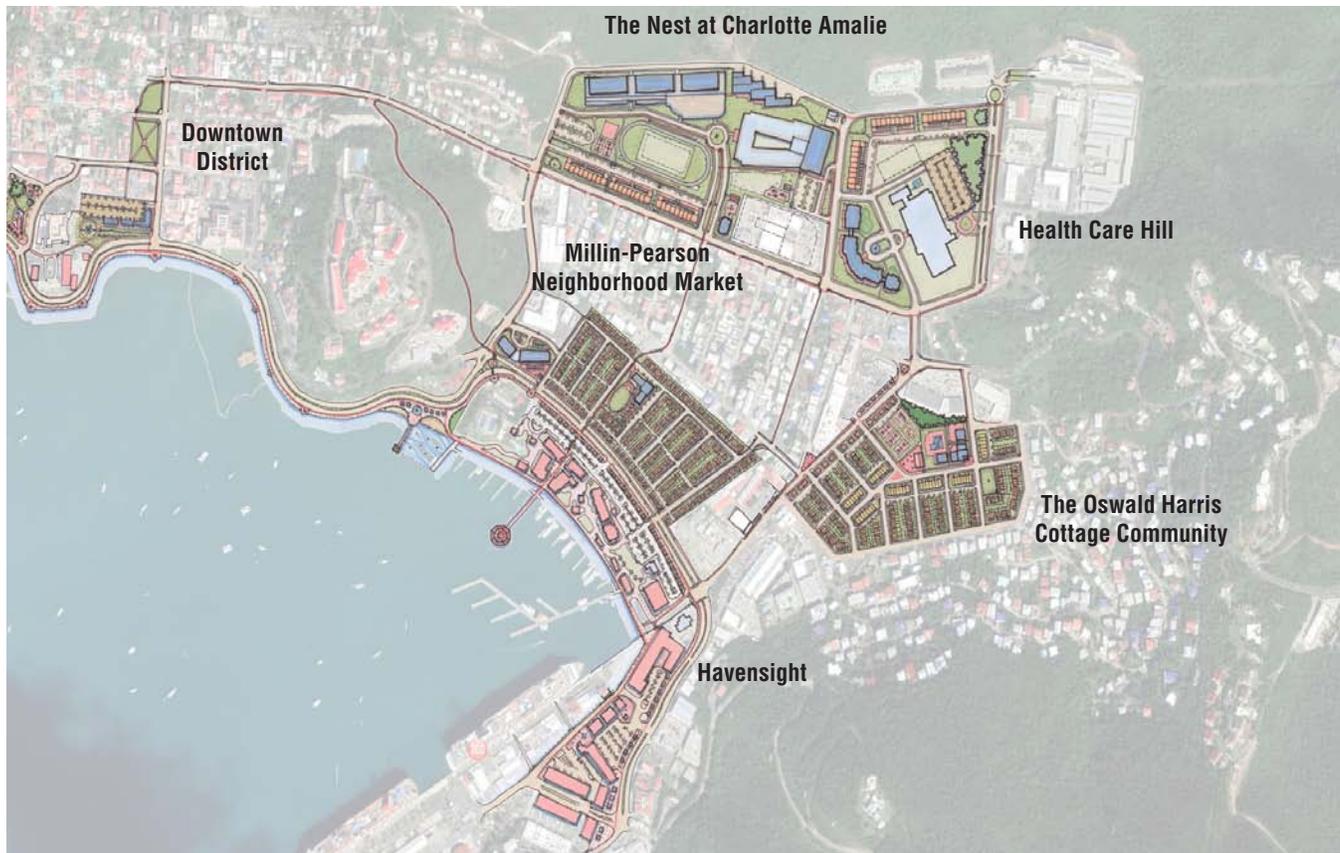
### Step 1: The Nest @ Charlotte Amalie

The panel began in an area that may be somewhat unexpected because it is a bit of a departure from the core scope the panel was asked to consider. However, given the comprehensive, coordinated approach outlined above and the clear need for revitalization in the existing educational facilities within the study area, the panel found that it was unable to craft a plan that did not directly address those needs and the opportunity that

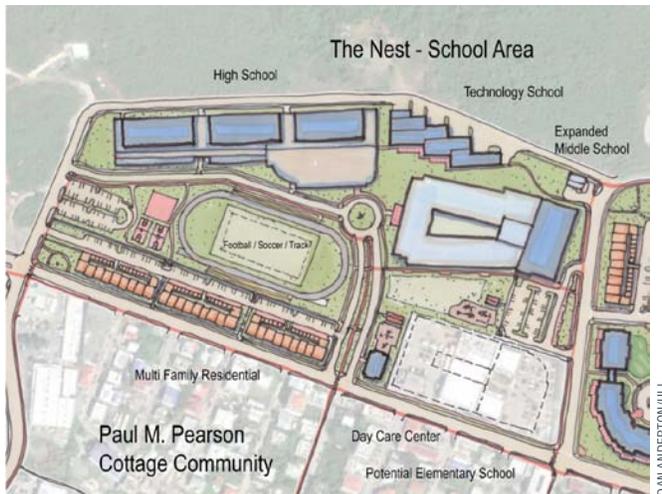
could flow from a redevelopment effort on the Charlotte Amalie High School site. Taking inspiration from the CAHS mascot, the Chicken Hawk, and the seemingly islandwide reputation for strong spirit of the CAHS students and alumni, the panel reimagined a campus on this site that combines educational, housing, and equitable economic development uses.

The panel recognized the pressing need for reimagined educational facilities to meet the existing needs of the student population and get kids out of temporary classrooms, as well as the need for workforce housing, including housing for teachers and municipal workers throughout the island, and saw a unique opportunity to enhance and expand the workforce and economic development efforts on the island to provide opportunities for youth and adults.

The Nest campus as conceptualized here includes a completely new high school facility and a slightly repurposed elementary school building with reorganized circulation and transportation infrastructure to improve mobility, access, and throughput. By consolidating some of the existing, low-density classroom buildings at CAHS, the plan frees up additional space for additional workforce housing, ideal for teachers or municipal employees.



*Built environment vision.*



Enrich key education facilities as an anchor within the neighborhood and boost residential appeal of the greater neighborhood.

Finally, the existing vocational training facilities have been reimagined as the COOP (Center of Opportunity and Progress), a state-of-the-art energizer facility that houses workforce and vocational training, incubator and coworking space, and a fabrication lab, or fab lab.

The panel recommends the introduction of roundabouts, circular intersections that are safer and more efficient than conventional stop-controlled and signalized intersections. Traffic travels clockwise around a center island, and vehicles entering the roundabout yield to existing traffic. Given the high-traffic points of the day, the roundabout approach should be considered for the Nest.

The benefits of roundabouts include the following:

- Improved efficiency because traffic continuously flows through the intersection;
- Safety, with a 78 to 82 percent reduction in crashes where people are seriously hurt or killed when compared to conventional intersections, according to the AASHTO (American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials) *Highway Safety Manual*, and reduction in the number of vehicle-vehicle and vehicle-pedestrian conflict points; and
- Improved aesthetics because the center island can be landscaped with trees, flowers, and shrubs or contain art, monuments, and statues.

Potential locations for roundabouts are as follows:

- Rumer Drive and Edward Wilmot Blyden Road;

## THE COOP

Education is an essential component in establishing sustainability and resilience as an important element of St. Thomas's social fabric. Through the COOP, this portion of the plan can foster the creation of an integrated education network that links the core K–12 science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM)–related curriculum with advanced partners like UVI and others well versed in vocational and workforce development training.

These investments in coordinated learning can be expanded further into economic development efforts through the incorporation of fab labs, maker spaces, incubator, and coworking spaces not only to encourage entrepreneurship but also to provide physical locations to house and foster small and local business development.

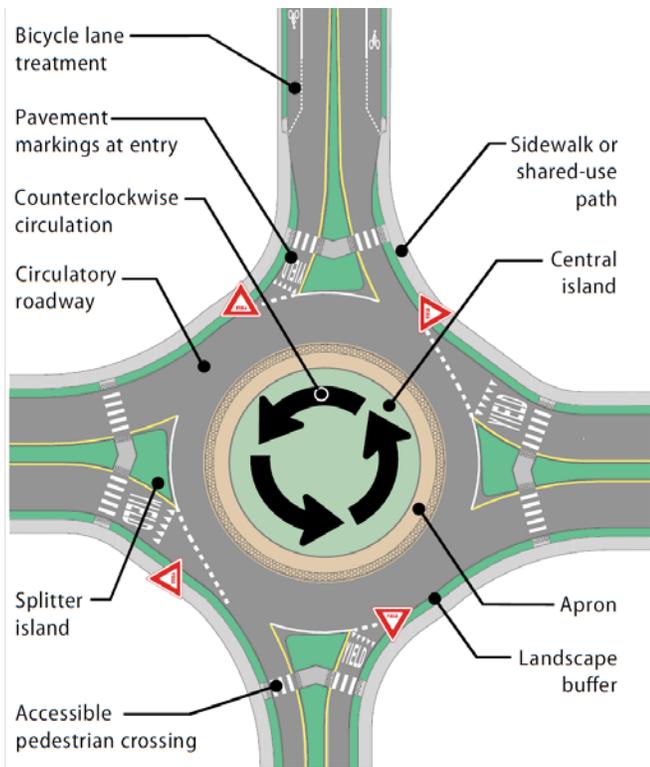
“Island Innovation @ the COOP” can become a focal point of research and theme around which these facilities can coalesce. It can both generate economic opportunity for residents and address the resilience needs of the USVI as a small, island developing state vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Examples of island innovation themes that could be pursued include the following:

- Information and communications technology and wireless telecommunications;
- Agro-tech, permaculture, and medicinal herbs;
- Physical computing, Raspberry Pi and Arduino projects, and app development;
- Traditional trades, alternative construction, maritime, and renewable energy; and
- Business development, mentorship, and marketing.

- Rumer Drive/Alton Adams Drive/Weymouth Rhymer Highway;
- Alton Adams Sr Drive and Gertrude Garden Drive;
- Edward Wilmot Blyden Road/Veterans Drive/William G. Lewis Lane/De Beltjen Road; and
- Intersection of Fifth Street and Alton Adams Road to help alleviate congestion and improve school and staff safety during dropoff and pickup hours.

## Step 2: Health Care Hill

The panel continued to move through the study area by transitioning to an area that includes both the site of the existing Roy L. Schneider Hospital and the Celestino A. White Senior Citizens Residence. A focus on this area is



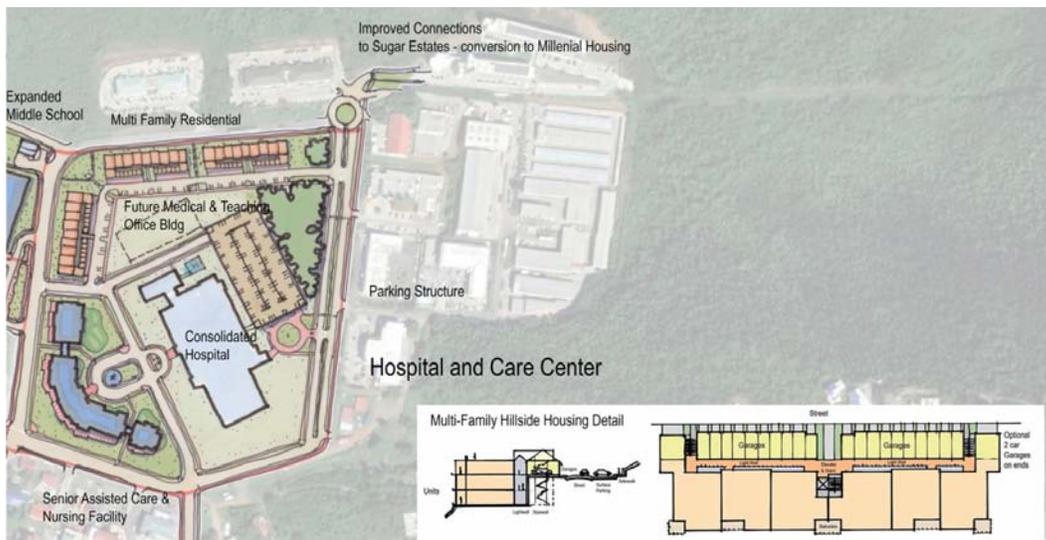
FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION

A roundabout is a type of circular intersection. Roundabouts have been proven safer and more efficient than other types of circular intersections.

another departure from the panel's core scope; however, the concentration of health care facilities and uses in this area represents an intriguing opportunity to reimagine the current site of the hospital as a fully integrated, health care-focused, mixed-use redevelopment site.

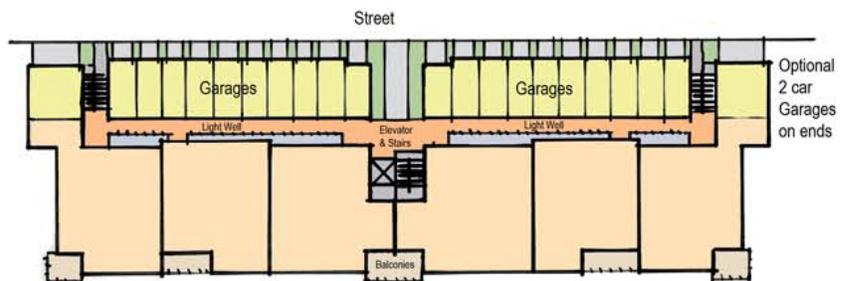
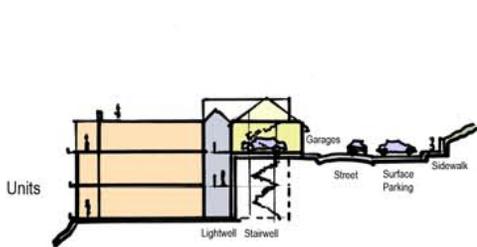
VIHA's local residents include a substantial number of seniors and other people with disabilities. A primary concern raised by residents here and on the mainland is the lack of in-home and residential services available for those requiring the most care. The island's aging population, departure of younger generations who might otherwise be able to take care of family members, and everyday challenges faced by people with disabilities and their caretakers warrant an increase in social services.

The panel recommends creating capacity for assisted living and support services in the study area. This can be supported by dedicating territory funding to social services such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, and in-home aides. Establishing a training program for medical aides, if no such program exists currently, and recruiting trainees from VIHA housing could ensure a qualified pipeline of talent while supporting the economic stability of residents.



DAN ANDERTON/ULI

Augment and consolidate the hospital site, adding complementary uses such as senior housing and accessory medical uses.



DAN ANDERTON/ULI

Multifamily hillside housing detail in section and plan view.

The panel recognizes the need for a revitalized hospital as a part of St. Thomas's ongoing recovery efforts. Further, the panel acknowledges that a need exists for additional senior-focused housing and health care infrastructure, perhaps in the form of assisted-living facilities with a continuum of services. Last, the panel identified an opportunity to incorporate a community-facing component within this redevelopment site that could incorporate activities related to economic development and food security, perhaps in the form of a community market in partnership with local farmers or the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The panel's development vision includes a consolidated Schneider Hospital surrounded by a new senior-focused assisted-living facility and new housing development. The housing envisioned here represents another potential opportunity for workforce housing targeted at the employee base from the surrounding health care uses. This development vision also includes an opportunity for a community market focused on healthy food access and food security to be hosted in the area between the hospital and new residential development. Furthermore, this development can be accomplished in conjunction with improvements to the road and pedestrian connections to the Sugar Estate to improve access and alleviate the existing safety concerns.

### Step 3: Oswald Harris Healthy Community

The next area of focus for the development vision is the Oswald Harris Court neighborhood, which the panel sees as an opportunity to create a new, mixed-use community that will replace each unit currently in the Oswald Harris Court,

add new affordable or workforce housing to the residential portion of the community, and incorporate new public and civic spaces organized around a theme of wellness, health, and active lifestyles. These public spaces could include recreational fields, tennis or basketball courts, and a recreation center with a pool or other athletic activities and programming. The primary goal for these public and civic spaces will be to serve not just the Oswald Harris community, but also the surrounding neighborhoods and even visitors and tourists.

Residents articulated a sense of loss for the Charlotte Amalie and Greater St. Thomas culture that used to be, where neighbors all knew and looked out for one another. The outmigration of families from the island, the generational shift to busier lives, and the lack of places for children to play and teens and adults to hang out were voiced as concerns. Additionally, current and former residents of public housing expressed a desire for green space integrated into the larger community, rather than set apart and reserved for VIHA tenants only. Redevelopment provides the opportunity to meet residents' desire for connection to one another.

To address the need for more community interaction, the panel proposes more indoor and outdoor multiuse public space that can be available for community meetings, birthday parties and family gatherings, cookouts, light exercise, after-school activities, senior programming, education, and job training. Seeking partnerships with nonprofit organizations such as Enterprise Community Partners and KaBOOM! to incorporate low-cost, fun play opportunities can go far in engaging community, children, and their caretakers.



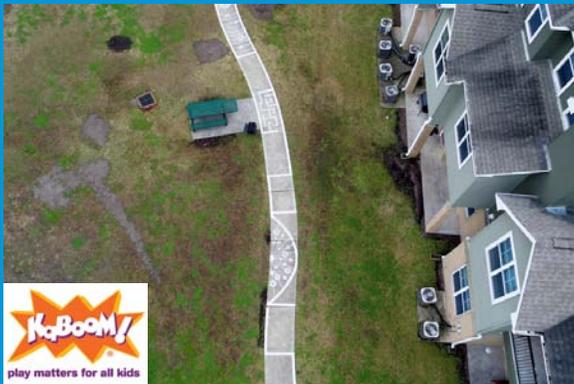
*The Oswald Harris Healthy Community: Generate multifamily housing density that complements its surrounding context while aligning key commercial assets along Veterans Drive and incorporating community facilities centrally.*

## PLAY EVERYWHERE CHALLENGE

KaBOOM! is a nonprofit that works to bring play into the lives of children, focusing on children living in poverty in the United States. KaBOOM! engages the public sector, the private sector, and community members to create play spaces for kids.

In 2016, KaBOOM! collaborated with private and public partners to hold the Play Everywhere Challenge, “to inspire cities, residents, leaders, and community members to design and implement creative PLAYces for kids.” Fifty winning proposals received a total of \$1 million to create their community play space.

For more information, visit [KaBOOM.org](http://KaBOOM.org).



*The OX4D project in Houston brought innovative sidewalks and an outdoor stage to a 250-unit public housing community. The modifications engage kids to encourage outdoor play. The project involved youth in the “design, development, and implementation” of OX4D, giving the youth a sense of ownership of the space and increasing community buy-in.*

The development plan includes a concept that has a mix of multifamily residential development, multiple play areas and recreational facilities, and a market plaza, all of which are intentionally located within the heart of the Oswald Harris community to invite neighbors and visitors from across the island into the new Oswald Harris Healthy Community. These facilities could also be considered as platforms from which supportive services for residents could be administered and in which community partners could reside.

### Step 4: Millin and Pearson Neighborhood Market

The neighborhood focus area within the panel’s development vision is a combined redevelopment of the Lucinda Millin Home

## PARTNERSHIPS

As a component of the panel’s efforts at compiling stakeholder feedback, a potential opportunity was identified for partnership with anchor institutions that are currently operating on the island and may be interested in pursuing creative strategies or joint ventures with VIHA as a component of a larger redevelopment plan. One example of a potential partnership is the Salvation Army, a longstanding and venerated community partner that has been providing services as a part of the St. Thomas nonprofit community.

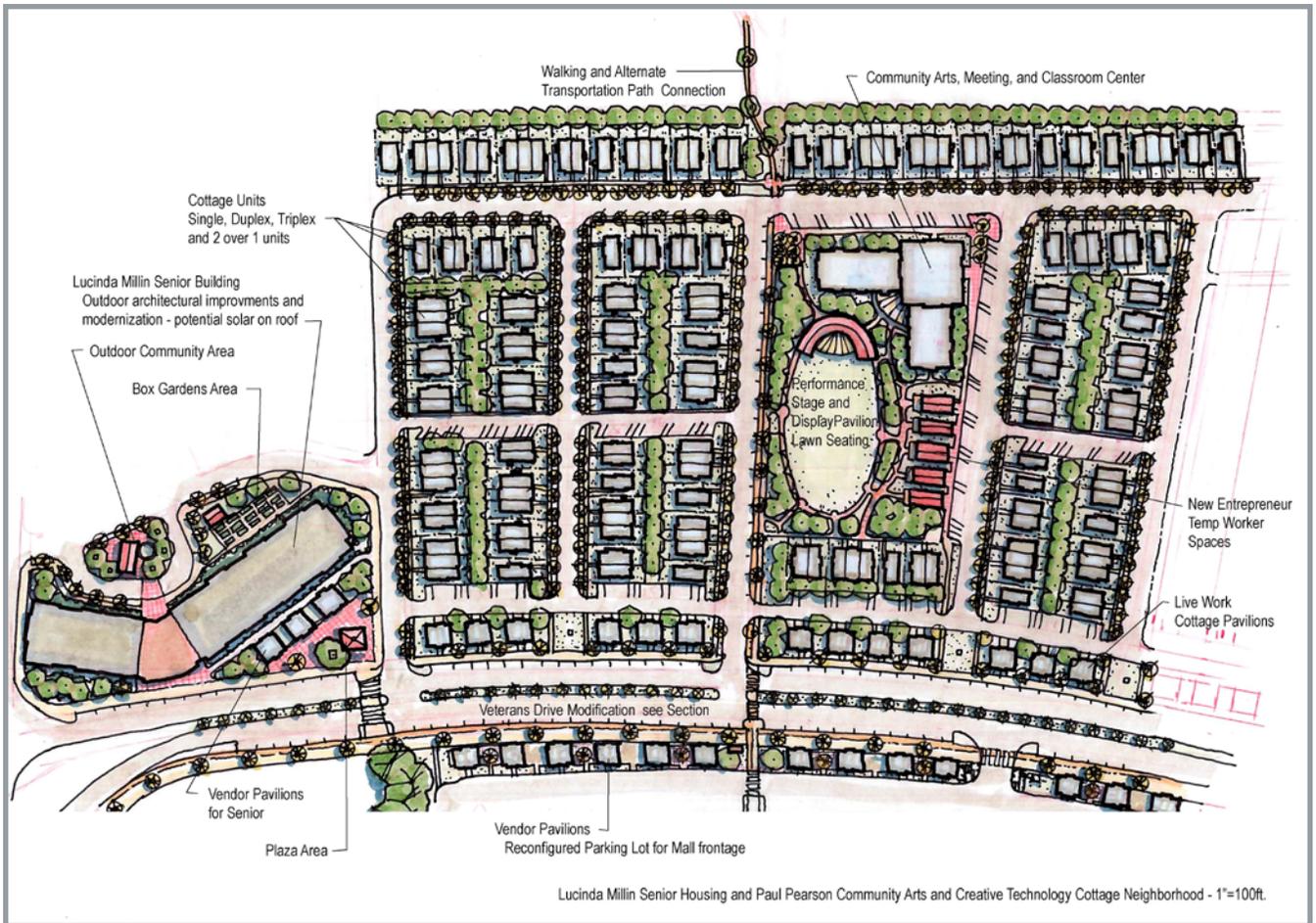
A potential partnership between VIHA and the Salvation Army might take the following forms:

- *Community center operations:* In the event VIHA develops a new community center as part of the Oswald Harris Healthy Community, the Salvation Army could be tapped to operate the facility. This partnership helps VIHA ensure that it is not burdened with the responsibility of ongoing operations of the center and relieves the Salvation Army of the burden of having to construct a new building.
- *Community kitchen and community market operations:* The Salvation Army currently operates a retail store in some of its existing locations as well as a commercial kitchen that provides meal services to the community. In the event this partnership approach is pursued, VIHA should consider incorporating space for both of these activities into the new building.
- *Workforce development activities:* The Salvation Army’s store and kitchen activities also present opportunities for workforce training to help residents pursue careers in retail or food service industries.

Modernizing housing and improving the lives of residents will be best achieved if supported by local social service providers who already work in the community. Partners like Catholic Charities and Lutheran Social Services are vital to ensuring no one falls through the cracks or is denied the opportunity to benefit from St. Thomas’s revitalization.

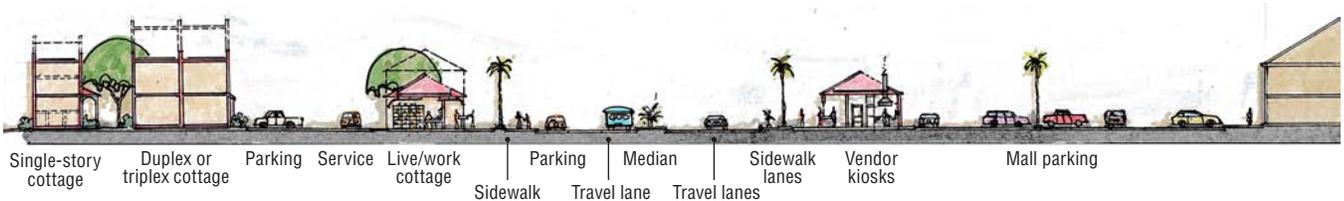
The panel recommends creating an advisory board of social service providers that will share information and make recommendations related to revitalization programs, including housing. The advisory board would be composed of volunteers who would formally transmit community feedback and foster a greater sense of representation. Participating organizations may include direct recipients of CDBG-DR.

senior building and the Paul M. Pearson neighborhood into a multigenerational, mixed-use community with a focus on integrated economic and workforce development initiatives. As with all of the development nodes included in the plan, the residential heart of the new Millin-Pearson neighborhood is the



DAN ANDERTON/ULI

*Millin-Pearson Neighborhood Market: Reposition and mirror commercial activity along Veterans Drive by promoting accessibility to and from the waterfront. Modernize Millin residential community and create outdoor improvements throughout the site.*



DAN ANDERTON/ULI

*Commercial corridor section.*

foundation of the plan. This development vision contemplates rehabilitation of the existing Lucinda Millin structure combined with a full redevelopment of the Paul M. Pearson site into a multigenerational, mixed-income community where all existing affordable units are replaced with new housing units incorporating affordable and workforce housing throughout.

The plan envisions placing an anchor building in the center of the combined Millin-Pearson neighborhood that can focus on economic empowerment and skills training for residents from across the island. In support of this vision, the plan incorporates a number of live/work spaces that can help both

foster economic development opportunities and provide housing for entrepreneurs. A highlight of this approach is the potential for locating this type of live/work development along Veterans Drive to help improve the connection between the Millin-Pearson neighborhood and the adjacent Havensight docks and commercial corridor.

## Step 5: Downtown District

Create a thriving 18-hour area with a mix of employment, visitors, locals, and residents by cultivating the pedestrian experience along Veterans Drive, thereby attracting more connectivity

between residential and commercial centers through investments in transportation, parking facilities, and shade structures. Enrich the Emancipation Garden park environment, thereby allowing for visibility along Veterans Drive and creating space for community and events sponsored by the BID.

The downtown district provides an opportunity to consolidate government functions, though a location is not specifically recommended; one campus would encourage collaboration between government agencies and improve the delivery of services to local residents and businesses by reducing the number of cross-town trips needed when interfacing with government agencies.

## Placemaking and Mobility

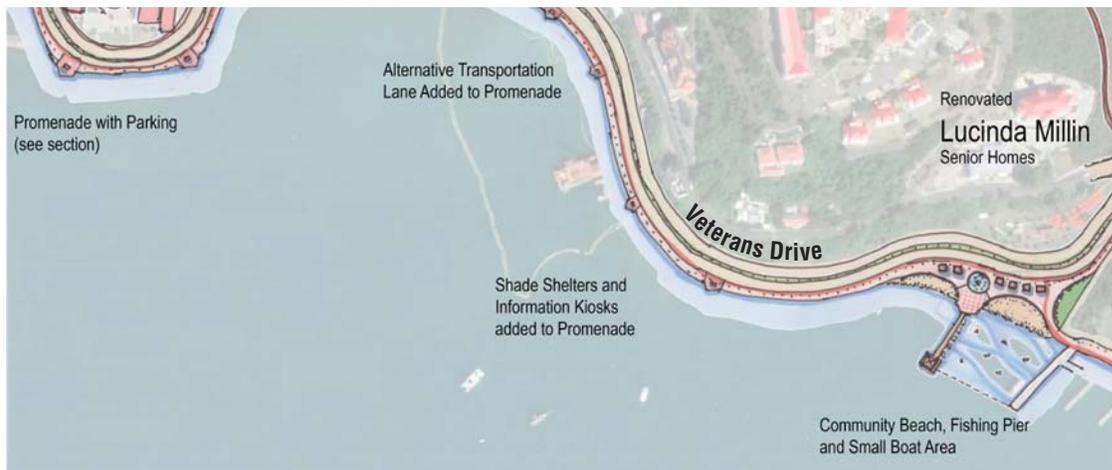
Given the analysis of the built environment and the panel's vision, any effort moving forward will involve a major shift in practices to leverage key opportunities to use cultural themes and design principles to tie the areas of Charlotte Amalie, Havensight, and the VIHA properties together and brand them as a unique location.

The recommendations for placemaking and transportation enhancements are based on the following themes:

- Emphasizing the unique culture of St. Thomas through both the built environment and the enhancement of



DAN ANDERTON/ULI



DAN ANDERTON/ULI

*Downtown District: Cultivate the pedestrian experience along Veterans Drive, thereby attracting more connectivity between residential and commercial centers by investments in transportation, parking facilities, and shade structures. Enrich the Emancipation Garden park environment, allowing for visibility along Veterans Drive and creating space for community and events sponsored by the BID.*

cultural, community service, and arts programming; safety for all transportation modes; improving walkability and encouraging alternatives to travel by personal vehicles; and reducing vehicle congestion.

- Increasing equity by reducing reliance on personal vehicles, enhancing connections between neighborhoods, and improving quality of life for low-income and vulnerable populations.
- Enabling USVI to be eligible for federal transportation funds for transportation alternatives.
- Improving bike and pedestrian facilities or active transportation options that will also improve health outcomes.

## Placemaking

To promote a sense of place and improve the quality of life for low- and middle-income residents, the panel proposes a redevelopment plan focused on four government-owned sites: Oswald Harris Court and Lucinda Millin Home, Paul M. Pearson Gardens, Roy L. Schneider Hospital, and Lockhart Elementary School and Charlotte Amalie High School. The improved connectivity, especially for nonvehicular transportation options, as well as the distribution of activities and amenities within these neighborhoods, would improve community cohesion and reduce neighborhood rivalries by giving residents constructive reasons to go to other neighborhoods.

Tourism needs to be brought to downtown, thereby creating nightlife and becoming more extended than just cruisers there for the day. This area presents a prime opportunity to articulate and celebrate St. Thomas's cultural identity. The panel recommends implementation of an ambassador program through the community proposed BID to help tourists make their way from Havensight to downtown, provide information on attractions and local cultural features, and clean up litter.

To truly enrich the activity experience, the panel recommends a robust programming effort. Programming can be supported through partnerships between social service agencies, schools and vocational agencies, and other community agencies to provide multigenerational appeal. Ideas provided in community feedback sessions include having cosmetology students visit senior housing to do residents' hair and creating programs to allow young people to fulfill required community service hours providing services for the elderly such as meal preparation, cleaning, and companionship.

Look for opportunities to create neighborhood community gardens in open space or on rooftops of multifamily housing. Partner with farmers to provide programming in the schools and communities to teach about agriculture, food production, and traditional foods. Community gardens would improve health outcomes by making fresh fruits and vegetables easily accessible to residents as well as improve resiliency by reducing reliance on imported food. With buy-in from the business community, this program could be expanded to commercial buildings and shopping centers to provide a source of produce for "farm to table" dining in local restaurants.

Create partnerships with the Virgin Islands Council on the Arts (VICA) to create new and enhanced programming in the visual and performing arts. This partnership could build on existing programs and cultural assets such as the Rising Stars Steel Drum Band and Sunday concerts at Emancipation Garden. The proposed development plan provides ample space for expanded programming, including auditoriums, studios, classrooms, and rehearsal space.

Through partnerships with VICA, local radio stations, or other community organizations, create programming to allow local residents to share stories that reflect the history and culture of St. Thomas and Charlotte Amalie. This program should leverage radio and internet technologies to record the oral history and stories of the local population for posterity and to make the stories and history of the island's people accessible to a broad audience.

Through the Department of Sports, Parks and Recreation, create youth and adult sports leagues as well as classes that focus on traditional crafts (such as basket weaving and broom making), the culinary arts, and environmental education. Although much of this expanded programming would likely cater to local populations, an opportunity exists to provide "one-off" classes in crafts and environmental education to tourists and visitors.

Create cultural activities and classes for the local Hispanic population, including both Spanish-language programming and programming that celebrates the culture and heritage of Hispanic residents.

Implementation of placemaking should involve a comprehensive wayfinding system. Implement signage with a unified theme throughout Havensight and Charlotte Amalie, as well as assets such as parks and shopping centers within a broader area. Include maps and distances to attractions to guide visitors,

particularly those arriving on cruise ships, out of the Havensight area and into downtown Charlotte Amalie.

## Transportation

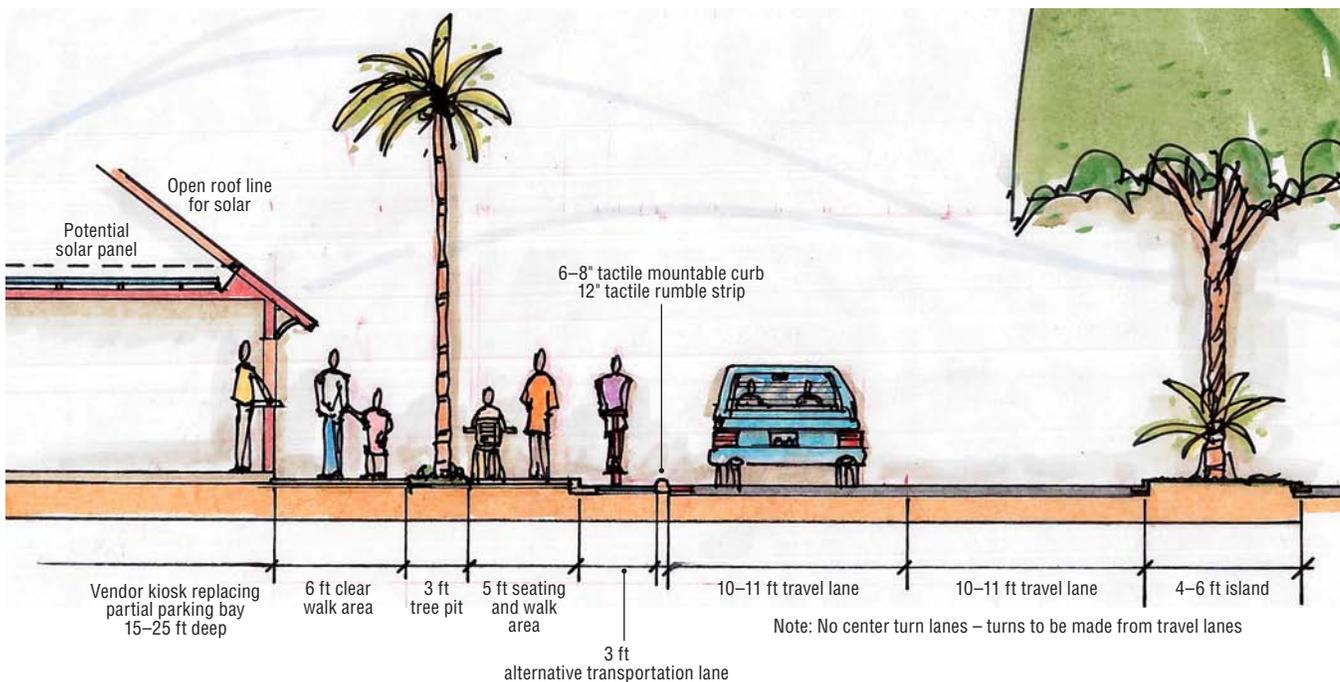
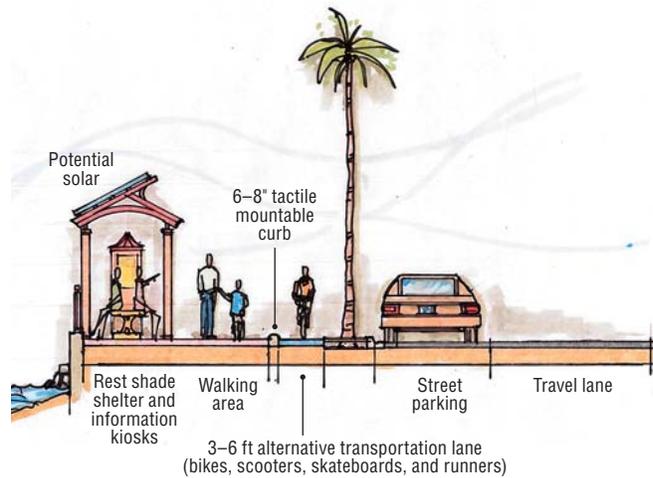
To provide an equitable transportation system, roads within the study area should have sidewalks along at least one side of the road. Prioritize areas with “missing” connections, where short segments of roads do not have sidewalks but adjoining segments do. These are inexpensive and quick projects and would substantially enhance connectivity and safety in the short term.

To ensure adequate capacity and pedestrian safety, sidewalks should be at least six feet wide and wider in areas with heavier volumes, such as Main Street and Veterans Drive. Add minimum six-foot-wide sidewalks along both sides of Perimeter Road between the Sugar Estate and Weymouth Rhymer Highway. Incorporate “guts” (intermittent waterways) and other stormwater management infrastructure into these pedestrian facilities. The panel recommends considering using permeable pavers to reduce stormwater runoff.

To create improved connections for bicycles, the panel recommends implementation of a districtwide bike route network. Separate lanes from vehicular travel lanes could be supported using one or more of the following strategies:

**“In the past, families probably owned one car per family, some none. Most families lived in the adjacent communities to downtown such as Savan or Garden Street [and] therefore walked to work or to the grocery stores, etc. Now every family has two to three cars per household, the demand for parking has tripled, and nothing substantial has been done to mitigate this problem.”**

—St. Thomas resident



*Veterans Drive sections. The panel recommends that the city enhance the built environment and encourage pedestrian activity through introduction of amenities such as rest shade shelters, as well as information and vendor kiosks. An open-space environment should be encouraged for multiple users by allowing separate lanes for walking, alternative transportation, parking, and automobiles.*



LAURA MAGRUDER/UUVI

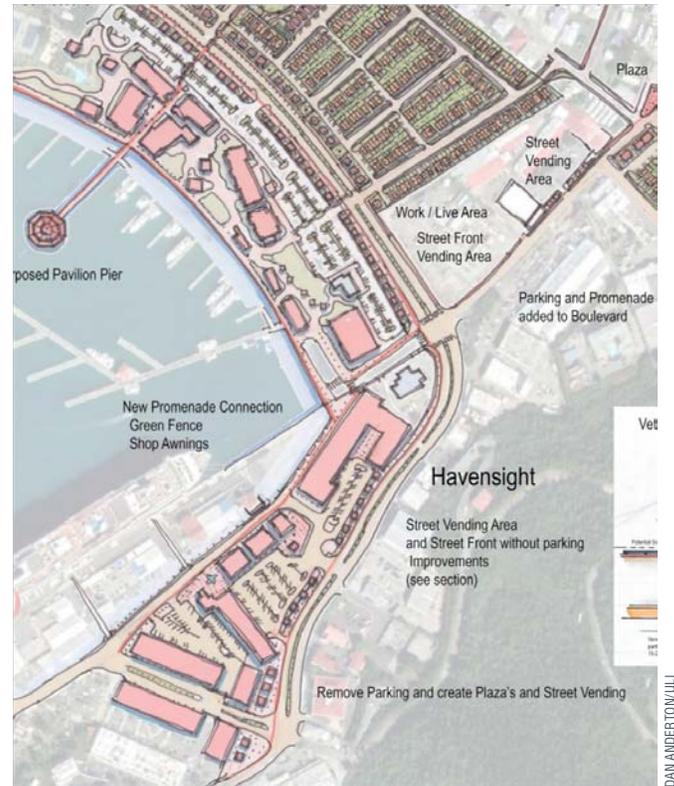
A local bike-sharing station is currently located near the cruise ship dock.

placing street parking between vehicle travel lanes and bicycle facilities, creating physical barriers such as landscaped strips and bollards, or placing rounded curbs between co-located bike and pedestrian facilities. Lanes for bicycle transportation could be open to other nonvehicular and nonpedestrian modes of transportation such as skateboards, rollerblades, and scooters.

Because of the narrowness of Main Street, the panel recommends prohibiting bikes because implementing transportation facilities that would safely separate bicycle from pedestrian and vehicular traffic would be difficult. The panel recommends the installation of bicycle racks in housing communities, in commercial centers, and in community parks and open space along bike routes. Encourage local entrepreneurs to develop bicycle and scooter services, and provide areas in downtown Charlotte Amalie and Havensight for bike-share docking stations.

The panel recommends encouraging new transportation modes by partnering with local entrepreneurs or national companies to bring scooters to St. Thomas and developing a local ride-sharing system similar to Uber and Lyft. Implement a water taxi between Havensight, downtown Charlotte Amalie, and the Crown Bay Marina. Facilities currently exist at Havensight and Crown Bay for this transportation mode; the design of Veterans Drive could be enhanced to include a dock along the waterfront promenade. Any enhancements should consider using permeable pavers to reduce stormwater runoff.

The panel recommends reducing competition between Virgin Island Transportation (VITRAN) buses and Safari buses so they offer complementary, not competing, services. One potential option includes Safaris run along a fixed east–west route, similar to current operations, from Havensight, along Veterans Drive, to Crown Bay Marina, to the airport, to UVI and back,



DAN ANDERTON/UUVI

Cultivate an enhanced vending experience along the streetfront together with modifications to parking strategy and attention to treatment of pedestrian and bicycling infrastructure.

focusing on major destinations. This is a unique experience for visitors and tourists.

Through the taxi medallion system, ensure that Safari buses operate on these fixed routes and according to a standard schedule with short and predictable headways. VITRAN buses could then focus on “transportation deserts” and “local” routes through neighborhoods, running expanded evening and weekend service hours. This presents an opportunity for leverage with vocational training and other workforce development tools to create mobile phone applications to track VITRAN and Safari buses for riders.

All approaches to the downtown district should include a parking management strategy. The panel recommends implementation of metered street parking in downtown Charlotte Amalie. A parking management strategy can consider implementing citywide parking zones with set parking fees, and time and vehicle-type restrictions to manage parking demand and encourage alternatives to personal vehicle use. Consider allotting free or low-cost permits to ensure accessibility for residents and small business owners. Efforts can exempt residents and small business owners from fees by providing permits such as stickers or hanging tags for their personal vehicles.



Regional connectivity of Charlotte Amalie, Havensight, and VIHA sites to the greater waterfront along Veterans Drive supporting west–east connectivity and investment.

Include structured parking under buildings for new construction to create more resilient buildings by raising habitable space above flood zones. Place parking structures and surface parking in the interior of city blocks, with buildings sensitive to the historic context surrounding and fronting the streets to mitigate the visual impact.

### Summary

The panel’s recommendations highlight tangible ways to remove barriers to progress, some of which have been in place in USVI for quite some time. Some of these barriers are physical—like the need for road and sidewalk improvements; some are institutional—like the need for more consistent and reliable governmental enforcement mechanisms; some are social-emotional—like the lack of trust and the assumption that residents’ needs will never be heard. These recommendations and the panel’s plan highlight ways for VIHA and the USVI government to better connect its residents to much-needed services through partnerships with outside entities and organizations.

Whenever possible, the plan attempts to apply a comprehensive and consistent formula of neighborhood-focused development to each component of the study area. Each sector receives as many of the key building blocks of the formula as possible,

which include uses, programming, and supportive services for residents and visitors. Each area was also intentionally tailored to have a unique character that sets it apart from all other sections of the study area and provides assets and amenities to serve its residents and attract visitors.

The goal of this approach is both to strengthen each individual neighborhood by providing the building blocks it needs to thrive and to knit together a broader tapestry of a whole community that stretches the entire length of the study area from downtown Charlotte Amalie on the east, Oswald Harris Court on the west, Havensight on the south, and Charlotte Amalie High School on the north, and reconnects the full area. If this reconnection can be accomplished and complemented by improved mobility and access tools, it would make for a larger community where all residents and visitors who find themselves inside the study area can feel truly connected to each aspect, each asset, each corner, and each component.

Overall, the conceptional vision provided by the panel together with key recommendations on transit and mobility offers the building blocks to equitably revitalize the housing and businesses of the study area and create an opportunity to leverage this investment for greater connectivity along the Veterans Drive corridor and lead to future investment toward the port and airport to the west.



## Governance

**THE USVI IS ALSO FACED WITH STRUCTURAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL BARRIERS** to progress within the USVI government itself. Although many of these challenges are longstanding and neither the creation nor the fault of current government officials and administrators, they are real and prevalent, and the time for reforming, addressing, and restructuring them is now.

The need for reform in government is not a new concept in the United States on the local and federal levels and, from time to time, is simply a requisite to progress into a new stage. In instances such as this, where a broader context of disaster relief and recovery can and should provide a universal rallying cry, the intensity of the need can be a strong enough driver to open the door for change that might not otherwise be possible. Successful reform efforts are those that are able to recognize the opening, develop a shared vision around improvement and progress, and then execute on tangible, effective, and visible changes.

---

**“Many people, businesses, and government agencies have not received disaster assistance two years after the storm events. However, I am hopeful that with the assistance from the federal government and the resilience of Virgin Islanders, full recovery is not too far in the distance.”**

—St. Thomas resident

---

Some of the specific points of feedback that are worthy of consideration by the USVI government as areas to focus reform efforts include the following:

- Lack of coordination between government agencies;
- Location and status of VIHA in particular;
- Lack of coordinated land use planning efforts;
- Lack of watchdog entities and individuals;
- Lack of engagement as a fundamental principle and approach; and
- Lack of transparency.

As distasteful as some of the commentary about this fact may be, a tie exists between the challenge the USVI is facing in more timely access to federal dollars and this challenge related to governmental structural barriers.

The following sections provide suggestions to the leadership of the VIHA and the USVI government on how to address these issues.

## Renew Confidence in Leadership

In his first State of the Territory address, Governor Bryan acknowledged that the people of the Virgin Islands entrusted him with the “responsibility of ensuring the public good and improving the quality of life for all Virgin Islanders.” He further stated that he was looking forward to “capitalizing on the historic opportunities we have as co-equal branches of government to work together in setting the course for a brighter Virgin Islands.” The governor also delivered the sobering message that the state of the territory is distressed. That sentiment has been echoed by residents and elected officials throughout the panel’s interviews.

USVI residents are also ready for change and have given the Bryan administration that mandate. Residents expressed a desire to see an end to corruption and ineptitude. They expressed a longing to be engaged meaningfully in charting the future direction of VIHA and the local government. Residents want to be heard.

The panel recommends that VIHA and the Bryan administration increase the participation of residents in planning for housing and economic development issues in the territory. Residents should be engaged from the early stages of any proposed new development, and the final plans should reflect their input. Err on the side of overengagement.

One way to sustain community engagement is for the governor to create an office of community engagement. Many

jurisdictions have established such offices. In the District of Columbia government for example, the Mayor’s Office of Community Relations and Services (MOCRS) serves as the mayor’s primary constituent services organization by providing rapid and complete responses to constituent requests, complaints, and questions. This office is a key resource for the community because it supplies a direct link between District residents, their mayor, and the government of the District of Columbia. MOCRS staff attends community meetings, monitors electronic mailing lists, attends meetings of business groups, participates in resident council forums, and attends many other community engagement forums.

## Engage the Right Talent

The residents’ mandate extends to a sentiment of disgust at the ineptitude and unprofessionalism of the labor force in both the public and private sectors. VIHA and the Bryan administration should make hiring the right people, regardless of political affiliation, a priority. Like many other jurisdictions, the territory struggles with a number of underperforming civil servants who are hard to terminate because of antiquated personnel rules. Jurisdictions like New York City and the District of Columbia are constantly pushing reform through classification and compensation efforts.

In the early 2000s, D.C. mayor Anthony Williams implemented a new civil service category called Management Supervisory Service (MSS) available to mid-level career service employees. MSS provided employees who opted into the new civil service category additional compensation in exchange for new performance metrics and disciplinary measures.

MSS appointees are selected from the most qualified applicants, based on specific job requirements, with special consideration to veterans and D.C. residents, although District residency is not required. Employees in the MSS serve at will. Those appointed to the MSS enjoy the benefits of a separate, more competitive pay structure and are offered a targeted training curriculum with courses on performance management and evaluation, human resources systems, and leadership development.

The territory’s civil servants fall into five categories: classified, unclassified, part time, per diem, and temporary. The largest category at 71 percent is in the classified category. Classified workers enjoy the same benefits of overtime, progressive discipline, and other civil service protections as their counterparts on the mainland. As in other jurisdictions, incentives and disciplinary measures are not aligned to

create performance management systems that reward good performance or make it easy to relieve chronically underperforming employees of their positions. The panel recommends the governor reform the classified employees civil service category by creating a new at-will category of mid-level management workers. This classification should extend to equivalent employees in independent agencies like the VIHA.

The Bryan administration should provide incentives to keep youth graduating from UVI in the territory and attract Virgin Islanders from across the diaspora to return home. Incentives could include tuition forgiveness for people returning to the territory after graduation, home purchase assistance, matching the salary of offers from mainland employers, and offering college scholarships to graduating high schoolers in exchange for three to five years of service within the territory.

An important component of any economic development strategy will be preparing the local workforce for the jobs of tomorrow and creating the business of tomorrow. The panel recommends the Bryan administration strengthen vocational education with a focus on traditional industries such as construction, hospitality, and agriculture, and emerging industries like technology, solar, and wind technology.

## Improve Coordination among Agencies

VIHA plays a critical role in the territory's economic development and recovery. As a semi-autonomous agency, VIHA receives policy direction from a board of seven commissioners, three appointed by the governor, two by residents, and two who are ex officio members. Despite its semi-autonomous status, VIHA depends on other government agencies to achieve its mandates. These agencies include the Department of Human Services to provide social services to residents, the Department of Sports, Parks and Recreation to provide recreational outlets for housing authority residents, and other government entities.

The panel believes that VIHA's mission could be better served if it worked more closely with other economic development and housing agencies under the purview of the governor, who was elected with a strong mandate for change. Based on the panel's interviews, residents have extremely high expectations of him and his administration.

In other jurisdictions, the housing authority sits in a cluster of agencies to foster collaboration and leverage each agency's resources. In the District of Columbia, the housing authority, though an independent agency, is part of the economic development cluster and reports to the deputy mayor for

planning and economic development who is appointed by the mayor. In New York City, the NYC Housing Authority (NYCHA) sits in the cluster of the deputy mayor for housing and economic development. Agencies in the cluster include NYCHA, the Department of Housing Preservation, the Department of Parks and Recreation, the Department of Housing Recovery Operations, the Economic Development Corporation, and the Department of Planning.

This kind of agency clustering enables the leader of the jurisdiction to provide strategic guidance, coordinate the delivery of services in a seamless manner, and leverage the talents and finances of all agencies to serve the community better. With the large amount of disaster recovery funds earmarked for the territory, including VIHA, the governor should coordinate the receipt and spending of those funds.

The panel recognizes the governor's work in implementing the Office of Disaster Recovery (ODR) within the Housing Finance Authority. ODR works on applying for and securing federal funding in addition to economic development, housing repair and replacement, health and human services, workforce development, and general community recovery.

This structure uses ODR as the resource for bringing disaster recovery, economic development, and housing development together. Collected, this bureau has broad responsibility for collecting, monitoring, and directing cohesion and implementation of government agencies and private-sector business and nonprofits in the recovery effort.

The panel recommends that the governor consider an expanded need for coordination of functions within all agencies that affect economic development and disaster recovery, implemented through a cluster reorganization. The new cluster of agencies should report to a newly appointed cabinet-level position with responsibility for supervision and coordination of the functions of the agencies in the cluster.

The following agencies are candidates for the new economic development and disaster recovery cluster:

- Department of Tourism;
- Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR);
- Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs;
- Virgin Islands Housing Authority;
- Bureau of Economic Research;
- Virgin Islands Water Authority;

- Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority;
- Public Finance Authority;
- Economic Development Authority; and
- Office of Disaster Recovery.

While recovery funds are available, the governor's appointee to lead the economic development and disaster recovery cluster will be responsible for maximizing the territory's collection of disaster recovery funds and reporting on the use of those funds. The cluster will ensure projects are implemented congruent with the governor's vision for economic development and placemaking. This collaboration will ensure VIHA resources are used to benefit the broader USVI community. At the end of the day, the governor will be held accountable for changes resulting from VIHA's rebuilding efforts, so it will serve him well to be at the planning table.

The panel recommends that VIHA should pause its rebuilding efforts to facilitate comprehensive planning for VIHA properties and other assets in the study area. This planning must be done in collaboration with the Office of the Governor, the Department of Education, Schneider Regional Medical Center, DPNR, WICO, the Department of Public Works, the Department of Sports, Parks and Recreation, and EDA. Comprehensive planning will allow the territory to maximize disaster recovery funds and allow VIHA to leverage other financial resources and planning tools available in the Bryan administration.

## Strengthen the Comprehensive Planning Function within the Territory

A comprehensive plan or master plan is a document designed to guide the future actions of a community or city. It presents a vision for the future, with long-range goals and objectives for all activities that affect local government, including transportation, utilities, land use, recreation, and housing. Comprehensive plans typically encompass large geographical areas, cover a broad range of topics, and extend over a long-term time horizon.

While the panel understands actions are pending in the legislature to adopt a version of the form-based code developed in 2012 for portions of Charlotte Amalie, the USVI does not have an updated comprehensive plan. Although form-based code is a positive step, it does not replace the need for a comprehensive plan for the territory.

The last updates to the Comprehensive Land and Water Use Plan, along with a new Virgin Islands Development Law, were

prepared in 2003. Since then, however, neither the plan nor the accompanying development law have been adopted by the legislature.

A number of stakeholders point to the merger of the Department of Planning and the Department of Natural Resources in the 1980s as a key marker initiating a breakdown in the comprehensive planning function. The combined DPNR is a fairly large department with staff organized in 11 different divisions, ranging from building permits to environmental protection to historic preservation. According to stakeholder interviews, the majority of the work appears to be regulatory and reactive at best rather than proactive.

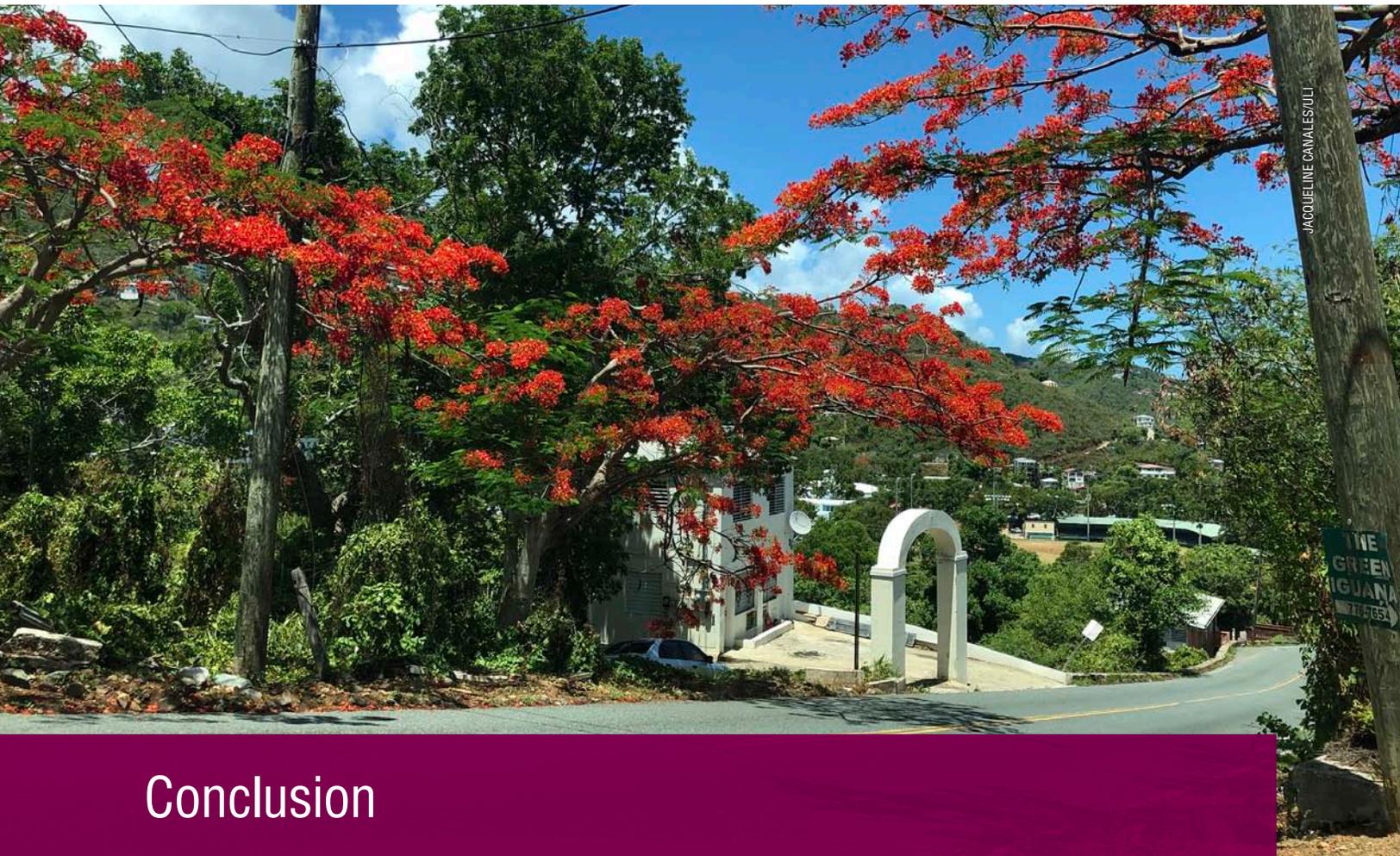
Furthermore, in 2009 an assessment of the Zoning and Subdivision Code in the Virgin Islands conducted by Rutgers University referenced the lack of land and water use planning and/or insufficient planning as a contributing factor to inappropriate development, land use conflicts, contamination of surface and ground water, erosion, increased flooding, gutter and drainage fillings, uncontrolled and excessive exploitation of natural resources, destruction of plant and animal habitats, declines in productivity of the marine environment, pollution, and so on.

At the same time, a number of DPNR staff, community leaders, developers, environmental groups, and others felt that the land development regulations were deficient and that a plan was needed to establish policies to guide the legislature's and DPNR's decision-making on development decisions.

These same issues persist today, with numerous disconnected spot-planning efforts by individual agencies, random charrettes, and other land/water use projects being initiated across the island without comprehensive guidance and integration. This leads not only to the possibility of inefficiency, waste, and increased cost, but also to a lack of leverage and an inability to frame a larger, cohesive vision for the community.

The panel recognizes the current and ongoing effort by the governor with assistance and funding from FEMA in establishment of a task force of qualified planning professionals and legislation drafters to review and revise the zoning, building, and permitting codes, including the form-based code.

Given the potential for increased development, the panel recommends that the territory continue these efforts and consider strengthening the DPNR's focus, increasing the number of long- and short-range planners in the department, and updating the current planning document.



JACQUELINE CANALES/STOLI

## Conclusion

**IN 2017, THE USVI SURVIVED TWO INTENSE HURRICANES**, battered and bruised, but resilient. In 2018, residents of the territory elected Albert Bryan Jr. as their new governor. He was elected to bring change to the territory, lead the rebuilding after the devastation of the hurricanes, and restore confidence.

Residents are eager to put the history of financial structural imbalance, poor and expensive power supply, the high cost of housing, poor physical and mental health care and health outcomes, and high unemployment behind them. Residents are also demanding the creation of a better environment for businesses to thrive, better coordination between government agencies, improved leadership and responsiveness of government, sustained engagement with the government, investments in workforce development, growing the private sector, and strengthening of cultural norms and traditions.

The USVI is facing pressing and critical areas of need and in many areas related to the panel's analysis, both within the study area and across the island, the time for action is now. The panel

recognizes the need for a coordinated and strategic recovery effort because a lack of collaboration among and between the many agencies responsible for executing the recovery plans can easily result in wasted resources, engender missed opportunities, and create openings that can be exploited by unscrupulous actors eager to capitalize on and profit from the recovery.

To be cognizant of and responsive to the tension between the need for immediate action and the need for deliberate and thoughtful planning and coordination, the panel has proposed a suite of recommendations that can be effectuated over a range of time periods as outlined in the accompanying chart.

## Timeline for Proposed Panel Recommendations

| Immediate (0–90 days)   | Short term (0–12 months)   | Medium term (12–24 months)   | Long term (more than 24 months)  |
|---|--|--|--|
| Actions that can be started immediately and completed in 2019 | Actions that can be started immediately and completed by the third quarter of 2020 | Actions that require additional funding sources or the completion of contingent activities before starting | Actions that require additional analysis, more significant structural change, or the removal of material existing barriers before starting |

Source: ULI.

Ultimately, the panel’s recommendations are only effective if they are actually adopted and implemented by the USVI government. The panel recognizes that, for many of these recommendations, even if sincere support exists for moving forward, significant existing structural inefficiencies, impediments, or other barriers could make the implementation process difficult and time consuming.

Some of these impediments have to do with access to the recovery funding that has been contemplated, and in some cases already approved, by HUD, FEMA, and other federal governmental agencies. To this point, the panel acknowledges that recent actions by leaders within the federal government are neither helpful nor encouraging in terms of the level of reliance that the USVI government might be expected to have regarding

future funding amounts or timing. Nevertheless, these sources of recovery funding are still available and, ultimately, can be relied upon to arrive eventually in substantial amounts and with a level of flexibility and accessibility that will allow them to be used by the USVI government for many of the panel’s recommendations.

The panel believes that if the government partners with the community to make meaningful shifts in its economic, resilience, and housing policies, then St. Thomas and the USVI as a whole will be better positioned to strengthen and withstand challenges to their community.

# Appendix: Table of Recommendations

|                                | Recommendation                                      | Key players   | Funding source   | Time frame  |
|--------------------------------|---|---|------------------|-------------|
| <b>Resilience and Recovery</b> | Explore energy alternatives.                        | Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR), Governor's Office, and the legislature | CDBG-DR          | 18 months   |
|                                | Include resilient measures within new developments. | DPNR, Governor's Office, and the legislature  | CDBG-DR          | 18 months   |
|                                | Decouple and privatize portions of utility.         | DPNR, Governor's Office, and the legislature  | CDBG-DR          | 18 months   |
|                                | Restructure the Public Services Commission.         | DPNR, Governor's Office, and the legislature  | Municipal budget | 6–12 months |

|                                       | Recommendation  | Key players  | Funding source                 | Time frame          |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Equitable Economic Development</b> | Create a BID to support the revitalization of Charlotte Amalie and new created communities. | Downtown Revitalization Inc., Governor's Office, business owners, VIHA, USVI Senate                  | Tax assessment on businesses   | As soon as possible |
|                                       | Encourage Main Street owners to make residential space available.                           | VIHFA, Main Street property owners   | No additional funding required | 2 years             |
|                                       | Practice intentional workforce training and placement.                                      | Department of Education, Governor's Office<br>U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Labor | Local operating funds          | Now                 |
|                                       | Create training program for health aides targeted to VIHA residents.                        | VIHA, VIHFA, Department of Human Services, EDA   | CDBG-DR                        | 2 years             |
|                                       | Increase supply of building materials.  | VIHFA, VIHA, EDA, local suppliers  | CDBG-DR                        | 6 months            |
|                                       | Decrease cost of construction.  | VIHFA, VIHA, local suppliers, HUD CPD, HUD OGC, HUD OIG, HUD TA providers                            | CDBG-DR                        | 1 year              |
|                                       | Ensure CDBG-DR section 3 contracts benefit VIHA and other low-income residents.             | VIHFA, VIHA, Section 3 and other employers, Section 3 laborers                                       | No additional funding required | 6 months            |

(continued next page)

|                        | Recommendation  | Key players  | Funding source   | Time frame         |
|------------------------|---|--|--|--------------------|
| Housing Revitalization | Create mixed-income, mixed-use housing.   | VIHA, VIHFA, EDA   | CDBG-DR, CDBG-DR-MIT, HUD Public and Indian Housing annual grants, Low-Income Housing Tax Credits, New Markets Tax Credits | 8 years            |
|                        | Focus on revitalization without displacement.   | VIHA   | CDBG-DR, CDBG-DR-MIT, HUD PIH annual grants  | Through occupancy  |
|                        | Address blighted properties with rehab grants.  | VIHFA  | CDBG-DR  | 2 years            |
|                        | Address blighted grants with code enforcement.  | EDA, VIHFA, Senate, Governor's office, Judiciary   | CDBG-DR-MIT  | Through demolition |
|                        | Include assisted living and services in revitalized areas.  | VIHFA, Department of Human Services, Salvation Army  | CDBG-DR  | 8 years            |
|                        | Ensure that revitalized areas include play spaces for children.   | VIHFA, VIHA, Enterprise Community Partners, KaBOOM!  | CDBG-DR, philanthropic funding   | 2 years            |
|                        | Prioritize continuous community engagement.   | VIHA, VIHFA, EDA, tenants, community advisory board, St. Thomas diaspora   | CDBG-DR  | Through occupancy  |
|                        | Assemble/catalog all civic and social service-related services (public, private, and nonprofit) on one publicly accessible platform like the Aunt Bertha service platform.  | Department of Social Health and Human Services, Health Services key service providers, Municipal Information Management Department | CDBG-DR  | 12 months          |
|                        | Develop and pilot a "minimum viable" Virgin Islands social diaspora platform to communicate and connect to Virgin Islanders globally as outlined by the EDA.  | EDA, Municipal Information Management Department   | Foundation support   | 12 months          |
|                        | Explore creative ways to promote participation in informal sporting and social clubs, which have been an important element of social culture.   | Department of Recreation   | Municipal support  | 12 months          |
|                        | Support businesses, social and civic venues/activities that bring cross sections of Virgin Islanders together, like the Bordeaux Market, Tillet Gardens, etc.   | Department of Human Services, Department of Agriculture, Department of Recreation, others  | Municipal support  | 12 months          |
|                        | Partner with the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands to form a collaborative table or collective impact model (composed of CAC or PAC members) to prioritize and implement recommendations from the 2019 Community Needs Assessment. | Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands, Department of Human Services, CAC, PAC   | Foundation support   | 12–24 months       |

|   | Recommendation  | Key players  | Funding source  | Time frame      |
|---|---|--|---|-----------------|
| <b>Governance and Improved Coordination</b> | VIHA should pause its rebuilding efforts to facilitate comprehensive planning for VIHA properties and other assets in the study area. This planning must be done in collaboration with the Governor's Office and other critical partners. | VIHA, Governor's Office, Department of Education, Schneider Regional Medical Center, DPNR, WICO, Department of Public Works, Department of Sports, Parks and Recreation, EDA | Not applicable  | Now             |
|   | Create a Governor's Office of Community Relations.  | Governor's Office  | Local operating funds   | Within 6 months |
|   | Create a new at-will category of mid-level management workers. This classification should extend to equivalent employees in independent agencies like the VIHA.   | Governor's Office, Office of Personnel, Office of Collective Bargaining, Mayor's legal counsel   | Local operating funds   | Within a year   |
|   | Develop incentives to keep youth graduating from UVI in the territory and attract Virgin Islanders from across the diaspora to return home.   | Department of Education, Department of Labor, Governor's Office  | Local operating funds, Funds from the business community, Foundations | Now             |
|   | Establish a pool of incentives to help develop, attract, and retain a talented workforce.   | Department of Labor, Governor's Office, DRI, private sector, VIHA  | Local operating funds, business community, Foundations                | Now             |
|   | Tap into the USVI diaspora to enhance the workforce.  | Department of Tourism, UVI   | Governor's Office, Department of Education, Office of Personnel       | Now             |
|   | Establish a loaned executive program, accessing private-sector talent to fill hard-to-fill positions.   | Governor's Office, Office of Personnel, Business community, Foundations  | Business community, Foundations                                       | Now             |

(continued next page)

|  |  |   |  |             |
|--|--|---|--|-------------|
| <b>Governance and Improved Coordination (cont'd)</b> | Expand coordination through the clustering of all agencies that affect economic development and disaster recovery.   | Governor, Department of Tourism, DPNR, Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs, VIHA, Bureau of Economic Research, Virgin Islands Water Authority, VIHFA, EDA, Public Finance Authority, Office of Disaster Recovery | Governor's Office  | Now         |
|  | Update, reintroduce, and adopt form-based code legislation for Charlotte Amalie and critical adjacent areas.   | DPNR, Governor's Office, and the legislature  | Not applicable   | 6–12 months |
|  | Update Comprehensive Land and Water Use Plan.  | DPNR, Governor's Office, and the legislature  | CDBG-DR  | 18 months   |
|  | Review/update and adopt new development law (if applicable).   | DPNR, Governor's Office, and the legislature  | CDBG-DR  | 18 months   |
|  | Continue efforts to review and revise the zoning, building, and permitting codes, including the form-based code, through the staffing up and updating of the long- and short-range planning functions. | DPNR, Governor's Office   | Municipal budget, explore opportunities for executives on loan | 6–12 months |

Source: ULI.

# About the Panel

## Adam Weers

Panel Chair  
Washington, D.C.

Weers is a principal at Trammell Crow Company with over a decade of commercial real estate development and finance experience. He currently manages the Shops at Dakota Crossing, a 430,000-square-foot shopping center in Washington, D.C. The development's high-profile tenants include Costco, Lowe's, Dick's Sporting Goods, PetSmart, and Marshalls. Weers also manages the McMillan Healthcare Campus, a 1 million-square-foot component of the multiphased, mixed-use redevelopment of the former McMillan sand filtration site in Washington, D.C.

Weers has worked on a variety of projects and product types, including the St. Matthew's redevelopment in Southwest Washington, D.C.; Gateway Grand condominium in Ocean City, Maryland; Shirlington Village Condominium in Arlington, Virginia; and the acquisition and development of the 96-acre South Kitchener Industrial Park outside Toronto, Ontario.

In addition, he manages the company's New Markets Tax Credits platform, which has received eight allocations from the Community Development Financial Institutions Fund since 2004, totaling \$650 million, and has placed about \$600 million of those tax credits into real estate projects across the country.

Weers serves on Trammell Crow Company's Diversity and Inclusion Initiative Steering Committee, which is tasked with advising the firm's executive committee on matters related to diversity and inclusion and assisting in the creation of programs to attract more diverse pools of professionals, capital, and projects to the firm.

He has an MBA from Harvard University, a master's in financial accounting from Georgia State University, and a bachelor's in business administration from Morehouse College. He is a member of the Urban Land Institute and has been deeply involved in ULI Washington, including work with UrbanPlan. In 2014, he was recognized as one of Urban Land's 40 under 40, representing the best young land use professionals from around the globe.

## Neil Albert

Washington, D.C.

Albert joined the DowntownDC Business Improvement District (BID) as president and executive director in 2015. He is a former senior policy adviser for Holland & Knight's Public Policy & Regulation Practice Group.

Before joining Holland & Knight in 2011, Albert served as city administrator and as deputy mayor for planning and economic development for Mayor Adrian Fenty. Albert cofounded and served as chief executive officer of educational services firm EdBuild, in the District. He also served under Mayor Anthony Williams as deputy mayor for children, youth, families and elders and director of the District's Department of Parks and Recreation. Albert currently serves as vice president of the board of library trustees and chair of the facilities committee for the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library, located in the BID.

## Dan Anderton

Germantown, Maryland

Anderton has a design career of more than 30 years and has been directly involved in the creation of communities both nationally and internationally, covering all aspects of land use planning and physical design including comprehensive and master planning, urban and mixed-use design, entitlement site planning, redevelopment planning, affordable housing, rezoning, subdivision planning, community revitalization, main street retail design, wayfinding and signage, placemaking, parks and recreation design, and landscape architecture. He has proven project design experience in the applicability of planning, zoning, and subdivision, and he also has extensive experience working with stakeholders, local and state government development review processes, and creating effective working relationships with jurisdictional agencies, boards, commissions, and the public.

Anderton has a goal to create community environments that are memorable, comfortable, sustainable, and inclusive to a wide

demographic of visitors, residents, and business owners while also being marketable for both public and/or private developers. He takes care to ensure that a conceptual design's integrity, density, and sense of place are maintained through the planning process. By carefully planning floor/area ratio and densities, providing for a mix of diverse building and product types and phasing, and incorporating traditional and neo-traditional design styles, his community developments are poised to fulfill the needs of the market and a wide cross section of prospective renters, buyers, visitors, and shop owners.

He has been involved with, and completed, hundreds of projects involving direct interaction with citizens, developers, architects, planning boards, county councils, mayors, public utilities, transportation officials, and other involved parties. The juggling of everyone's interests throughout the completion of a plan or project is extremely important. His desire is to go through the design and planning process with the majority of stakeholders feeling as though they have succeeded in having their personal vision incorporated into the community.

Currently employed by Dewberry, a national planning, engineering, and architectural firm, Anderton is responsible for community planning and urban design within the company.

Anderton graduated with a bachelor's of landscape architecture and environmental planning from Utah State University in 1983 and with a master's of landscape architecture from the University of Illinois in 1985 with an emphasis on behavioral design and placemaking.

## Allison Anolik

Raleigh, North Carolina

An accomplished planner and project manager with 12 years of experience in environmental and transportation planning with a specialty background in GIS and graphic communications, in her current role, Anolik supports a variety of federal, state, and private clients, including GSA, NPS, DoD, NCDOT, and high-speed rail corporations, and is instrumental in the preparation of reports and documentation required for North Carolina SEPA,

NEPA, and NHPA compliance. Her expertise encompasses a broad range of disciplines, including environmental planning, transportation planning, land use planning, urban planning, GIS and spatial analysis, cartography, and graphic communications.

Anolik possesses strong leadership, management, facilitation, critical thinking, and strategic planning capabilities as well as outstanding written, oral, and graphic communications skills. She is passionate about leveraging collaborative teams to develop solutions to complex and challenging planning issues and communicating these solutions to clients, colleagues, and the public.

She holds a BA in geography from the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, Virginia.

## R. David Gibbs

Brooklyn, New York

Gibbs specializes in design, engineering, installation, and project management of photovoltaic, solar hot water, and wind systems, as well as education. He was introduced to sustainable design as a student at the Art Center College of Design in Switzerland and developed a passion for renewable energy and remote, off-grid living as the general manager of Susitna Energy Systems in Anchorage, Alaska.

He recently cofounded Brick by Brick, a social impact investment fund that is presently engaged in the post-Hurricane Maria rebuild efforts in Dominica. Gibbs is also a partner in the technology research and development firm T4D (Technology for Development) Laboratory. He was the executive director of the Coastal Marine Resource Center, as well as a founding member of Power Rockaways Resilience, honored as a White House Champion of Change for its relief work after Hurricane Sandy.

Gibbs created and co-wrote a proposal for the RISE:NYC Competition, which was awarded \$3 million from the Economic Development Corporation of New York City. He continues to foster the development of a local workforce and entrepreneurship, particularly in underserved communities; he

was an adjunct professor at New Jersey Institute of Technology, an instructor at Pace University (NABCEP PV Entry Level & PV Installation Certification Course), and a Green Jobs trainer at Solar 1.

He has a background in mechanical engineering and earned a bachelor's in industrial design from Pratt Institute. He is certified in various green construction methods, such as Passive House, and numerous U.S. Green Building Council GPRO classifications. Gibbs continually collaborates with nongovernmental organizations such as Engineers without Borders, Build.Found.Haiti, Youth Build International, Global Resilience System, and the Barbuda Research Complex, where he consults on resilient built environment and infrastructure projects in developing countries.

## Marion Mollegen McFadden

Washington, D.C.

McFadden serves as senior vice president of public policy and senior adviser, resilience, at Enterprise Community Partners. Previously, she served as deputy assistant secretary for grant programs at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

At HUD, she oversaw affordable housing and community development programs, including the Community Development Block Grant Program, the HOME Investment Partnerships program, the Housing Trust Fund, the Neighborhood Stabilization Program, and CDBG Disaster Recovery funds, including the recent National Disaster Resilience Competition grants. In this role she formed and facilitated multiple public/private partnerships, including with the Rockefeller Foundation, to support communities planning for disaster resilience, with the Silicon Valley-based company GitHub to bring tech education and resources to residents of public housing, and with the nonprofit organization KaBOOM! to create a design competition to retrofit cities and other built spaces to accommodate play for better health of residents.

She holds a JD, magna cum laude, from Howard University School of Law (2000) and a BA from Northwestern University (1994).

## Tyrone Rachal

Atlanta, Georgia

Rachal is president of Urban Key Capital Partners, which is a mission-driven, specialty finance advisory services platform with expertise in providing a range of financial services to highly impactful real estate development projects in distressed communities. He is also a principal of Red Rock Global and president of Red Rock Global Capital Partners where he has specific responsibility for directing all financial advisory services and private placement activity.

Before forming Urban Key Capital Partners and rejoining Red Rock Global, Rachal was managing director of redevelopment at Invest Atlanta. He had specific responsibility for managing, marketing, and overseeing the city of Atlanta's tax allocation district program and served as director for commercial, retail, and mixed-use projects applying for tax increment finance funding. Rachal also created and had the responsibility of directing Invest Atlanta's controlling entity interest as president of Atlanta Emerging Markets Inc., a New Markets Tax Credit program—certified community development entity and multiround allocatee (over \$200 million). Because of this specialized track record, Rachal recently launched Urban Key CDE to compete for NMTC allocation from the Department of Treasury Community Development Financial Institutions Fund.

He joined Invest Atlanta from Red Rock Global, which is an Atlanta-based real estate development and brokerage company he cofounded. Before that, Rachal served with the Private Equity Group of Merrill Lynch & Co. in New York where he had the responsibility of advising financial sponsors in the private placement of over \$7 billion of limited partnership interests to institutional investors. He also served within the Mergers & Acquisitions Group at Merrill Lynch & Co. in New York where he provided advisory assistance to Fortune 500 companies and financial sponsors in over \$5 billion of both acquisitions and divestitures.

Rachal is a graduate of Dartmouth College with degrees in economics and government, as well as the University of Chicago Law School and Booth School of Business, where he received his JD and MBA degrees, respectively. He currently serves as past chair of the Public-Private Partnership Council of the Urban Land Institute and was a participant in ULI Atlanta's Inaugural Center for Regional Leadership Development.





Urban Land Institute  
2001 L Street, NW  
Suite 200  
Washington, DC 20036-4948  
[uli.org](http://uli.org)