



| Committee on Disaster Recovery and Infrastructure

Legislature USVI

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0:00:00 the activities will be carried out in six phases under the resource conservation and recovery act subtitle d closed turf system of the united states environmental protection agency the system considers gas emissions slope integrity and soil erosion limiting storm water flow affecting groundwater surface water and environmentally sensitive places increases resilience to upcoming calamities. The project also calls for the use of the region south of the landfill to receive municipal solid waste. The area will be used until a new landfill is constructed. CDBGDR funds total approximately 46 million for the project. The project is currently in the application stage with a completion of construction anticipated for October 2023.

0:00:57 The Office of the Lieutenant Governor's Street Addressing Initiative. The U.S. Virgin Island Street Addressing Grid Master Address Repository System will be completed as part of the project, bringing the territory into compliance with recognized local and national and international standards the project will create more than 150 000 geocoded addresses points name all roads in the area construct street name signs and publish the maps release the office of the lieutenant governor will oversee and maintain the maps cdbgdr funds totaling 5.3 million are being considered for this project a notice to proceed was issued with a stakeholders project kickoff meeting held on september 22nd 2022 the anticipated project completion is in february of 2026. economic revitalization the neighborhood revitalization program the ihfa plans to continue the momentum of vision 2040 by developing a neighborhood revitalization program the neighborhood revitalization program shall consist of two eligible activities the building facade and streetscape enhancement and small businesses and entrepreneurship technical assistance program applicants interested in the building facade and streetscape enhancement must provide documented evidence their facility or building sustained physical damage by the 2017 Hurricanes Irma and Maria. The town of Charlotte Amalia, Christianstead,

0:02:44 Frederickstead, Kruseby and Coralby were identified as starting points for this initiative. Applicants interested in the small business and entrepreneurship Technical Assistance Program must provide documents their micro businesses

suffered physical and financial losses due to the 2017 storm. Startups created after the hurricanes are also eligible if they can show their creation was a result of the closure of a previous business of same owner after damage caused by the 2017 hurricanes. Technical applicants can also apply for SBETA's technical assistance program designed to support entrepreneurs.

0:03:34 The program's objectives are to promote the creation of low and moderate income jobs and rebuild the workforce employment loss due to the hurricanes. Technical assistance activities include but are not limited to development of business continuity plans or new business models financial management guidance and long-term recovery and sustainability plans the program will be funded with a little over 14 million dollars in cdbg dr funds the evi department of labor skills for today the project will provide very training opportunities including but not limited to the construction field for LMI residents low to moderate income residents in the territory by offering entry-level training in high-growth construction occupations based on current labor market information. The goal is to train 640 individuals over two years, a portion of which includes employment for those participating in work-based learning. Funding consideration is \$10 million in CDBGDR funds. To date, 285 have enrolled in the National Center for Construction Education and Research construction training territory-wide, with 125 completing the program and receiving certificates. The number currently enrolled in on-the-job training program, work-based learning, is 96. We are also excited to highlight that with the scheduled December 1st soft opening of the Westin Resort and Spa on St. Thomas, formerly Frenchman's Reef, our Skills for Today participants have the opportunity to

0:05:25 train the hotel staff in preparation and at no additional cost to the contract. The Virgin Islands Port Authority, Charlotte Amalia Channel Wycle Dredging Project, and crown bay east gregory channel dredging will allow larger ships to berth in the harbors of st thomas the funding consideration is 39.4 million in cdbgdr funds in june of 2022 the u.s department of housing and urban development hud deemed boat dredging projects ineligible for infrastructure program activities the ihfa recently appealed the decision requesting a waiver of eligibility for port enhancement projects we are awaiting a response public services and public facilities program lutheran social services of the virgin island sister emma cottage is a project geared toward replacing the current hurricane damage building sister emma cottage is a group home expected to serve up to 16 severely physically impaired children to provide a safe clean and comfortable living facility the funding amount is 2.8 million in cdbgdr funds the subrecipient agreement has been executed the project agreement and notice to proceed is pending the approval of the environmental process once that is completed project agreement and notice to proceed will be issued with an RFP sent out for construction services on may 31st 2022 the virgin islands housing finance authority announced the availability of cdbgdr funding under the public service and public facilities special needs housing program eligible applicants included entities who serve the vulnerable population such as non-profit organization government agencies and NGOs to ensure nonprofits have access to funding the goal is to fund those entities that may have been affected by the hurricanes or or were born from a need realized after the storms ensuring this 7.4 million in public services and special needs funding was made available the application submittal deadline was august 3rd 2022 applications were received from various nonprofits nine agencies have been selected and notice to proceed was actually issued yesterday non-federal cost share match program with a budget

0:08:07 of approximately 317 million the non-federal cost share match program is designed to assist state agencies public entities local nonprofit organization and other eligible applicants by leveraging CDBGDR funds with FEMA public assistance provided to the U.S. Virgin Islands to maximize, facilitate, and ensure recovery. In this program, CDBGDR funds are limited to covering the non-federal cost-share match portion related to FEMA-eligible project worksheets. VIHFA continues to work with the Office of Disaster Recovery and VITEMA to streamline the process our program payments will be reimbursed based on actual cost incurred the match program works in partnership with the office of disaster recovery and vitima to raise awareness of the requirements of the program to other government agencies and private sector entities wapa vihfa and JFL thus far has received the bulk of the local match, allocating \$96.2 million to date.

0:09:20 We anticipate a total of \$119.6 million in local match payments for the STEP program, composite poles, \$5,892 are installed, underground and underwater cables, and generators for WAPA. temporary hospital facilities, and the purchase and installation of 83 modular units at the Department of Education. With continued guidance, recipients are working to prepare and submit the paperwork necessary to comply with FEMA and HUD documentation requirements. Some of this documentation includes compliance with the Davis-Bacon Section 3 procurement, environmental, as well as HUD conditions. In addition to monthly training webinars, the local match program will conduct site visits and participate in procurement processes most recently two new staff members have been hired to assist the agencies and non-profits in this effort cdbg mit on july 1 the authority submitted our implementation of plan and capacity assessment for the community development block grant mitigation funding to hud when approved the authority will have access to a little over \$774 million in federal funding to execute disaster recovery mitigation programs.

- 0:10:40 It is anticipated that during the first quarter of fiscal year 2023, approval will be received. CDBG mitigation funding represents a unique and significant opportunity for the territory to carry out strategic and high-impact activities to minimize, mitigate or eliminate risk and reduce losses from future disasters. Further, it provides an opportunity to increase resilience through improved local planning protocols and procedures within the parameters and guidelines required by HUD. Our approach to implementing CDBG mitigation funding will be thorough, holistic, innovative and swift. To this end and in the interim, we have identified current key personnel that will support CDBG mitigation program from its inception, identified and scheduled the necessary preliminary training for persons that will assist in getting the program up and running, identified and begin engaging in holistic discussions with HUD partners and experts in the field to acquire the necessary technical training and support for the successful implementation and seamless development of the program. The CDBG MID funding and programs will provide many opportunities for the territory. I anticipate there will be a need to engage in extensive community education and awareness campaigns and initiatives, provide continuous training to staff and applicants that will administer the funds and programs, continuously reevaluate capacity and be open to and seek out experts in the field to help us to help ourselves. We look forward to providing periodic updates on our progress to this body. As discussed earlier, \$67.6 million supports the electrical grid improvements and with that we have recently amended our current contract with Tetra Tech to delineate the scope of work based on the electrical power system Federal Register notice these cdbgd electrical power systems enhancement funds offer an opportunity to support creative initiatives that will improve the grid's dependability resiliency efficiency sustainability and financial viability the next stage in the procedure is an approved
- 0:13:00 action plan which we anticipate having to hud by december 2022 the emergency rental assistance also known as ira the territory initially received 21.3 million during the first round of ira one allocation in march of 2021 and paid out 4 million in direct and indirect assistance to more than 700 household territory wide senators with the widespread financial strain brought by the global pandemic these funds offered critical assistance to those burdened with outstanding rental and utility obligations we know that when we came before you just about four weeks ago we had good news that we would have an additional 266 cases closed for an overall total of 745 cases resolved and announced that we had met that goal we are genuinely thrilled again to report that we have hit a new milestone 251 payments for a little over 2 million during an 11-week period to To date, more than \$5 million has been allocated for rental and utility assistance. In total, HFA and our contractor Plexos has processed 1,120 applications of the 1,461 cases submitted to final resolution.
- 0:14:24 Homeowner Assistance Fund. The Homeowner Assistance Fund was created under the American Rescue Plan Act of 21 to mitigate financial hardships associated with the coronavirus pandemic by providing funds to prevent mortgage delinquencies, defaults, and foreclosures among homeowners experiencing financial difficulty due to COVID-19, to qualify expense related to mortgages and housing. The territory was awarded a little over \$8.5 million. OMB has selected the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority to administer the Housing Assistance Fund program on behalf of the Territory. To receive the allocation of the HAF funds, the Territory developed and submitted to the Department of Treasury an action plan which describes the needs of homeowners in the jurisdiction, the design of the proposed program to be implemented using HAF funds and performance school pursuant to the regulations homeowner households with incomes of up to a hundred percent fifty percent of the area median income are eligible however the regulations further require that at least sixty percent of HAF dollars must assist homeowner households with incomes at or below a hundred percent area median income once implemented the HAF program will assist homeowners in mitigation financial hardship by eliminating or reducing their mortgage loan areas and thus their housing vulnerability and help the lenders recoup outstanding payments. The RFP was published on August 31st, 2022, and the authority conducted a pre-bid conference on September 15th. Due to the questions posed, the bid submission deadline was extended to October 11. Once bids are received, the Evaluation Committee is prepared to meet and vet each proposal. Based on the Territory's HAF
- 0:16:31 Action Plan, the authority anticipates assisting 300 homeowners through various programs established under the HAF. These include mortgage payment assistance, mortgage principal reduction, Reclosure Prevention and Delinquent Property Tax Assistance. The deadline for use of funds is September 2025. CDBG-CV and ESG-CV. Under the CARES Act, jurisdictions were awarded Supplemental Community Development Block Grant funds specifically to prevent, prepare, and respond to the coronavirus pandemic these allocation are referred to as cdbg-cv to diminish them to distinguish rather them from the regular annual cdbg allocation the territory was awarded 2.8 million over three rounds of allocation an application cycle was conducted to identify projects to be funded under cdbg-cv ads soliciting proposals were published in all local newspapers of general circulation and posted on hfa's website 19 applications totaling 4.24 million were received public hearing to present proposal was held virtually on july 20th the team vetted all submission and approved six applications totaling a little over 1.9 sorry 1 million in funding solicitations for the second round began this month and a virtual application orientation was held will be held on october i'm sorry was held on october 4th any interested parties can still contact cdbg staff for more information all application must be hand delivered to hfa office

- 0:18:20 on a before friday october 28 4 pm the deadline for the use of cdbg cv funds is september 2026 funding allocations for the esgcv program total 2.2 million the amount of the allocations and based on formula determined by hud which recently released a new guidance extending the grant deadline to september 2023 over 700 000 has been spent to date esgcv funds may be used to prevent prepare for and respond to the COVID-19 crisis specifically for persons who are homeless or receiving homeless assistance or to expand homelessness assistance, homeless prevention activities to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19. A total of six organizations were funded for nine projects implementing various activities ranging from emergency shelter, homelessness prevention, rapid rehousing, street outreach, HMIS data management, and program administration expenses. Additional eligible activities include vaccine incentive, portable bathroom showers, and laundry service. Total ESG-CV funds obligated to date is a little over 1.7 million. Senators, this concludes my testimony but before I end I especially want to thank the entire VIHFA team who continues to work tirelessly on the mission of the authority while simultaneously working through our gains pandemics and more your hard work and dedication are noticed and appreciated I would also like to thank the HFA board of directors for its guidance and wisdom along with members of this body for their continued support in our efforts in disaster recovery. My staff and I are available to answer any questions you
- 0:20:24 may have. Thank you Interim Acting Director. Right? Interim Acting CEO. Interim Executive Director. Thank you. We'll begin with a round of 10 minutes each senator johnson good morning thank you very much my colleagues good morning to the testifier and morning to love the territory i am start out listening to that's fire intern director and everything went south when the ward vision come up because i have i've met with spending i've met with the prime director and this is one of the programs and that really happened and bring the people at the territory and still is um every time it rain i think about those folks with those homes and i have been fortunate that i went to some 20 homes and when i go to these homes when these constituents call it's very sad and it still is because every time it rain i think about them based on going to their home and in the condition that they're living every time it rains in the virgin islands those are the first set of people i think about because the conditions are not good this envision program we have to find some way somehow to step the pace up on this and i don't know what's the answer at this point in time but we must find ways of making these roads for these people be a faster path and get to be living in a more comfortable environment it's very sad i see washpan walk it all over our house
- 0:22:37 when you go in somebody bedroom and you can see the sky a couple areas and times i have got blue tops to help them because the top stem of time but the place is deteriorating fast that we can see it um commissioner i just want to ask a question because i'm you know someone sent me a document here they try going up on the website and the page the same page cannot be found do you do you guys have problem with your website at this time not to my knowledge not to my knowledge no well i i need words we're here for someone to run a quick check and and see what they get because this just happened within the last maybe five ten minutes the csc will that's a consist of these 30 members who will be making the final decision to select who will be the members for that csc that will be the housing finance authority we'll be making that final decision as to who correct as stated in the how far have you gotten as far as getting members or people applying what's the status where are you with it as we speak today again we just rolled it out we did um send some correspondence to the this the legislature as well as the office of the governor to get some individuals so they have um We've got some responses for them. It's just launched. We will have some advertisement out for individuals to apply.
- 0:24:15 So it is just recently launched. I had a meeting with you about maybe a month ago, maybe six weeks, and I brought up some constituents that had some concerns and issues. And I remember one of my constituents, we felt very good when I left your meeting. As of today, no one has reached to her home and gave her any update or any scope as to the status of what's going to happen. She's been living with her neighbor for just about from the time of the storm, relating to that house in Cal Cajun that we spoke about. But as of today, no one has reached out to that Envision program and what's the status on your home. So I'd appreciate if you could get some information for me, that individual.
- 0:25:11 Absolutely, Senator I will. And to the Chair, what I would like, if possible, can you provide a listing of the 39 homes under active construction and the listing of the 16 homes that have been completed um i i i definitely would like to see these zones because it's just alarming and i definitely would like to shoot a chair if we can provide a listing of the 39 homes under active construction and the list of the 16 homes that have been completed i would appreciate that there's a emergency home across from Anisope in St. Croix, what's the status of that emergency unit? There's about three units that should be under you guys' preview. What's the status at? I do have Ms. Johnson, Ms. Nicole, yeah, she's online. Ms. Johnson, can you go ahead and introduce yourself, take yourself off a mute, introduce yourself and respond to the Senator's question.
- 0:26:18 good morning senator nicole johnson manager of rental properties i'm trying to figure out what emergency housing units you're referring to in the anasope area can you say that again please what emergency housing three units that you're

referring to in st croix and the anasope area we have anasope that's directly across from public work up on the hill it's anasope units is about three units you know um i know that we have two buildings not three units okay probably could be two buildings then i i said three but it's probably two what's the status on that those emergency home the status of those emergency homes right now we're going through um the phase in which we're going through the procurement process to ascertain a contractor to repair those units the interiors of those units right now so it's not nothing is out and bid nothing is secure as as to when it will start nothing as secure as the one is going to start but it's in process and we're hoping to get it rolled out before the end of 2022. hi thank you very much and commissioner you spoke about the wood that that's in store and you spoke about st thomas and st croix and i i happen to drive passed alexander henderson on a regular base and and a lot of that wood is is deteriorating it's it's it's turning black either it's the treatment is being washed out or either mole is infesting it when i last have an inspection and done of that those woods to find out how much of the wood is still usable and how much is not Thank you for the question, Senator.

- 0:28:16 First I want to assure the public again and again that we will only be using lumber that is considered good on their property. We have hired recently a warehouse manager who is currently going through that process with some of our contractors. So when it's made available to us, I'm happy to make it available to you. I would appreciate that so I could have an idea as to how much of that wood, based on the amount of lumber that we have and how much of it is still available for use.
- 0:28:52 You spoke about Mount Pleasant. Of these seven new units, where in Mount Pleasant are we talking about? yeah spoke about seven homes senator let me get you a site map i don't have exactly where in mount pleasant at this time but you got some colleagues that um right unless give us some good No, let me provide that to you.
- 0:29:34 Thank you. Okay. I appreciate that. If I can, while I'm on your time, Senator, our website is up and running, so I'm not sure what the individual is logging on to or not able to have access to. I've been logging on to VI Housing Finance Authority and locking doors to affordable housing and it came up... One minute. An entire sheet came back saying it's page not found. So, I'll have them try it again. V-I-H-F-A dot gov. Excuse me? V-I-H-F-A dot gov. Okay. And I want to ask one question to wrap up. I saw some first-time eligibility terms and condition, and on one page I see income for saint croix and thomas and john i said income of 53 79 and 58 and then on the next site i see where it says uh income of 24 000 for a 215 000 mortgage income 21 000 with a mortgage of 192. what what is the difference here that we are seeing here because i this other site that that's other information that you have here with the wages of 24 21 and 33 are more low income and then i i see this different income on the other side about 53 000 for saint croix 79 for saint john and 58 for saint thomas and and the mortgage is is nearly close to the same in some area in the the same career is 216 and then 215 and then the saint john area it's 192 and then it goes up to 260 and then the saint thomas is 240 42 and then it goes to 231 so the the mortgage is nearly the
- 0:31:32 same but the the income is is greatly different senator are you referring to a page in my testimony this morning no on your site the eligibility for applicants for low income and that's not the VI housing site but one of your sites up with information for people applying okay those are figures are based on the part of I'm sorry those are based on the heart approved income limits So it would, based on how the public income limits for the area, so it would say like on St. Thomas is this amount, St. Croix is a different amount based on your income, like your area of medium income.
- 0:32:30 Yeah, and I understand that, but there's quite a difference in the salary based on what I what I receive on one stock you have salaries of 24, 21 and \$33,000 and then in the next area you have salaries of 53, 79 and 58. I'll get back. Yeah because it's possible we could be referring to a moderate income and above or that low to moderate income but I'm happy to have that discussion with you also you asked about um where in mount pleasant it's just right behind the via warehouse i know the area okay all right thank you very much thank you very much man to you thank you um senator johnson senator blighting points of information Thank you so much, Madam Chair. Good morning again to all. My point of information is to the interim ED. In respect to your comments made due to donor redevelopment, you said it's for the Tutu Hawaii residents. It's also, especially for the former donor residents and the Tutu Hawaii residents. That's my point of information.
- 0:33:49 And my point of inquiry, Madam Chair, is to the statement that my last colleague asked in respect to the lumber. And my question is, on the interim, it is stated that the hires are someone to manage those areas in conjunction with the contractor. But my question is, in respect to the contractor and the individual who was hired, do they have knowledge of that type of industry in terms of the material? Because if the person has said that the lumber is good to go and the contractor said they are not using them because they don't feel it's good to go, who makes the final decision in those instances? That's my question. That's my point of inquiry.

- 0:34:31 Which is why we've secured two other experts that can assist in construction, why we have the staff augmentation with Grant Construction as well, who has those construction experts. So they would be called in to assist if a decision could not be made right there. Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for that. Okay. I'm ready.
- 0:34:57 Okay. One quick, one quick minute, Ms. Clendenin, the Plexus, are they still under contract with you guys? They are. Are they leaving anytime soon? I hope not. Okay. Senator Blayden, you may proceed at this time with your ten minutes. Thank you, Madam Chair. Good morning again to my colleagues, listening viewing audiences, staff, central staff, good morning, interim ED, Clint Dillon, and your staff that there with you, and thank you for your in-depth testimony. But I must say that before we begin and get into my line of questioning, I'm much disappointed because I've been reaching out to your office. My staff and I have been reaching out to your office for some time to try and set up a meeting. we were supposed to have a meeting on the 11th but we were not able to arm yet to get to you so we have this schedule for the 25th of this month and we are going to deep dive and get into all of the different divisions and programs within the core mission of the authority whereas we try we will try to identify the issues until we can move forward solutions so i'm just putting a notice on the 25th you'll get something in writing hopefully by friday that we have to scheduled for the 25th but nonetheless um let me get into my line of questioning because in your testimony you stated that uh out of today according to your testimony regarding the vision program 16 homes have been completed and construction is underway on 239 others 16 homes in five years i honestly find this to be unacceptable on so many levels and i'm honestly disturbed that the pace continues to be slow because in your quarterly report too hard for a period of april to june of this year you stated that at the end of june 13 homes have been completed and 38 were underway that means that only three homes have been completed in this whole quarter so can you tell me why is the pace so slow particularly when it comes to contractor
- 0:37:05 that a contractor was hired earlier this year so why is the pace still such a slow pace what's going on in that space can you talk to me simply please certainly and of course um miss hanley will um add to what i'm about to say but we too are um are just as concerned as you about the the program and the piece of it but the program has not been without its challenges its challenges in terms of capacity which which is why we did a staff augmentation to get that engineering firm on board to assist the staff a lot of the homes require drawings architectural drawings which again the capacity internally has not been with HFE which again is why we We hired two engineers to assist, we've partnered with ODR to use their engineer to help us. We've got our own, we have tried numerous ways to make this go faster. Because the homes have to have drawings, they cannot just go into construction. And drawing could take some time, but I want Ms. Hanley to also to add to some of the challenges she's facing daily with this program. Good morning.
- 0:38:28 To add to what Ms. Clendenin is saying is that, as she mentioned, the drawings are required after the inspection of the home, a drawing can take up to 20 days. The drawings for our contractors need to provide details. Because these homes require substantial rehabilitation, that is why there there is an extended period of time some of the concerns also exist as it relates to the cost of construction as we all aware the cost of construction has increased significantly we do have homes that are ready for construction but the concern is that the cost exceeds the program cap the program cap existing right now is 250 000 and some of the corrective the change orders that we have received is in excess of three hundred and fifty thousand dollars that is a significant cost to the homeowner so one of the things that we're doing is looking at the individual line items for the repairs in some instances we can remove those line items in some instances we can't because it's a health and safety and that is some of the challenges that the program is facing So, with the increase in the program cap to \$350,000, we're hoping that we will be able to provide assistance to homeowners whose repairs exceed the existing program costs. Okay, thank you for that. And let me ask you quickly, what type of engineers have you brought on board? Civil, mechanical, or structural? What type of engineer? And what are their specialties?
- 0:40:09 We have brought on board two civil engineers. With both specialties, civil and mechanical. What are their specialties? Civil and mechanical. Civil usually deal with roads and bridges, you know, not homes. Not necessarily. What type of engineers are you going on board? I will let Mr. Pell, who is the civil engineer, who is new to this program but is assisting, and he could speak to the expertise he brings.
- 0:40:45 Mr. Pell? Succinctly, please. I know Mr. Pell, I know what he brings to the table, but continue, move forward, Mr. Pell, please. Yes, good morning. My specialty in the civil engineering field is construction. Civil engineering does have five disciplines, which includes construction. It has roads, bridges, buildings. so i focus on the construction side okay thank you for that the reason why and that's why i'm looking forward to my hearing because i'm going to really drill down and get into the the dirt and the detail of exactly what the issues are because i know what they are and we need to really have a real and frank discussion moving forward because this is this is this is this we must we must change we must change the way we are doing things um i know and i will also have contractors there at that hearing because they're the one in the trenches and they're the one that's going through the issues because of course yes um the prices are changing on daily basis but at the same time the amount of time it takes to get through the process but the time you get your notice to

proceed everything has changed so we need to really find what's going on with the structure and the process and how we can streamline a process that's the issue i'm seeing and the most important issue i'm seeing is communication i myself as a senator on my team who call it on a daily basis we can't get through many times we have to go in person many times people are calling me who can't get through and they go in person i still can't get through that's a problem and it's a serious problem until until unless we get our communication correct i don't care what plan we have what to do how much you have to be higher the front line must have access there must be access to hfa in order to get anything done because that's why it's so slow

0:42:39 also the communication needs to improve i mean i can't stress that enough um in fem ed you spoke to the esv program which is the emergency solution grant and despite many of the um individuals who have been going through different programs who may have fallen through a crack that's another form of assistance that can assist people i know um a young lady called me yesterday as a matter of fact told me she had been trying to call hrt because um you guys finally assisted her and i'm grateful for that she had she brought the individual who had um investors in a home since the hurricane and she had been waiting to be um relocated and offering to fix her home and you guys finally but at the same time she stated that um where you guys put her and i'm not going to call it in the area there's 16 to 20 steps and she's elderly she can't even make up of the stairs she did the first night when she went home she couldn't move for two days because she was in someone's pain what how do you guys part of that process look succinctly in terms of where you put someone in an interim i know as we all know that there's a shortage of housing stock that's why your agency plays such a critical and vital role in bringing those talks online but how does that process look when it comes to individuals who are disabled and elderly in housing them in an interim while the home is being repaired how does that look like and what that process looks like please someone can explain to me please because it's like a hardship on top of a hardship on top of stress that you've been dealing with for so many over a year really who deals with that process in an agency um you were talking about the esg someone i get got assistance through esg yes yes you program yes what we do one minute sub recipients who would who the um the person will go to them with the problem they would assist them in finding a home and then we would use those funds to pay the rent and pay the utilities and for the case management

0:44:39 so we go to um say to catholic charities um the women's coalition so we go to different organizations and they're the ones that assist we don't go um as the agency is not going out to find the apartment yes very well very well i got it thank you so much um we will deal with that also the next hearing um when we did dive and last before my time is up because what i really do don't understand um and i would like to have some information on i know dpnr um found that the level of toxic work within acceptable limit we talk about duna now because it's been down for a year behind a year right now and how does the contractor the gc contractor refuse to return to work when dp and i have actually who are the agency the regulating agency said that the tax rent are are not are acceptable so is in a contractor in violation and shouldn't they be penalized because we are in a crisis and we need the project to move forward so what is being done in that that um space because i know they are on a negotiation um in terms of return to work etc but i know dpnr is the regulatory agency that deals with those issues so how can a contractor say they're not returning to work when the regulatory body has said everything is fine um ed because maybe a year behind so the project with the virgin islands housing authority they are currently in that negotiations with GEC and Penrose, their developer, to determine a path forward.

0:46:29 That's the only statement I could make towards that, Senator. All right. Understood. Understood. Madam Chair, I appreciate the time. I have many more questions in respect to the disaster and infrastructure space. But nonetheless, I'll regret and wait for my second round. Thank you so much. Thank you, Senator Blyden. What's the bottleneck, Ms. Shelford, in getting his ERAP payments out? I have for one to send you, send Mr. Grant, send him all kind of emails. What's the bottleneck in this whole ERAP program?

0:47:06 What we were going through at the end, ERAP 1 was closing out at 9.30, 2022. so what we made sure that we got all the applications in so that we didn't have to send back any monies and as we speak the checks are going out so that was pushing through a lot of checks to make sure we met our deadline so it so how soon let me give a good example i said i sent you an email um let's look at royal american that's a lot of people in a large apartment we We did look at that whole, the agency and who they were serving in terms of who we would have had in the pipeline. We had some that we did pay and then we had some that came in, say, September.

0:48:00 Some were second round and those people we have already, we did the checks, we have to do certifications for the check, but to meet our 9.30 deadline, we got the checks done and we're getting them out. Can we agree that we need to really speed up the ERAP process? Because the key word in emergency rental assistance is the E, emergency. A sense of urgency is needed. Understood, and we had to push to meet our deadline so that we didn't lose any more funding, and now we're getting the checks out. So the checks are prepared and going out. What's going out? We're talking about checks going out in a week.

- 0:48:42 Two weeks, because honestly, as a senator, and I think I could speak for most of my colleagues, I am exhausted with acting as a super commissioner. I don't get you a salary, right? I don't. We fall lower on the pay scale, but we spend a considerable amount of time with people coming to the building, having to go outside, and it takes away, honestly, from our policy making role to hunt down checks. understood and like I say as we speak they're going out it comes with also yes you process the check you have to do a certification that's required by Treasury so we can't just say we process the checks we mail them out we have to get the landlord and the tenant to come and sign we send them by email we get them back some people might respond before others some you know might respond before others but our goal is to also get the checks out we really don't want people calling you or call it us on a regular about these checks because we know the urgency not just the goal senator i do want to put on the record that with the addition of the plexus team we have really been able to get to that five million mark and five million dollars worth of direct assistance has been out we sign checks every single week for e-wrap i had a plexus employee call um very concerned about their job and they they informed us that their contract has not been extended to december is that accurate plexus has a contract with us from may to may of 2023 that is the term of the
- 0:50:31 contract okay um senator francis thank you very much sorry before you proceed senator francis hold a second before you proceed i want to acknowledge the presence of senator vla please mark him up um present and then director acteline williams i totally forgot to acknowledge you my humble apologies good morning go ahead you can say good morning thank you very good morning to you good morning to my colleagues good morning to the testifiers and good morning to the people other versions today it's a rough day and it's a rough day because we have just gotten a 17 page testimony that briefs well however the reality is that we're not we are not meeting the needs of this community in respect to the envision program we are failing and we are failing miserably to be able to address that particular issue frankly i believe that we will never be able to meet this because again we're continue to extend the time over time and costs continue to increase significantly as we see here i truly believe that we have come to the point where we just need to issue a grant issue a grant to these individuals applicants and hold them responsible for fixing their own home and they could draw down periodically uh similar to what the bank um requires but we're not meeting the needs of this community i want to ask media to show a picture of an individual that have been waiting i've been waiting for months to be able to get some attention because of the weather beating tarpaulins because of the rain this is the result
- 0:52:36 of it this is simply one of the many stories that we encounter every single day our community is losing hope there's no hope in fear but they're losing hope in this process they're holding the senators responsible for these issues because they believe that we have oversight responsibility again to address their concerns i had an encounter with a woman right out of kmart and i don't know who was crying more if it was me or that resident i mean as she gave her revelation of what she's experiencing especially in this time of this heavy rain the amount of tops and watch fun that she has to put to be able to catch the water in some instances because of a roofing problem and i know we're talking about envision that's the total we built but our community is really feeling the pain and we have to do something we have to do something to resolve this issue so madam interim director how can we truly move the needle on this particular issue well let me ask the director of odr in terms of your oversight responsibility how are you holding hfe responsible for the expenditures of this federal monies and being able to meet the needs of this community good morning adrian williams actalin director office of disaster recovery as senator we meet with the housing finance authority on all of their recovery projects we meet on a bi-weekly basis on
- 0:54:24 all of the other projects funded through cdbg dr we also we meet also bi-weekly with them on the envision program we've provided opportunities for them to access the engineers that are with our on our contract to help to expedite the archaeological engineering services that's a huge challenge so so let me stop right there because what is what is this bi-weekly meeting result in i mean what is the results of these bi-weekly meetings who ultimately then responsible for productivity i see where the director spoke about productivity is perhaps the most important reason for onboarding staff who is then measuring productivity so the the participants the highest ranking that participates in the meeting is miss anna hanley we give we identify what the deliverables are um and of course they're not to our expectations either the somebody's challenges are real however there's a lot of work that needs to be done in this regard interim director senator again what is what is your marching orders what is what is it that you're hoping to achieve during your tenureship and oversight of hfa and respond and respond to the needs of this community As the Chief Disaster Recovery Officer as well, it is the goal with my team to get these projects moving. That's the name of the game, with some sense of urgency. There has been a significant amount of challenges faced here, and even before I had dreams of coming to HFA, they have been quite challenged. challenges as Director Acklin said are very real but we believe I believe now we have some things in place with the staff augmentation which is necessary to do these drawings for some of these homes even the picture you showed the con the condition of that house that could just never be rebuilt without some type of drawing or or that type of engineering necessary and again HFA historically didn't have that capacity on staff either so with the help of this new

company with the resources we use with ODR we are hopeful that this will accelerate the process and if it doesn't we are prepared to bring in additional help as well to move it even faster i think some of that is the problem i mean we continue to bring

0:57:21 in the help but we're not moving these projects faster um you know some of the complaints that we're getting is that we get um the residents are getting called the applicants are getting calls almost every two weeks for an inspection but no inspector is showing up They're waiting and waiting and waiting for these inspectors to show up and they're not showing up. Senator, I don't know why that would be.

0:57:51 I'm going to let Ms. Hanley address that, but I don't know why we would call and say we're coming and not appear. Senator Francis, for that particular client, I do apologize if that has occurred, but one One of the things I ensure with the construction management staff and our contractors is that we recognize and understand that our residents are tired and there is a process associated with the inspections and I make sure that we do not cancel the inspections and should we have to, contact is being made with the residents to advise them of a need to reschedule. We did recently schedule in excess of 18 inspections. That is to help us to get drawings for these homes. That was done with our construction management staff as well as our new CM project management staff grant engineering services. And these are for the homes that require substantial rehabilitation. So therefore approved DPNR drawings are required.

0:58:56 Very well, Madam Chair, was my time called. Two minutes. um thank you thank you for your response miss henley but i think the reality is that again individuals are calling the senator's office and i could give you names and number because they're not able to reach hfa in some instances or that there is no response to them i mean you know when when when individuals resort to their representative is because they're not meeting you're not meeting the needs the agencies are not meeting the needs of all community and we really got to do a better job in resolving that that particular issue senator if i may yes and to your point again it's why we have our citizen complaint initiative that i spoke about earlier just trying to be at the forefront of some of these complaints and being able to have them address where we have dedicated personnel i do want to take this opportunity to tell the listening public again three four zero one minute seven one five five nine zero two if you have a complaint that's the number to call or go to cdbginformation at vihfa.gov you could email your complaint as well and my final question quickly on this particular round is have there been an assessment of the the lumber stored at Henderson School, you know, I continue to see the deterioration of the lumber that's there is exposed to the rain and sun and we know what happens to lumber for an extended period of time. They've been there for a number of years. Have there been an assessment to determine whether or not these lumber will be effective to be put on people's homes? Sure. As indicated to the former Senator, we are currently going through that process.

1:00:50 i'm happy to provide those details once completed but to assure the listening and viewing audience we will not use lumber that is not um cold or not um good lumber for folks home time ah thank you very much again my time i've been called i am happy to hear that at least with the um era program that we're making some advancement there but we still have a lot of work to do in this community and again we want to be a partner in this um because our our family members our constituents is who's been impacted by this significantly thank you very much madam chair for the time thank you senator francis point of inquiry senator blighton thank you madam chair i know instead of me spoke to the mitigation funds and i know the last week spoke about those funds were right after the budget market process we spoke and i know you had a very important meeting that week with hud in respect to those funds and the waterline extension program um what what is the um result of that meeting because i know uh as you know i've been stressing and pressing for this for some time now and i know doing the budget process you said that those funds one could not be used for the waterline extension but um none of that are no different so what was the result of that meeting can you let us know please senator i'm happy to have that conversation offline with you but you can't put it on the record i i wish not to thank you so much thank you madam chair i was distracted what was your question um the statistic i discussed it online with respect to the mitigation funds

1:02:35 that was allocated for the waterline extension throughout the territory um after the hurricane so I know she had a very important meeting we'd had in respect to those funds that I was inquiring about the results of that meeting, but she said she's going to discuss it offline. Thank you so much for the time. Is it proprietary information? Yes. What makes it proprietary information? Senator, again, as we go through. But then, okay, hold on. Would it put funds in jeopardy if you respond to us?

1:03:08 short yes I it is best if I speak to the senator or we could have a conversation offline oh sorry please mark Senator Joseph as present point of inquiry Senator Joseph thank you thank you so much madam chair and a pleasant good morning to everyone including our listening and viewing audience my point of inquiry is to the same question that Senator Blyton asked. Is any of the funding in jeopardy currently? No funding is in jeopardy currently. Okay, thank you so much. Thank you. Before we go to Senator, carry on. The employee status, how many vacancies do you have right now? With the

disaster recovery we have about 10 or 12 vacancies and overall let me get that for you and then I guess I have to ask director actinine williams actinine or um interim acting executive director clen denning i sent an email i copied you i copied odr and i copied vitema and i sent an email right on the cusp of hurricane season beginning and knowing that the envision program is languishing for lack of a better word i sent an email asking about the status of tarps and i sent it to the three agencies that are

1:05:03 dealing with disaster disaster recovery roofs that's the three of you guys and i also asked if you need an appropriation for more tarps because if you put a tarp on in 2017 the tarp has weathered in 2022 and we're driving the island and we're seeing tarps that are in total disarray they are no longer serving their purpose while they wait for the roofing program director acteline we talk about a long-term recovery group and this and that how in the absence of us not moving at the end of the day we could say we didn't get this contract that we had this but the point is that the government has culpability and no matter what the excuses around it or the reason around it the point is roofs were not repaired and they're still not repaired how in our good conscience are we functioning knowing that rain we see rain all the time right now happening people are drowning in water there's a home next to me i keep saying it oh my childhood babysitter is in water every time i pass her house to get to my house i am so embarrassed and i feel so guilty so what is the plan what is the plan in the interim as you work with odr and vitema at least to replace the tarps and the roofs that have been damaged that may not be your responsibility but what are the discussions because it's a domino effect you have roofs inviting my job is to tell you when the storm come in response and recovery disaster recovery have the federal dollars to move the projects but the point is all of you guys deal with disaster and the outcome of a disaster so i'm i'm asking on the floor today

1:07:03 since my email went unanswered first let me apologize that your email went unanswered that my staff didn't respond um tarps is not the unfortunately not the uh within the purview of the responsibility of the housing finance authority our full commitment our full attention our full focus must be must be on these homes that's where we are um it begs the question so with the cdbgr funds there's no program there's no allocation to um to give out tarps or to purchase tops and further or to install or help the homeowner install tops our focus is to get these homes fixed. Hold a second, if I had to take the pasture that that is now within my, I do everything every day, that's not within Title 2 of the Virgin Islands Code. And if I had to take the pasture and sit to a constituent, that really ain't my job. I would be home jobless. And I said that to say, and even though your job is the roof, I asked specifically, you could sit and say senator we will not get to these homes within a hurricane season and of this roofing program these are the amount of people that we have that need roofs that may need their tarps to be replaced therefore we may need an allocation of so-and-so-and-so to get tarps out and to replace them I'm not sometimes we in a box but we all live in this community and nothing precludes you from saying you know that that's a good suggestion we may need an appropriation and i asked that question in the height of the budget season it was i asked it actually in may and june july august september october not a response not

1:09:04 one from vitima i had to i call director actually we had a discussion truth be told and nothing from you and i'm like people i mean just we live in the same society somebody have to be our aunt our uncle or cousin that don't have a roof are we saying that we are so tone deaf to the needs of our community i couldn't get a response to say i i could have been able to say um finance china budget markup let's move to fifty thousand dollars we're gonna find tops from someplace and and we will initiate a movement and gain tabs replaced.

1:09:43 Senator, carry on your recognize for your time. Thank you. And good morning to you, Madam Chair. Good morning to my colleagues. Morning, that's five, they're here. that you're right wow uh this is this is very troubling to hear some of what we're hearing this morning and um i really have to say enjoy my colleagues and their sentiment as it's it's it's sad it's really sad that that we continue to beat this state of not really progressing at the level that we should while we still have a number of individuals that are suffering and waiting it seems to me that part of the problem here bottleneck and the systematic issues and everything else that has been a challenge um for the department but communication really has failed and that makes even matters worse when an individual is waiting waiting waiting and not sure of what's happening or when their home will be repaired or what's going to happen you know it's it's very disappointing and um we really need to change this really need to change this um you know i just like my colleagues have received numerous calls and have different people who've been asking questions and trying to get some answers in response there's one case in particular it really hits uh it hits deep and um i wanted

1:11:37 to identify the lady's name i just mentioned she's ct and she's a senior who has been waiting um for answers um she has been displaced and she's living jumping from here to there family and friends because she cannot live in her house um since the last since 2019 she's been staying with another friend And these individuals, they need help. So my question really is, what's happening with the rental assistance program for these individuals that have been displaced because their house hasn't been repaired?

- 1:12:27 So, thank you for the question, Senator. I do want to say for, we recognize there was an issue with that, people having to be displaced, especially if we may have started construction and something went wrong in construction, et cetera, what we have done is rewrite our policy, our policy to allow for us to be able to shelter that person, to be able to, whether it's to put them in a new home, use one of our emergency housing, to get them somewhere safe until the construction of their home is completed. So that's one effort we've made. Also for ERAP, it may be in ERAP too, there may be some opportunity for that individual to apply.
- 1:13:29 However, ERAP is largely for those affected by the pandemic. so in case management have you been reaching out not you particularly your office um to individuals that you have your applications that are in this process to find out what are their status what do they need i mean what has your office been doing then to ensure that if they're in this predicament where they don't have a place to live um what options are there because this This individual in particular hasn't received any call to provide any type of options or assistance to her.
- 1:14:13 So with the case management form, HORN, they are really the frontline in advising those applicants as to status, what's happening with their property. We also now implemented, and I spoke about earlier, that complaint line, more like concern line I want to call it, where they can call. If you are, I think I may know the applicant you are speaking about, and the team is working feverishly to rectify that situation. Well, I just spoke to her this morning and no one has assisted her in reference to rental.
- 1:15:05 Senator, I don't really believe that is completely true. I don't believe that is completely true. The staff has made contact in sense of this is what we are willing to do, this is what we can do. I'm happy to have her call me herself, but I, too, have, if it's the same individual, have been in contact with those near and dear to her because, as you stated, she is an elderly person as well.
- 1:15:37 So I'm happy to take her number and place the call myself. So we could do that. I'll speak to you off the record. Thank you so much. all right um some solution not only to her but to many that are in the same situation because i i can't believe that my colleagues and the clients because students that they've been assisting are um lying about their situation and their status so we really need to get to the bottom of this now um with regards to you spoke about the rising cost of constructions and and that you prepared a third substantial amendment to the disaster recovery action plan, which has to be approved by HUD. Do you foresee HUD approving this amendment?
- 1:16:23 Is there a timeline by which HUD would make this decision? And how does this affect the current operations that you have? And I'll let Ms. Hanley speak to this, but we don't foresee a problem with the amendment As we had shared it with HUD previously as well before the official submission just so we could work out any possible concerns they may have. So I don't foresee a non-approval from HUD. I don't foresee an issue with the approval of the third amendment to the action plan. For the applicants, it positively helps the applicants. It increases the program cap from \$250,000 to \$350,000 for a homeowner. And for rental applicants, it increases from \$50,000 to \$75,000 per unit.
- 1:17:25 And it doesn't affect your current operations? No. We do have a couple of applicants whose cost of construction increased the \$250,000. As I indicated, we're doing one of two things. We're temporarily holding those applicants so that those applicants would not have to pay escrow for their construction. Or we have worked with some applicants to reduce their line items within their construction, but maintaining health and quality standards during the construction process. And also, I know you spoke in your testimony about a citizen complaint initiative and a citizen complaint tab that you have placed on the website. But are you meeting the expectations of the 15 days that you expect to respond to these complaints?
- 1:18:21 Yes, Senator. Okay. have any of the federal funds have you lost any of the federal funds you've received thus far beyond the um what was it beyond the era um funds that we that warwick captured there are no other funds that we've lost and how much was that that was 16 million 16 million right but i want to assure the public that no applicant went without because that money went back we served the applications we received very well and then right in that area regard to the arpa funding um you said you've been able to process 1120 applications from that how much have you been able to award to your applicants And in those cases where one of my colleagues eagerly inquired about the emergency housing stock under the preview of the house and finance authority, is there any plan to expand also has authority paid for any displaced family to be housed due to extended time they have to wait uh in order to get their home repairs so we do have a few emergency housing projects under the
- 1:20:10 um cdbgr program um we also are doing some of our own repairs as miss johnson testified to indicated earlier um we also i'm currently in conversation with the commissioner of property and procurement for the lease or purchase of some um facility that we can refurbish to make for emergency housing as well and i'm sorry your last question was um no that's fine that really gives me an update of what you're doing and in closing because my time has been called i just really want

to ask that the case managers really reach out to all your applicants and find out what's their status and provide them with information the options that they have available communication is the key and when there's no communication then you know people don't know what the status is or what what is going to happen so i think that's crucial so please do reach out to these individuals and that would provide some sort of comfort to know that there's some work being done and someone looking at their case and something is going to happen uh thank you madam chair what a inquiry yes point of increase and uh blandin thank you um interim director acting director td trending um let me ask um in respect to plexus Because my specialist just came off the phone and was speaking to me in respect to Plexus and them not receiving any call because of the high call volume and acting folks, having folks call back the next day, but folks' lights are being cut in the interim.

1:22:03 I have an elderly senior constituent who lights have been cut for two months straight, and she can't get a hold through Plexus, and she said she called my office like hundreds more on a daily basis i get calls what is being done in terms of those individuals who like and or what has been disconnected and cannot get a hold of plexus through plexus and what's going on with plexus is anyone from plexus on the screen right now that i can question please that can respond to that no senator nobody from plexus is a part of this um hearing one two we're not aware of any individual that would have their lights cut um because we didn't issue the the check so i'm not sure if this you said this applicant had her lights cut for two months yeah two months back to back it's happening it's happening on a regular basis um intermediary and that's where the communication again comes in um i'll have um a lot of my staff will come down in person and see what can be done okay because he himself is having issues thank you madam chair um i'll continue my line of questioning when my time comes again thank you you're welcome senator francis point of inquiry uh thank you very much madam chair just real quickly i wanted to ask the interim director whether or not the utility payments under the rewrap is up to date my office just received a distress call of an individual in st thomas that had her power disconnected um and recently as a result of a non-payment under the europe portion she's paid her a share however europe have not made good at their side of it so i'm asking whether or not the utility payments are up to date on their ERAP.

1:23:57 Senator, I'm a little confused because that's not really how the program works in terms of the proportion and ERAP proportion. If the tenant is behind in the utilities and the senate application and we have communication with WAPA about these tenants they shouldn't be disconnected so we I you know we could get back to you or we could get the names of the tenants that are the that are getting disconnected to see where they were in the pipeline if the application were you know something is missing because contact with WAPA that we deal with that they shouldn't get disconnected as long as we have the case on hand and we're working on it or whatever the process if it's in process very well again um you know whether or not the utility is payment is up to date was one of my initial question but also the fact that an attempt were made to call um the erap emergency line and there was a message that informed the individual that they'll get a return call the following day i'm over that call have not been made and to date now the power has been disconnected and this um young ladies in distress obviously having a child in the house as well so um i'll be happy to share the name number with you please share information with us because as long as they're an applicant we would inform up and they would not be disconnected so i'm not sure what happened in this case but we will be able to help if we can as long as we get the information and we will reach out to wapa and thank you thank you very much madam chair you're welcome director williams

1:26:02 are you there yes can you tell me about my tarps please well senator there actually isn't any existing federal program that will allow for the purchase of tarps um in our conversation i did um recommend too that we also include the cost for installation because a lot of the families wouldn't have the support to put on it on tarps on their on the roofs so um i i fully sanction any effort you can make to appropriate funding for that um because based on how the existing disaster irma maria disaster is structured um we're past the preparedness stage we're in the permanent phase for the reconstruction so we do know that there's no federal funding for tarps because you and i already established that via conversation so it goes back to the point that when the email went out somebody could have said that this is the average cost of a tarp i am not in a disaster business so somebody could have said that this is the average cost for a tarp and this is how much we will need to get tarps almost every agency when they have a need make sure to send a request to ask us to fund something we just reprogram a whole set of funds from agencies six million education and the list goes on and we did not get a response I am so really I'm so frustrated with this top on this roof because you guys don't get a brunt of it

1:27:50 you can't even go to the grocery store good because our pictures plastered across the side of the road so the first thing to do is to ask us you guys aren't plastered any place and it's frustrating just from a place of empathy and humanity just humanity my poor babysitter bedridden and her hospital bed is sitting in water and then there are towels on the floor saturated in water and her daughter is handicapped that cannot be okay so if we can't get a roof repair we're in a height of hurricane season. I'm a hurricane baby so I know. We're in a height of hurricane season. And the whole, we escaped by the grace of God. Fiona went a little south, Ira went a little north, but we still got rain. And even if we get a tropical

storm, it has the ability to impact us like a category four because the infrastructure is broken so today before you leave by the close of business can you send the data one of you guys of how many homes that need roofs so we can work on repairing those apps please a begging and i hate to have to address private emails on a public platform because if i send a private email i don't want to feel like i've been antagonistic on the floor because that's the impression that you guys give the public that i come here to cut you off and that's not it but i asked for this information from the end of may june then i called

1:29:43 the director or we had a discussion so these private discussions have become public because i can't get a response i have to have the lights and the cameras on me to ask a question and then again response so i'm asking by the close of business to my office please send the data senator viola you recognize at this time thank you madam chair good morning to the people out of virgin islands good morning colleagues good morning to the testifiers uh let me start with some of the easier questions first that could be answered very straightforward i saw that you said you have the decision uh hud in reference to the projects uh what is the status of the permits that does some money was the startup of the permits with army corps and And was an application submitted for the Skuna Bay Dredging Project to Army Corps?

1:30:48 For the Dredging Projects, it's the East Gregory Channel and it's the White Coat Dock. So for those, we've submitted to HUD and we're an appeal and we're awaiting the response. What's the status of the permits at Army Corps? I'm not sure of the status with the permits for Omicor, because if we don't have an approval for HUD for this, there should be no activity charged to this. So I'm not sure of that.

1:31:25 Okay, but that's two different things. The permit is one. The permit allows you to do what you need to do, whether or not we utilize local or federal funds. So I'm asking about the permit. I think they're good for some five years. Has anybody checked on the status of the permit with the Army Corps? We have not. Okay. Was the application submitted for Schoona Bay to Army Corps? Senator, that Schoona Bay project isn't a part of the recovery projects that were There was an application, I'm not asking that, there was an application submitted to Army Corps.

1:32:12 Whatever part it is, it is. But there was an application for the dredging submitted to Army Corps. Ms. Williams. Ms. Williams. So, Senator, this, that, the Schooner Bay Channel is being slated for the mitigation funding. Correct. So the Housing Finance Authority is not at that point yet. What the Port Authority has been doing was trying to see whether or not they can get the to do some of the preliminary work but it's really predicated on the mitt requirements hold up that's the money part but it's important because it provides the funding for all of that floratory work that needs to be done and structuring the overall scope of the work so some of it can be done but they still have to wait hold up what authority have submitted application for permits before um there was a back and forth in which they were seeking to utilize the federal funds so they were going to go through um fhe but i'm not asking that i'm asking about the permit being submitted to army corps because you get the money the permits have taken a long time so has that permit been submitted by the port authority to army corps for the school So, to my understanding, and of course, that is the information that I have at this point, they have been working with Army Corps to do everything they can do up to this point.

1:33:35 Okay. I'm trying to get like a yes or no. I'm really just trying to find out has it been or has it not? I think for current information, we would need to speak to see what's the status with the Port Authority. Okay. working on this project from 2015 when we first came in the legislature a lot of fact we passed money for for the school of a dredging all the way back in the 31st legislature in reference to the citizen complaint process it that that really puzzles me because we have a citizen complaint process when the citizens can't even get you to housing finance authority to find out the status of their homes under the invasion program now in reference to this audit the office of the inspector general and this is u.s office of the inspector general um and the hud monitoring how much has been spent on administrative costs for the cdbg dr match program on the cdbg dr program how much has been spent on the administrative class one second senator okay while i'm awaiting that information we had a administrator for the envision program before the armand group how much total was paid to the armand group actually paid the normal contract was of like 14 million senator seven million okay seven million dollars I looked at that particular contract and the contract was to uh develop scope of work permitting draw house plan etc etc what was the deliverables

1:35:40 of that that program we paid them seven million dollars how many house plans are generating how many permits were applied for senator i don't have the specific number of permits that were done under that particular contractor. What did occur was that the initial damage assessments for over 400 of the properties were completed and a lot of... I read a contract... One minute. I read a contract for Amman Group and it wasn't just to determine what was damaged. I mean, anybody could determine what was damaged just with a naked eye. It was for them to also develop plans to be submitted to DPNR, actual architectural drawings, detailed architectural drawings to be submitted to DPNR.

- 1:36:38 Was that ever done? What did we pay \$7 million or \$8 million for? Senator, yes. Some of the architectural drawings were completed under this particular contract, under that contract. Okay. How many? As I said, Senator, I don't have the specific number. I can provide that for you. You need to have the specific number. I think a lot of these stuff is why you're being audited because we spent a lot of money on administrative costs and we're not completing the project. We spent \$8 million to the Armand Group and you got 10 completed homes on St. Croix and ten and six let's say even if it was three hundred thousand dollars you know that's a little over four million dollars in homes how do you spend eight million dollars in administrative costs in a year or two and it's not even equal to the output in terms of what is actually constructed how are justifying that senator as we have testified before as it relates to that particular contract that contract was a time and material contract the cost was not administrative costs to the program those were deliverables based on the projects and a part of the deliverable was the development of scope of work architectural plan submission of permit to dpnr i read the contract the contract was was well written but we have paid a company eight million dollars and we still at step one there are individuals who are waiting for their drawings to be completed where more and more than one occasions individuals have gone into their homes and said we're gonna get back to you we're working on the permit we're working on this we're working on that and nothing i i i truly don't
- 1:38:38 understand how that took place now we hired persons since march of 2022 to construct some 200 homes how much homes have been assigned to persons initially 50 homes were assigned to persons 36 of those 50 homes required architectural drawings an additional how many 36 architectural drawings have been completed completed to date one minute 36 will be 11. how what is the plan to speed up to speed this up it is is you you just hired a new administrator for the envision program correct correct senator and who's that grant engineering services are they responsible now for the architectural drawings yes senator how many are they working on they're right now they were given 36 initial um projects to work on they were given an additional 50. who is calling the homeowners to let them know the status i i know a number homeowners that are waiting for a call who's calling them to let them know that we're going to get to you by this date we're working on this we're working on that who's calling them our contractor horn which one of the contractors horn so there's a next the next group we have uh for administrative calls but individuals are not would you indulge us bottom chair one second proceed individuals are not getting those phone calls i i know dozens of individuals who call me with the recent rings
- 1:40:32 that are waiting for their vision program they said they're calling calling and they can't get through so i i don't think this company how much you bring this company to follow up on all of this senator i don't have the number for this particular contractor in terms of payment um this is our case management um contractor okay so can somebody please get those numbers for me please and my last question a one million dollar contract extension was given within the last two weeks who was that for true necessity what was that for this one million dollar contract extension senator i'm sorry i'm asking you to repeat your question A \$1 million contract extension was given to a group. What is that contract extension and what was the purpose of it? We recently did a contract extension for one of the contractors that does the security for the lumber. We did that extension of that contract and we also...
- 1:41:53 A million dollar extension for the contractor that does security for the lumber where? In both districts, the St. Thomas, St. John, St. Croix districts. And they had a \$3 million contract before? They had a close to \$2 million contract before. Is that the only contract extension that was given?
- 1:42:30 That is on the top of my head, Senator, yes. What is on the top or the bottom, is that the only, we got to know, is that the only contract extension that was given? I can do some research and give back to you, but that is what I recall. Did you get board approval for the contract extension? Yes. Can there's a next contract extension that you're not speaking about?
- 1:42:57 I can be very specific, but I'll give you an opportunity to say what it is on the record. Again, Madam Chair, we'll remember to ask the question again. Thank you so much. Thank you. One second, Senator Blyden. Are you referring to TSG, Senator Veille? Yes. Did you extend the TSG contract without board approval? I think that's what the senator is asking. No, Senator. We did extend their contract, but within the contract which already received board approval, indicates that we can extend for another term how much a point of inquiry senator bladding hold one second i want to just finish this this um this conversation sounds a very um point of inquiry how did you all of a sudden just remember so quickly yes you did and i'm asking the question and you can't recollect so how did you just all of a sudden just remember i didn't all of a sudden just remember but when the senator gave the name it jogged my memory, by jogging my memory, I was able to respond because I was also asking or being told about Tetra Tech, which we also extended their contract as well.
- 1:44:12 What is the amount of the contract extension? For Tetra Tech? TSG. It's about a million dollars. For what? for the services they provide um advertising marketing etc you know that that's that that's why we're an issue and that's why the officer inspector general is conducting an audit because we are having all of these administrative costs and the people in

anyway what are you advertising you advertise it and the vision program is shambles and you have have hundreds of individuals that are calling to get information you're extending a contract for a million dollars and people can't get the roof fixed and are you acting like you can't remember no and from my knowledge from my it's my time for the information i'm getting it was not approved by the board and at some point when the board says the blind and has a meeting i'm going to ask him to bring the board and swear them in and let's find out what or not they approved that particular expenditure thank you so much madam chair thank you at one point and this isn't politically motivated this is this is this is humanity at this at this right of course when you go up to rapoon hill on the left hand side there was a big europe sign advertisement the arab sign changed to a campaign poster it it's so optics make it look a little crazy that i don't know about it changing to a campaign poster hold on so it was a big europe sign about emergency rental assistance and all this stuff you couldn't miss the Arab sign on the bottom of our Poonhill as you're turning the corner looking at you like a nice

1:46:00 blue sign and then it changes so you know things this we know election season where this isn't even politics this is just people need homes people need homes to live in people just need a place to live and live decently i mean declaration of independence life liberty and the pursuit of happiness senator if i may also the office of inspector general their audit just to be clear is on the entire um cdbg dr program um to include the uh match program as well so it is for the entire program and not any one specific thing Okay, Sansa Blyton.

1:46:52 Thank you, Madam Chair. This is through the Chair to Ms. Henley in respect to the 36 drawings for the 36 homes. Is it a policy that every home needs a drawing? Because I know every home does not need a drawing. So are you doing a drawing for every single home? Can you clarify for me, please, for the record? For the record, no, Senator. The homes that do not require drawings, those homes have gone into construction. For the homes that do require drawings, those are based on the inspections. If there are any structural issues associated with the roofs or if there are any structural cracks or anything, we would then utilize a structural engineer to determine structural integrity for the home.

1:47:39 Thank you for that. My last point of inquiry, Madam Chair, is to the Chair. I'm requesting anything that was submitted to HUD for reports, because I know they had two reports, and anything that basically came back from HUD in respect to the report, I'm requesting to see those documents through the chair, please. Thank you so much. What a point. thank you um director um clinton in how many of your vacancies are crucial to hud and dr because i know you felt a capacity matrix with hud right yes so how many of those vacancies are critical to hud or crucial crucial to the hot and DR programs all vacancies we have are crucial to the to the program so do you face the potential of having any sanctions if those positions are not filled not to our knowledge no and can any of those positions be subcontracted to resolve the hiring problems are you having right now which is why we've done a lot of contracting as well take for example the grant engineering the staff augmentation of capacity we just could not hire so we would contract that out so where we can contract and not fill positions we will so her last monitoring visit was when? September? September? August. Okay and what was what were those results? We don't have the results as yet we anticipate them later on in the

1:49:32 month early November. Oh you haven't received anything on the findings conclusions nothing no okay you on did you have a previous report from instead of it being in September your attitude or your your inspected what March and August right if I can my director of policy and regulatory services miss Alana Lavinia if I could be allowed to have her enter into the well oh that's That's why she backed the mountain. Come talk to me, Ms. Lavignier, come.

1:50:16 Let's stage your name and title for the stenographer and then you can proceed to respond. Alana Lavignier. Hold a second. Well, let's do it. Good, go ahead. Alana Lavignier. Hold one second. The mic. Try again. Alana Lavignier, Director of Policy, Procedure and Regulatory Service. so you answered that it was August no findings as yet yes we had the March inspection right already before yeah were you there then I was not there then okay but are you able to tell us what those findings were in March those findings in March those findings in March related to some of our policy policies and working through those policies as well as some of our processes our contract review processes as well as some of our policies processes some of our environmental policies and processes they were in regards to those things for which we have rectified work through those policies and processes and resubmitted to HUD are you able to submit the outcome the findings from march to this committee yes so we will send a request for that information and of those findings how many have been resolved we have submitted for all except for two and we are except for five and we are waiting on the results of those to see if they have been resolved if HUD has accepted those okay and I would So that response from HUD will come with the... Later on this month, yes. Okay.

1:52:02 Senator... Hello, Vickery. What a Vickery, Senator Blighton. Yeah, thank you, Madam Secretary. How many findings were there? I know you said you have five left. How many findings were there now? Total. In March, there were, I want to say, eight findings. Eight, and you have to... so you took your three and your five open still yes in regards to this mark in regards to the march um findings yes we have three open okay thank you thank you madam chair you're welcome and

you had september 2021 inspection as well right yes how many findings were in september 2021 so for september 2021 there were eight findings in September 2021.

1:52:58 That's the same eight findings. So September 2021 had eight findings. Is that the same findings that they had in March? Of 21? Yeah. No, those are separate findings. So were we able to resolve the eight findings of September 2021? We were able to resolve four of those findings from September 2021. And we submit it now to resolve some of those additional findings for which we're waiting on their response. I'm a little lost, right? I'm confused. I'm not easily confused. So we resolved, of that eight, we resolved four. So did four findings roll over to March of 2022 plus another additional four? Because you had eight in September 2021, and you said you had eight in March 2022, right?

1:53:46 That's what my notes say. Yes, okay, so I just confused. In March of 2021, we had seven findings. Seven. September of 2021, we had eight findings. In March of 2022, we did not have a monitoring. We did not have anything for March of 2022. You had no findings from March of 2022? We had no monitoring in March of 2022. Okay. Okay, so the findings are from March 2021, September 2021, and they came and they made a visit in August of 2022. and what so that total is what seven we had seven seven and eight we had a total of 15 findings okay good now we're making sense so of the 15 findings how many have been resolved so those 15 findings we have had we've had four resolved totaled however we have submitted an additional um six to get resolved that we're waiting on their responses and if you could briefly tell us what just give a brief synopsis of what those findings were so the findings were related to policies and some of our processes early in the program um for which we have now worked through those policies and processes that that includes the contract review process some of our environmental processes for which we're still working through some of them had to do with the floodplain with floodplains um additional additional findings had to do with our procurement processes um our cost reasonableness um and how we went ahead and calculated those and educating staff on those pieces and do we anticipate

1:55:34 Do you want to say something, Director? No, go ahead. Do you see something? Okay. Do we anticipate any sanctions? No. Not that I'm aware of, no. Okay. Senator Joseph? Thank you so much, Madam Chair. I just want to quickly follow up with a line of questioning and a pleasant good day to everyone again. How many areas or indicators are considered for findings? In some instances, the department or the agency, they would look at 13 areas and they would go through those 13 areas relative to your policies and procedures, and if certain policies and procedures aren't documented. So what is the overall areas your cognizant agency, this case would be HUD, would look at?

1:56:39 What are those numbers? How many is the overall total of areas that they look at? They look at an overall total of four areas. They look at procurement, overall management, finances, and special... special like special so how many uh areas within each of those four areas will find is it each one has a finding or is it a sub like in finance you have various sub areas is that how they conducted it so they looked at each area and they looked at specific areas within the speaking to the mind i could barely hear what you're saying please so they looked at they looked at each area hold it senator's time you look like you just speak like me and media knows to turn my volume up so that i can be heard so can you amp up the senator's mic the the testifier's mic so she could be amplified because we're really struggling to hear you for real okay try again okay this is better much better thank you so much okay so when they come in and they do the monitoring they look at those particular areas within those areas they have monitoring checklists to make sure that we are our policies and we are okay and so they normally give you a list of areas sometimes it comes in a binder or book you should have it hud usually supplies it and tell you that these areas are what they are looking for and it usually comes with a whole total number of areas I don't yes so in in that in that aspect you're only saying it's four total areas you could get finding for each but you aren't going to get finding under each sub area too yes okay so all of them including the sub areas what is your recollection of the total findings that you can

1:58:36 receive under each area the aggregate total aggregate i would have to say it's the total aggregate would have been 15 findings but i can't provide you a better idea that that's that's fine because when you said four i was like thrown off because i know it's usually a bigger number and they usually have a monitoring certain agencies have monitoring books that it gave you to guide you through that so you could prepare yourself to don't receive any findings and it's the same way with hud correct yes okay okay now let me just go quickly here to some of my questions one of our previous senators asked about this item but i didn't catch it on my notes relative to the amount of administrative costs spent for HUD CDBG-DR and HUD CDBG-MIT.

1:59:36 That was asked by a previous senator and I didn't get the amount. Sure. No funds have been expended for CDBG-MIT as we have not received those funds. Of the funds received for disaster recovery for the administration financial management system we've expended 25 million dollars 25 mil okay and that represent what percentage of the overall monies that we received for HUD CDBGDR we received about I'll get you the percentage okay all right now let me go through some of the other questions that I do have let's talk about this one area because I wanted to and it's under the

Envision program really that's I know that's a bane in your side and a really a bane in the whole territory side because it's not happening at the rate and it seems to be mismanaged and it's not being implemented well and we have people who are in very dire need of these services and we have all of this money here and we need to spend it So now I wanted to ask you about the RRR program, which you spoke about in your testimony. I'm reading from page six. You mentioned for an RRR stands for, Triple R stands for the Rental Rehabilitation Reconstruction Program. How much of this money you said, let me see in your testimony.

2:01:15 You said about \$50 million have been allocated for this program. how much of that have you spent madam chair you can hold my time whether they wait please I don't know if we could just have a minute, we could get you that number.

2:02:00 Okay. And so it would also follow suit. I would like to know how much of the money you spend for the HRR program, HRR, that acronym is for the homeowner rental, I'm sorry, the homeowner rehabilitation and reconstruction program need to know how much have been expended and when would these award also i need to know when these money was awarded when they were awarded that would be very insightful uh i will now go to some of my other questions i want to focus some of the question regarding this citizen advisory committee i just have a really major pet peeve about committees and being formed and then they don't do no work okay and they're just being formed as as a band aid because we having some issues so when was this committee formed is it I see it is supposed to be you're looking for members of this for this committee when did you look at forming this committee didn't say it here in your testimony interim director executive director sure um miss lavender will respond so we began the formation of the committee in the ending of july august and we are currently still in the process of roll out for that committee okay and when is your target date to actually roll it out our target date to actually roll it out will be by 1 november which is why we have currently since started sending out information to get individuals interested in joining the committee the end of november one one november beginning of november okay okay okay i then have some questions regarding this project research um how would this be implemented and what

2:03:57 are your benchmarks to identify that this is actually uh working this project research when you're looking and working with your internal people to identify challenges strengths and areas for improvement and streamlining the process and activities so who is monitoring that how is that going to be implemented um i see was launched recently i'm sure you have some documentation on how the whole project is going to be yes who's a point person in monitoring this I am the point person in monitoring that.

2:04:38 Madam Chair, one moment, my good friend here. Just say your name before you speak so we are clear, because I forget easily. Okay. Some things. Alana Lavonier. Alana. Okay, go ahead, Ms. Lavonier. So I am the point person for project research, and with project research, I am actively monitoring it. One minute. We are going through and speaking with all departments through a discovery process, And then we're looking at policies, processes and daily activities and identifying where we can pretty much what we need to realign. How do we realign and reeducate our staff, identify where the bottlenecks are, how do we remove those bottlenecks and how do we work more efficiently and create goals, objectives and measures so that we can measure, make sure that we're actually being efficient and working towards.

2:05:28 Well, I'm going to tell you that's going to be a hard call because you have a high turnover rate at Housing Finance Authority. And now people are going to have to do this added capacity building, professional development, because that's what it really boils down to, to see where your strengths and weaknesses and challenges are. Do you have the information I had requested, interim director, executive director? Yes. Time. Madam Chair?

2:06:02 Okay. Yes. So for the admin, \$25 million, that's about 46%. For the rental and... Wait, before you go, 46% have been spent in administrative costs. Right. And that's based on the money that you have actually obligated. Right.

2:06:27 But early in the program, when the program first started, a lot of the time, your payroll time, different costs was allocated to admin when it could actually be allocated to the project itself. So right now, the financial team has embarked on the... A real... Reallocation. to reallocate right so that we'll see back okay i understand that whole process so it may be so you're saying that this money this amount the 25 million may be reduced because it will be reduced because some of that cost should have actually be allocated to the program right okay and it wasn't when do you uh anticipate your financial team would uh complete the reclassification that's the term they usually use in accounting to reclassify some of those funds so they are doing that we have they have a timeline of um the next six months to get it all completed so we're going through that now with the payroll reallocating that so we have a six months timeline so that number will considerably come down okay was that something that the uh hud financial team i spoke to you about informally no when we looked at the just the admin cost and as we of course attend different trainings etc um you become more educated so not sure what happened in the beginning of the grant but it was incorrectly allocated and we need our admin dollars so that's why we're going through this process discussions with hud relative to the reclassification or reallocation of these funds from admin to project costs and have they have you provided them with a list of

- 2:08:18 a list of costs that you intend to reallocate to project from administrative costs so yes we've had the com go ahead go ahead oh thank you yes we've had the um conversation with hud because of the concern in admin dollars as well as to how we're reallocating that okay and you've sent them the information so that they can approve that reallocation so we send it as we go so as we reallocate it's sent off to them it's so have you sent any yes we have how much have you sent to be reallocated so reclassified that amount i don't have before me but i can certainly send that can she provide that information to you okay it's your exact um specifically specifically how much of the 25 million have been re 25 million in administrative costs for i do have it um my finance person just text me six million already reallocated six million six million Mm-hmm.
- 2:09:26 Okay. And if... Six million to administrative costs, to project costs. From that to projects, yes. Okay. And then you asked about how much was spent in the rental rehabilitation and the... Yes. Would you be so kind? Yes. I'd like Mr. Miller to respond. There we go. Hi. Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Gregory Miller, senior manager of the Envision Tomorrow program. Currently, for the homeowner program, we expended \$20.3 million. And for the rental program, \$3.1 million.
- 2:10:04 Repeat that for me. How much did you spend for the rental rehabilitation? \$3.1 million. Why such a low number? \$3.1 million out of 50? Well, currently, there's approximately \$25 million allocated to the program. there's about 83 eligible homes I'm sorry Mr. Miller somebody is speaking as well and I can't hear what the testifier is reporting on the numbers because I'm jotting down my notes can you repeat your numbers Mr. Miller that's 3.1 million for the rental program and 20.3 million for the homeowner program okay now when do these money expire uh interim executive director madam chair i'm so sorry that is that that background noise because you really went over your time i think that your colleagues are saying time and i'm being very lenient you gave me a signal i said these are very pertinent questions i gave you like two minutes actually well just wrap up go ahead but you're wasting time right now so go ahead i thought i just wanted to just get out i don't want to abuse but you gave me the option no worries with it but go ahead ask a question please okay 20 now okay now you make me last my train train a top man half my whole momentum so you said 20 million point three uh madam chair i do have some more questions and i will be asking those questions and i really thank you for your leniency and i appreciate it deeply
- 2:11:49 thank you i hope the favors return at some other point i gotta look forward to exchanging them notes director actually with thank you somebody speaking directly you want to say something no sorry engaging those guys okay um website who's in charge of your website um it's run by our director of um communications and the director of information technology we recently sent out I know a bid but we don't have the results of who's going to take them all over you realize the website isn't updated there's like four or five websites so we sent um so what we're doing is trying to entertain or find one vendor to combine all the websites so we have one so when we say it's not updated are you talking about VIHFA you're talking about CDBGDR DR, so do you have every single contract on your website for your DR program?
- 2:13:12 We're supposed to but I don't believe everything has been uploaded as yet. Do you face any consequences for not having that information available to the public? We're supposed to, so as we update it, it goes up. mean if we're monitored and they find there's timelines they may it may be an area of concern because before you got here that was a problem with hud the if the timeliness of contracts going on a website for transparency purposes and this this predates you but i'm still seeing the same the same delay and i know that's a that was a issue for hud i don't know if it's the same issue so I want to know if that if was my policy friend is that a finding or is that something that has hard voiced a concern to you that was a concern prior to you getting there and it still it hasn't changed it is a concern based upon transparency for which we are working through to make sure that we get those uploaded onto the website what's the timeline the timeline for that will be by the close of this by the end of this year. December? By November December timeframe we are working towards process and policy improvements. Okay and then what I know in one of your findings how it took issue with your procurement process and how you were selecting contractors they indicated a lottery type system. What's the fix to that finding the procurement process so what we're doing within our procurement is really doing a lot of training with the staff as well as looking to upgrade the way we currently do our system it's a lot of manual work and we are moving towards updating it to more electronic way of doing it as well as looking to secure some vendor expertise in just really making the procurement really solid. Okay and then I just need while I wait for contracts to go on the website I'm requesting all
- 2:15:32 CDBGDR contracts resubmitted to this committee itemized listing and I would like all documents from the Armand group as well Point of inquiry, Senator Joseph, and then Senator Johnson, you'll be recognized for eight minutes. So point of inquiry, Senator Joseph, and then we get to Senator Johnson.
- 2:16:05 Just with your line of questioning regarding the contracts, I wanted to know how many houses have been contracted by the contract to be fixed for this R&R program at 3.1 million? How many construction contracts were awarded for the \$3.1 million and how many houses would that equal for the rrr program for the rental program we have reconstructed two units thus far we are working to put forward another five units in the program hold a second you said of that 3.1 million

only two units so tell me the breakdown of that 3.1 million dollars that you only repaired two units you want the breakdown of 3.1 yes i'll have to provide that information back to you two units we'll send you the breakdown of it two houses that doesn't make no sense \$3.1 million, that's an accurate number? That's what he said here.

2:17:33 And that's two rental homes? Rental units? Yes. Are there like more than one unit in the rental? Was most of that admin cost? Talk to me. Yes, the majority of that money spent was in admin cost. know program implementation case management that's not good that's not good how much was spent on actually fixing the home um i would have to research those numbers for you how long have you been in that position uh just about two months now and you need to have that information um upfront yeah 3.1 million dollars for two mismanaged for two units again he did indicate that other costs erupt into that so we will get you the number of the cost for the two units you understand the frustration a little bit so much is going to admin and people are just seeing you have eight million dollars for our man four million spent on building a home they gave it four million dollars three point one million dollars fixed two units the majority is admin cost like you're not seeing it tangible that you could touch and feel and you know senator if I may talk to me please and recognizing some of the difficulties associated with that that's one of the reasons why we changed the process associated with the issuance of our contracts as I stated to Senator VLA the Armand Corp coniman material for the grant engineering services contract its deliverables thereby the contractor has to provide a product in order for them to be paid i.e. a drawing i.e. a scope of work any of

2:19:45 those items before they can be paid we did receive deliverables as associated with almond corp but not the volume that we had anticipated we did receive damage but you understand the optics senator and hence we've learned from that and we have made process improvements I'm a little stressed about this, we're just throwing away money, you know, we just, everybody gain their fair cut, but the people that really need the help, they're not getting a fair cut. And if I was a business person, I'd fly from wherever in the States to come get a contract in the Virgin Islands too, and I'm not going to get paid, having done no work.

2:20:33 Again, as Ms. Hanley stated. Director Clinton, I really understand the process, you know, but people have been... Right, but I don't want to leave the impression that this good group of folks here that's... I am not giving you the impression because Ms. Hanley was quite eloquent in her response. I'm just telling you that the reality still remains that people have been paid and people can't... The layman just can't feel it. you can't feel the impact of any of these programs but contractors and what's that have been paid and we're not saying that you know that you guys aren't working hard and you're not showing up to work i am sure miss hanley you probably stressed out you have so much happening the weight is on you i completely get it but at the end of the day to whom much is given much is expected point of inquiry point of increase senator blighting and then senator johnson you may proceed with your eight minutes uh and before you go also it's trying to get online uh my point of inquiry down in respect to the same that line of questioning to miss to miss henley i know there are also several contractors who have actually finished the homes of individuals who have moved in but still they have not been paid they have not been paid so i will also send you that information but we we have issues moving forward we need to address those issues. Thank you, Madam Chair. Senator, may I respond, please? Senator Blyden, the issue is that the paperwork associated with the submittals, they're oftentimes not correct. There is delays, I do agree. However, in order for us to be able to process payment timely, the paperwork has to be submitted correctly. And we do spend time with the contractors, working with them to ensure that the closeout documents

2:22:25 associated are prepared adequately so that we can process. I appreciate that. I appreciate what you're saying, but at the same time, this contractor has been doing it for some time, and I believe they stated that all the documents are correct, but I will send you that information, and we'll have a further discussion offline. That's why I've been trying to meet, and that's what happens. We can't meet. We have to bring this stuff to the public. I don't do this. I love to meet behind closed doors. You guys know that. what I can get a hold of, what I need to get a hold of. Thank you, Madam Chair.

2:22:58 Okay. Director Clannier, what's your conversation with the Congresswoman in petitioning HUD on the home limits, to change our home limits? I think it's stifling you the cost to repair HUD, the limits. That's our third substantial amendment, so it's part of what we're changing now. So once that is...

2:23:31 So what do you change? I know St. Croix was like 251, St. Thomas is 332. How much is St. John? Oh, she's talking about the limits for... You're talking about moderate? Yeah. The HUD limits. Ms. Hanley, answer me. Go ahead, talk. No, no. Because I don't understand. You are referring to the HUD limits that are published annually? Yes. Okay. Ms. Glendon, and we'll work with it. Isn't that also giving you a problem, the hot limits? No? Those are for the construction of new homes. And it varies per district. By the time we get to people's homes, they're going to be new. Because if your home is getting wet out from 2017, at some point, we're going to have to end up building new homes, right? But what's happening, we're mixing two programs. Okay, talk to me.

- 2:24:22 The new home construction program, those limits are subject to that. For the Envision program, the existing limit is 250. We've adjusted that to 350. But the request that you're making of Ms. Clendenin is for the area limits based on household income and the number of persons that live within the home. But those are for our new housing infrastructure construction programs. Those are new homes.
- 2:24:55 So those limits apply to that particular program. Is there a limit for the Envision program? Currently, it's \$250,000 grant given to the homeowner and \$50,000 given to the rental home property owner. And is that a hard limit as well? No those are program limits yes that's we create that program limit yes but we've just increased it through the substantial amendment for homeowner to 350 and for rentals 75 000 per unit is that sufficient for you to get a home a roof repaired for the homeowner yes the concern is for the rental property um would they be able to get access to funding through the banks so the question would be if a roof has to go on to a home that was damaged and with the weathering of the home the damage water damage or everything else won't the cost exceed 350 because you have to fix the wall and other things what we're finding is the reason we increased it to 350 that was because of some of the damage that we have identified and that was the cost that we thought will be able to cover the homeowner repairs and then have you issued a statement to retract those local policies that we had our that was hampering the rehab of homes that were not federally sanctioned For example, the inspection. I know in 2020, a lady, she's a senior citizen. Her home was inspected. The contractors came and then she had to sign that form that says you can't do anything to your home. and then she had she had to do some emergency repairs that she did not do because she signed that waiver form in 2020 and the last hearing it was it was stated that that was not a federal requirement it was actually a local requirement have we publicly retracted those requirements because people's homes need emergency repair because envision in a stratosphere someplace
- 2:27:11 waiting to be a reality. We, via HFA, did not issue a public statement, however Senator VLA did provide a public statement on behalf of via HFA. No, no, no, Ms. Anley, no. What was the decision from HFA? HFA can't have people signing up with that. We did advise that the homeowners do have the right to make repairs to their homes while they wait for reconstruction, permanent reconstruction, or rehabilitation. They've gotten a press release with your Expensive Media Group, so everybody could receive the information. We can do that. Please. Thanks. Of course.
- 2:27:55 Good. Point of inquiry. Point of inquiry, Blyden, and then Senator Johnson, I promise you, I'm coming to you, and then Senator Whitaker. Senator Blyden? Thank you. Thank you. Based on your line of questioning, Senator Saru, Ms. Henley, the amendment you spoke to in respect to the increase from \$250,000 to \$350,000 through HUD. Have that been approved as yet? And if not, when do you intend in having that approved? No, it has not been approved. As Ms. Clendenin stated, we just recently had the public hearings notifying the public of the adjustments to the action plan. I do anticipate that we should be able to get approval from HUD by the end of November.
- 2:28:36 Thank you so much. Thank you, Madam Chair. You're welcome, Senator Johnson. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. These are rough times, very difficult times for homeowners and people who are living under the addition with i guess not even knowing when they're gonna get them fixed and it's very sad we sit here and i think all of us inside here have a roof on our heads but the people our constituents they don't and we continue to hear every single problem about it but we're not getting it fixed i want to ask a question about the dunu project i saw you said that it was 30 percent completed and it's a year behind what's the cause of that being a year behind initially there were environmental um delays and i believe there is a bit of a dispute between the housing authority the developer um penrose and the contractor they are in uh discussion to to resolve any issues they have and determine a path forward housing as we so as we speak right now that project is on hold correct Hi, I want to ask this question here about your special needs program. How many applicants applied for assistance that's funding availability for public service and public facilities, special needs housing program?
- 2:30:37 Is Ms. Ross? Yes, Ms. Zakenia Ross. I think it was in excess of nine that applied for the program, but Ms. Ross could give you the... Sorry, what was the question? Tell us the number of folks, the number of applicants received for the notice of funding availability.
- 2:31:04 It was 11 in total. 11. Yeah, for the NOFA, nine were selected. And can I ask, what was the criteria used in selecting the nine agencies which were selected? Well, our national objectives, so they had to have a tie to the disaster, or a tie to the disaster and be a non-profit organization serving the vulnerable population. And who was a part of the selection of this process? Who was a part of it? My team, with some, and with the consultants. sense. I'm so sorry, Senator Johnson, to interrupt you, but could the person who is speaking, could you kindly turn on your visual, your camera, so the good Senator can see who he's addressing?
- 2:31:56 Sure. Yes. Hello? Wonderful. Thank you. Now, I know the good Senator is very pleased, so the Senator is very pleased. Senator Johnson, your time is still there. Please continue. Continue, ma'am, please. She indicated the HFA staff, along with the technical assistance from the consultant that's provided by HUD, went through the applications.

- 2:32:32 All right. Approximately how much funding of that \$7.4 million in public service and special needs funds will be issued to the nine entities? so um to be honest with you they actually got a fair shake it actually exceeded the 7.4 million so i had to reallocate to give to make sure everyone got funding and exceed in excess of what um we originally planned to pay out for the nova which is a 7.4 million approximately 7.5 all right thank you very much um intern director the emergency housing rental how many people do you have on your waiting list at this present moment for emergency rental miss nicole johnson do you have a response if if you could turn your camera on state your name for the record and respond to the senator's question good afternoon senator at this time um we don't have anyone on the witness but we've received numerous inquiries information was given in regards to what the processes are however i haven't received to my office um any applications for any emergency housing applicants you're saying to me that there's no one in the emergency housing rental unit on a waiting list at this present moment not at this present moment as i stated i've received inquiries however i haven't received anything to my office i'll accept what you're saying to me but the amount of people that i can hear in trying to find homes and place to stay and i think your agent be one of the
- 2:34:23 three minutes it may be helpful senator i'll make some contacts to the uh the intern director and pass some information for some folks because i've been finding people outside there that homeless and not because they want to be homeless because they can't find a home and find a place to live met a gentleman about two weeks ago his bed is sitting there in the frederick said market area His clothing, everything is sitting there He continues saying he's been reaching out To any and everyone and been trying to get his name And listen, to avail no one And he's not Sleeping with me, he's sleeping because he want To sleep there He's sleeping because he can't get help So I'm definitely going to reach out to In turn, Director Clendenin For you to make some connection with me With that individual that was just speaking I'm sorry I didn't get her name Yes, Senator, so if you can just provide the information For me, I would be happy to reach out that individual to provide some assistance hi uh intern director can you share my cell phone with the individual please i didn't get your name very sorry what's your name ma nicole johnson manager frontal properties all right you got with the you got my name seek so i should be able to find you yeah thank you very much thank you very much Senator, you do have some more time left if you had any other pressing question you want to.
- 2:35:53 A minute and 30 seconds, Senator Johnson. Okay. Thank you. Senator Genevieve Whitaker, you are recognized for your eight minutes. Thank you, Chairwoman. Good morning. Good morning to you. Good morning to my colleagues. Good morning to people of the Virgin Islands. Good morning to the testifiers. I certainly had to jump in. I am in the middle of a conference dealing with school interventions. On a national level, I'm hoping to bring that back home. We have a lot of issues with our schools that we need to address critically. And that's where I'm also where I'm at right now at a conference, as I indicated in my letter. Director Clendenin, you know, Interim Director Clendenin, where are we with the emergency mortgage assistance program as you know i've consistently followed up with you with um you know of course i do appreciate the level of communications uh previous we um we testified that at that last hearing that in fact that you know we're moving forward application process where are we with the medical i'm sorry the emergency emergency mortgage justice that's program what is the status of that program email so the housing assistance fund um we did publish our rfp on the 31st and we did extend the deadline and to october 11th and have you made outreach to those respective um individuals in fact i had um indicated to your predecessor um there were individuals and homeowners who in fact you know needs to be notified are you guys in contact and can any kind of communications with individuals who have engaged your office in need of the mortgage assistance are you in communications with them senator
- 2:37:50 Valley Shelford CFO we had we reached out to the bank who would also help us help to provide a listing of people that we can work with as soon as we go to the rfp and start accepting applications so we have not accepted applications as yet but my point is with the bank so they had so so you guys have not you guys received phone calls right from individuals who need mortgage assistance am i correct in the last year my current also the office visits so did you track any of those individuals including myself because i reached out to you all of individuals who have were requesting assistance the application not ready yet but have you um collect having kind of listing to remain in contact with them those who directly reached out to you no no well what i would suggest okay before what i would suggest um as you because you know um it can endellas you know to continue to change work on putting together a system in place so that we can in fact for those who already engage and then they go through the application process that's my suggestion i want to move on to the citizen advisory group because one of the things that's so important is the involvement of the community in the process for implementation of the plan i reached out two years ago last year you know constantly asking um i do see i saw some comment that in fact the citizen advisory group is now being activated um can you speak on the record about the status of that and um you know can share with the public how they can become a citizen part of this advisory group absolutely and um i will let miss alana alavaner director of regulatory um services go ahead and respond to that but i do want to say that we are just launching this so there's absolutely the opportunity for the public to still be a part of the process, and I encourage them to go to our website, complete an application, and send it in to cdbginformation at vihfa.gov.

- 2:40:04 But go ahead, Ms. Alana. Regarding the implementation, we are currently in the rollout process of the implementation process. We are looking for two individuals from each district, both St. Croix, St. Thomas, and one from St. John. Once we have all those individuals and they have submitted their applications which they can get from our website and they send it in and we go ahead and we select those for the committee our goal is to have them as our voice and have where the public can also participate come to the meetings and have their voices to be heard. We are still are in the early stages as we are looking for individuals to serve on the committee. Thank you so I'm really that's moving forward because i you know i had kept i kept on reaching out asking because public participation is so important um director clannendon under particularly under the program because you have let's look at cdbddr you have the housing component infrastructure economic revitalization public service and special need housing and i do encourage as you encourage please continue to encourage the public to in fact you know know about the components three minutes under the area of housing um how are you how are you already already in plans to work with the virgin islands housing authorities plan to rebuild a set of homes with 3 000 homes in the project that area how how oh can you play all my time um somebody's somebody's talking at the same time as me it's kind of hard to yes you could go ahead and proceed senator somebody had their mute uh the mic yes unmuted yes it happens uh director clendenin um specifically in the area of housing because one of the areas we're trying to work on is increasing the housing stock which is directly in the plan how are you working with whether the housing authority and other entities to go about the establishment of new housing opportunities how are you identifying it and can you just simply just say what plan do you and the board have to move forward new development new
- 2:42:15 housing developments single-family homes so we have an extremely collaborative and good working relationship with the virgin islands housing authority a number of their projects um to provide housing is under the cdbg dr program and we estimate upwards of some 95 million dollars um for uh mitigation as well to be considered um for housing authority um the thank you yeah thank you and we'll circle back about that because i really want to be actualized because what they were saying there were some bottlenecks with respect to getting the funding that they'll need to move forward that very aggressive important plan under economic revitalization we keep talking about this support for our small businesses our small businesses have gone through so much um some of the few of there's some who got some benefits from recently through the innovation grant but there are many that were left out one minute how are you how have you and the board been really working to actualize again this is in the plan as you guys put it in the in the plan even revised plan and providing true true technical assistance to small businesses sure and senator thanks for the question i will let um mr donnie dorsett um the program manager for the economic revitalization component under the program to speak to some of the efforts as to what he's doing Good day, Donnie Dorsett, Economic Revitalization, Senior Program Manager.
- 2:43:58 Senator Whitaker, we are developing a neighborhood revitalization. There are two components of it. Under it, there's a small business and entrepreneurship technical grant assistance that was mentioned in Ms. Clinton's testimony. So what that basically encompasses is that we're going to assist businesses with respect to who have been impacted to by the hurricanes in addition to that we also have a technical assistance entrepreneurship that will enable individuals to basically help themselves with their businesses and to give them guidance we're just waiting on approval from the substantial amendment number three thank you thank you just to close out because i know my time was called chairwoman you may proceed senator whitaker with wrap up thank you yes definitely and just saying closing in the last point and i want to thank you and to um said what i really suggest that you do is if you have not done already engage with svdc there are a number of small businesses that did not get the innovation grant there are a number of smart and also the eda because they work critically as well with small businesses or collaboratively for those to capture those information those names coordinate to reach out to them so i'm going to actually coordinate with you all in that regard i have been working with the eda um engaging sbdc as well so that we can truly provide the technical assistance to our small businesses so thank you very much for the time thank you for your responses to the virus thank you so much senator whitaker uh before we go into our second round and recognize Senator Blyden for his five minutes, I wanted to ask and follow up on another question I had regarding the Envision program, your home ownership rehabilitation reconstruction program. Mr. Miller, kindly indicate to us how many houses have been completed for the homeowner rehabilitation and reconstruction program how many have been completed for the 20 20 plus million dollars that have been expended
- 2:46:18 to date the program has i'm sorry good morning good afternoon greg miller senior manager of of indivision tomorrow to date the program completed 14 homes 14 homes for 20 million dollars is that correct senator i would like to yes okay uh correct the statement please that is yes miss hanley you're recognized that is 16 homes completed um also senator what needs to be looked at is the number of homes that are in active construction the contractors are do receive mobilization that is counted in that cost to include the 39 homes that are already in active construction okay and what is the cost per square footage for construction in in the the Virgin Islands do any of you have that you have a construction manager you have assessed that because that will help us to understand these figures in more detail we do have a construction we do

have construction managers as well as we have a director of planning and construction as well I think last reported on St. Croix homes were running in excess of maybe three hundred dollars per square foot and St. Thomas and St. John of course higher but I could get you the exact figures. It would be helpful for us to be able to really quantify the amounts that are being spent and qualified because when I hear two units completed under the rental rehabilitation and reconstruction program, and we have expended \$3.1 million. That is a bit of a lopsided amount. Senator Blyden, you're recognized for your five minutes.

2:48:22 Madam Chair, can I have a point of clarification, please, before I receive my time? Certainly. Proceed. Because I know you said five minutes, but did the second round on Senator Johnson did second round he received eight minutes so other time other time let me for the second round because he got eight minutes oh thank you kindly for that clarification you know i came in at the end of the the whole discussion so i'm very thankful that you're there to help us clarify so it's eight minutes i did ask and we weren't too sure so i'm so thankful that you were able to to clarify so it's eight minutes and so senator johnson you're welcome and now you are recognized my dear senator for your eight minutes it's a very important topic very important and i also want to remind my colleague again um that is why we have a hearing on the 25th i'm going to actually dive into the different programs and divisions with the core mention of the authority and what the issues are and we're going to also have our non-for-profit organizations present we're going to have the board present we're going to have everyone and everything i have to do with this this these programs in terms of moving forward and having a honest and frank discussion but uh miss henley um i also want to state for the record that the contractor did call back and how the financial authority have already signed off and his documents so there are no issues there the issues on you guys side and that's why we need to find out exactly what the issues are and move forward i mean we are not perfect none of us but it's about solving the problem i'm moving forward um together as one okay so i just want to put it on the record and in my discussions with um the interim um ed and with contractors my team and i have brought to the agency's attention the numerous instances where people's cases were being closed without proper cars after one or two attempts have was made to contact them by email by the um no um contract contract and i explained that in many cases particularly can someone turn on the mic please particularly our elders access to email was a challenge and we further found that in many

2:50:38 cases the housing finance authority had incorrectly entered email addresses in the applicant's file and thus applicants were through no fault of their own not receiving emails and the housing finance authority promised at that time to change its outreach efforts and to reopen a numerous amount of those cases and additionally i personally provided the whole different authority with the names and contact address of a number of seniors who have been improperly dropped from that program so my question is to um can someone turn on the mic please i'm gonna share someone mic is open um on the other side i believe is miss someone mic is open i believe your mic miss joseph as senator senator everybody's mic here is muted okay fine let me move let me talk to you so what is this um interim ed what is the start of the progress in terms of reaching back out to those seniors who are um affected and they have um cases that were being reopened what the status senator um if you could clarify for me which program are we speaking of the emergency system program the conversation that we had myself and you had in respect to with a new um contract that came on board plexus and the challenges that we found that was occurring and we had a discussion on especially with the seniors on when it first came on board with a nice discussion and you you were supposed to get back with us in terms of um what what's going on with that with that space in that space so um plexus has been opening the cases and we're opening those individual cases of others who are dropped from the program to not fault of their own and you guys want to get back with us in that respect um plexus has been a really good partner with us a lot of the cases where individuals withdrew

2:52:44 or were denied for any reason those those cases they did go back and review where we were able to get some folks paid so if if somebody did not receive payment and they were reviewed it's probably that there was an issue or concern with their particular um application or the information provided or not provided because we've still had cases where individuals uh plexus's team did uh reach out if there is no no no no let me let me be clear it was many seniors who were on the program i was dropped from program because plexus said they could not get a hold of them for whatever reason and after we spoke in in terms of many of those seniors not having access in terms of email, et cetera. There was a book, and we sent, I sent a listing of the names of those individuals to you guys, and it was about to review and go over those and let us know exactly they gave my opportunity to get back on a list and work with them. I'm trying to find out what happened to those elders in those cases, because it was a certain amount of elders that were dropped from the program to no fault of their own.

2:54:04 And that's my question and my concern. I'm just following up on those individuals. And again, Senator, I would have to go and look for the list that you submitted. I don't recall that list. I don't know if, Michelle, if a number of members of the team. I'm happy to go back to that list and we could look. However, we did go back through who was denied or we had an application and something happened and was able to pay out some of those persons as well as for those that didn't

qualify, we couldn't. Yes, and if you could send me the list also, because I don't recall a list because most of the times we have, when you do send things to us, we do look and try to ask.

2:54:50 We will resend it right after I'm finished with my line of question. I'll resend it immediately, okay? Thank you. In addition, again, I'm reminding you guys, um in respect to the chair the um the monetary ports and respond um from hud and finally i would like to also um basically say for the record in respect to the many um different programs that you guys have and the many federal funding that you have and uh capacity of your staff and the training etc because i know you have lost several um staff members um that these with many of these um federal funds etc and the different programs what are you doing to actually um fill out void when it comes to your staffing in assuring that moving forward you know on we're in point in respect to um responsive in respect to our communication because as i stated i have stated before many times i am asking that they those individuals possess some type of empathy and have compassion because this is a very special area when it comes to dealing with our residents housing them and the hfa plays a major role when it comes to that and i expect to see more of that moving forward can you talk to the staffing in terms of training and what's going on in terms of filling the void with some of your vacancies that you said they are all critical i do agree with that so what's going on in that space absolutely thank you and again as stating in the um testimony we recognize um port part of retention is to really have a good onboarding experience and we are creating that on the onset where individuals really understand a lot of the federal rules and regulations the Federal Register notices how the program operates understanding the policy so they have that foundation coming in so there's a lot of opportunity there in orientation as well as sending staff to training I'm taking advantage of every

2:57:06 possible webinar series there is for disaster recovery we do attend a lot of of those, as well as sending staff to training as well. What we are doing more strategically is not just hiring bodies to have a body in the space, but rather hire for purpose intentionally. For example, the hire of Miss Lavenire here next to me, who has a great background with HUD and policy and regulatory services so she was hired particularly to help streamline our policies the procedures that we're doing the compliance requirements etc so we're being strategic in our hiring each manager is assessing reassessing the areas constantly to ensure that we we get what we need and include them and i'm sure if i may um i just want to wrap up by stating that um in respect to plexus and folks not being able to get through and having to call back to get um receive a call back the next day etc um that need to be corrected immediately that should not be happening and a high call volume shows the need you understand that the desperation that's needed at this time so that should not be happening that needs to be corrected immediately and i look forward to having a further discussion in respect to the mitigation funds um at your earliest convenience thank you so much madam chair for the time and thank you guys for responses and i wish you guys the best moving forward and please communicate it's critical thank you so much thank you so much thank you i i missed a brief portion of your questions we were talking about

2:58:56 mitigation funds yeah i was telling her i look forward to having um the follow-up meeting with in respect to mitigation funds i look forward to them having better communication and plexus not having to call back the next day or people call back several days later because their call volume is so high and it shows the desperation and the need for them to have someone available at all times in order for us to move forward. Thank you so much. You're welcome.

2:59:24 So the mitigation programs, I know at one point Howard was not allowing MIT to commence or release any funds unless the outstanding issues were addressed. at the same are we in our same position today I'm sorry Senator repeat mitigation the mitigation programs at some point harder um they weren't it's her my notes previously hard it wasn't allowing any programs on the MIT to commence or release any funds unless outstanding issues were addressed no that no no that's changed yes no i'm i'm gonna so that says no correct okay and then um plexus back to plexus and i increase you know all local outreach for e-wrap was stopped by the vihfa board on 10-3 we laid off all of our employees yesterday is that true i didn't hear what you said say i'm sorry all local outreach for erop was stopped by vihfa's board on 10-3 we laid off all of our employees yesterday vihfa board did not stop plexus um to to the point of lay off their staff what vihfa board has asked is that we have a discussion with plexus and we're in that discussion with plexus as stated we have a contract from now until may of 2023 so So does Plexus get the memo that their local outreach was not stopped?

3:01:27 Plexus has the memo that we need to talk about what our requirements are and what they are bringing to the table. And what's the timeline on that? We have a meeting scheduled, actually, this Friday at 4. Okay. Plexos. Correct. Okay.

3:01:53 Senator Francis? Point of inquiry. Go ahead, Senator Blyan. Point of inquiry on Senator Francis. based on your line of question and um um interim ed pending in respect to plexos i'm a little confused because based on what you just stated on the record whether that shouldn't have been done doing the vetting process with them to make sure everything aligned moving forward in respect to the program what's expected of them and from them absolutely absolutely but throughout the course of the contract we it's required that we go back and have a conversation okay very well thank you so much

thank you manager you're welcome santa francis uh thank you very much madam chair um mother interim executive director i know you spoke today at length about onboarding of employees can you speak to how many individuals have resigned been discharged or terminated from hfa of recent within the termination none um in terms of resignations we've had in excess of in excess of four within the last three months okay and um have you replaced the ceo for our position yet i know that that darren richardson is one of the individuals that resigned recently have you filled that position we have not and thank you for bringing that up if the public could go to our website via hfa.gov uh the uh career section there is the job listing there as well as others and if you qualified we'd love for you to apply very well we'll send you a bill for that advertisement because i know you're spending a lot of money in in advertisement right um so let's have a discussion again going back to envision um your envision program

3:04:08 how are you prioritizing those individuals uh for the rebuild is is there any mechanism any um any any data that help you to drive your decision, whether or not to prioritize those individuals that need have rebuilt? Yes, Senator. Ms. Hanley will go ahead and respond. One of the things that we utilize to determine who moves through the process are the individuals who have received grant signing. means the individuals have either their architectural and engineering drawings prepared and have completed environmental okay and are you looking at in terms of individuals that may be residing outside the home you know their their age and those any of the factors that determine what or not an individual will receive some priority with the edits to the program policy mr. Miller is looking at some of those considerations for the other applicants what would we call special needs applicants okay and is there any consideration whatsoever in respect to giving a grant award you know given these individuals are having them select work with their contractor with some reporting back to HFA to make sure that there's completion is there any discussion about doing that as a means of expediting the process we have had that discussion internally there was no formal decision made as to whether or not it would be permissible I do believe though that thinking I'm probably gonna

3:06:04 get looks for this thing the some of the issues and concerns that the program is facing internally the residents will have those issues as well I've received calls from individuals who are looking for recommendation for contractors looking for recommendation for engineers we do have a capacity issue within the Virgin Islands as it relates to contractors and engineers so the residents will to have some of those issues that the program is facing right now as well and the issue of the contract does not be intimidated in a timely fashion and I heard your rationale in respect to that that they're not completing the paperwork in a timely fashion with bleakness but I see that there is an opportunity for us to be able to ask what uh in that um space you know whether it is by project directors or by some other um envision now i mean the earnest young or those type of assistance but the issue of them not being paid in the fashion is one of real concern i've approached by several contractors in respect that so in order for us to to be able to get them and keep them in loop i think a critic for us to uh to be a little bit innovative and creative about how best we could assist them in being able to fill fill out those documents and keep traffic the reality is fema and hud change those guidelines um periodically you experience it at your level um odr experience it at their level so we think co-op into our contractors is that real yes it is real senator one of the things that we're looking at mr miller has been instrumental in providing assistance to some of the contractors who have experienced significant delays due to improper completed paperwork mr pell who's just been hired with hfa he's going to to be working with our construction management contractor who is responsible for providing the assistance to our contractors to aid them and help them in filling out this paperwork to ensure that they are accurate and they can be processed timely.

3:08:31 So there are improvements in place to ensure that this occurs, Senator. I'm happy to see Mr. Pellon on board. certainly a man of this community and i expect i have great expectation from him and um two minutes i don't know if he changes but personally i'll be utilizing it to help um to make sure that i get some of my questions answered let me let me just lend my voice to the concern that have been raised regarding our blue tarps or soft roof throughout our community i i think it'll be rather important um for us to to revisit that that issue uh you know it is a concern of mine as well i believe that the tarps that have been put on people's home over the last several years has really been where the beating by this time and uh you know in this time of strong reign i know that i hear hfa don't have the responsibility of this but i think as a government i think collectively hfa vitima odr should and as well the office of the governor and even this body of db um you know we should give some consideration to those individuals uh that uh are really impacted by every rate and the fact that the tarp along the load one minute so voice to that concern um executive director i have sent you the information regarding the young lady that's in crisis with the e-wrap program um fire your cell phone uh you could pass it on to your to the proper channel but that is a real situation and um again she's in distress and whatever we could do to support and assist her uh with that i would appreciate essentially her name as well as a cell phone number and um where do we go from here i i think that that we have had a meeting and i know that that

- 3:10:22 we'll be wrapping this up shortly but where do we go from here in reassuring this community that the those that need our services you know what can they expect as we leave this place today um from from uh from hfe what is it that we could expect leaving out of here today senator um i just begged the indulgence of um time interim executive the director clinton and as it relates to the envision program the team that you have before you we are committed to helping the residents of this territory to make them whole we admit that we are slow in trying to get the repairs done however with the onboarding of mr. Pell the onboarding of mr. Thomas and with the energy of mr. Miller there are processes that we have have put in place with our contractor grant engineering services, we will be able to now provide to the residents a timeline by which they can anticipate their homes being repaired. With the projects that we provide them, they provide us a schedule by which we will be able to get the architectural drawings that would assist us in anticipating um procurement and providing the residents responses and answers to their questions of what is and when and that is a question that most of our residents ask us right now and before we were not able to provide that response but i am assuring the residents that we will be able to provide that response in the future uh thank you very much for that madam chair if i could just ask that they respond to
- 3:12:19 this final question on your time uh please in regards to the visit by um marcia fudge have we been able to reconcile the concerns that have been raised um by the hud secretary and working towards meeting um whatever timeline was provided to us or we had committed to go in so we are reconciling uh some of her concerns we do have a document that i do promise to send off to her but we have addressed some of the things she talked about while here such as reaching out more to the non-profits which is why we offered the notice of available funding gave an additional two million dollars to that program where we got nine respondents applicants that we are happy to fund so yes senator we currently are thank you does that satisfy your response your inquiry senator francis the amount of chair i guess we'll drill down um you know subsequent but i think it's important that we're able to reconcile those those and differences because we certainly need her and outside um in in this space so uh thank you thank you for the opportunity before we get there director clinton roughly you've had 31 separations based on the documents um from the budget hearing to now so how are you not within the three months is that what But within the last three months, you had roughly, how many separations, eight? I said in excess of five, I think I said.
- 3:14:10 It's eight. So you had eight separations. And over the time, you have had 31. So I don't know how effective we have. I keep forgetting your name. I was going to say the policy director. Tell me your name again one more time, please. Alana Lavonier. So we have Ms. Lavonier here on policy. and mr pell but people leaving you faster than you could bring them on board well again in the disaster recovery world and they will tell you as we have learned in training as well disaster recovery work is difficult it is challenging and it is hard and as such turnover is high it's not unique to the territory it is all over we were recently on a call with the northern mariana islands last night as well and they experienced same or similar challenges again yes we have to have bodies to do the work but we need to be strategic in our hiring practices so that yes it slows turnover and we are able to retain employees we've hired a great set of individuals as well as Miss Hanley indicated, not just Mr. Pell, but Ms. Constable, Mr. Miller, Mr. Dorsett who's been there a minute though, Ms. Ross, Ms. Johnson, Mr. Odari Thomas who will help us focus on the infrastructure projects as well. So it's about being strategic. Thank you, Senator.
- 3:15:46 You know, he's smiling. Plexus. I know you're on Plexus, you know, because emergency rental assistance is really a sore issue for myself and I'm sure my colleagues. Ten weeks ago, they asked you for a change order? Yes. Okay, and then the board asks for operations to stop with Plexus because you exceeded the amount? The board has not asked that operations stop. Because I'm trying to get to the bottom of this. There's no bottom to get to, Senator.
- 3:16:30 No, no, no, no. As I'm indicating before, we are in a conversation with Plexus. We have a meeting for Friday. some things that were brought through the cost of the through the course of the contract that we need addressed so there's no bottom to get there we provided more than five million dollars in direct assistance to to um i have been so lenient today with the condescending tone the responses i apologize senator and i have been extremely lenient just not let you talk over me no antagonism so early when i asked you about plexus you said a contract was until may 2023 what was the difficulty in saying that we're going to meet with plexus on friday because there are some issues because plexus employees are still citizens of this hold a minute there are still people that live in this territory locals that work for plexus that are worried about their job and their job security and they will ask the question to the body insofar as their job status and when i ask it at the beginning of the hearing i don't know that's nothing happening we're going to their contract extends until may 2023 this is how you answer me and now as i probe a little more you're telling me well we having contract issues and we do intend to meet with them on friday so i don't like pulling information from from a testifier. I don't want to be adversarial with you. I want to have a conversation so we could bring to light what is happening, how we can fix it, and have a robust discussion. That is it. That's all I'm saying. So I don't want you to skirt around the answers anymore, because usually if I ask you a question, I have some idea of what appropriate response is.

- 3:18:23 And I just need some clarification on the matter. So I don't want to use my time to attempt to reprimand, but if I am speaking, please don't speak over me. Understood. Point of inquiry, Senator Joseph. Thank you so much, Madam Chair. My point of inquiry was relative to the previous, not you, the other speaker from St. Croix, question regarding um the number of applicants that were awarded for ngos i know you have identified it in your testimony on page 13 but kindly indicate for us the number of applicants that had were received for the notice of funding availability how many applications did you receive? Ms. Zakenia Ross indicated earlier that 11 will receive of the 11, 9 was awarded.
- 3:19:27 Okay. I may have missed that. Thank you so much. Thank you. Senator Carrillo. you madam chair and um i must say that when i look at how many elderly people in our community have been spring since 2017 with the hurricane and now the rise of inflation i'm compelled to say something this morning about our retirement system government retiree requires cost of increase given the impact of inflation and this must be done and the members of our loan program fully reinstated before anyone in gfs should be considered for peace i am more than alarmed by the gs board support of a massive salary increase where it's administrator this is frankly shocking and unacceptable and i hope this has changed going back to the finance authority interim director with regards to the payment i know you mentioned testimony to the program that you're actively working to streamline late payment and approval process to minimize that delay that you're having can you share with us what specific changes you're doing to avoid this from happening certainly thank you senator um with the some of the changes are for example our
- 3:21:20 financial system or the grants management system where when designed it appears that a lot of the manual procedures was just dumped into an electronic process. So we're looking at how to make that more seamless with our contractors partners. We're looking at all the approval levels. Is 10 or 12 approvals really necessary to move this one document, depending on the amount of the document, the scope of work for the document. So just really finding creative ways to process quickly and within whatever parameters in terms of rules and guidelines we have to follow. Those are just too specific.
- 3:22:09 When you feel confident that you will be up to date or in a better position to make these payments on time? So we are, and we've gotten better. We've been able to turn out large payments quickly as well. The time has reduced, but I do believe within that six month period, when it comes to payment processing reallocating our admin dollars etc we will see a tremendous change yeah i was going to ask you then what is the goal that you're looking to target what average time frame turn around to be able to make those payments and i know a lot is dependent on receiving the appropriate justification documents and so forth that fall along align with your requirements but what are are your goals our goals would be two weeks at minimum okay and what do you have currently outstanding to your vendors especially the contractors I wouldn't say outstanding to our vendors it's going through our payment process I can provide a listing if you like as just to where payments are in the process but I wouldn't say outstanding unless Ms. Shelford CFO wants to add anything to that.
- 3:23:42 No because what we do as long as we get all the documents and that goes to the grant management system that's needed based on the requirements for her also then we would pay that contractor. one a document might be missing or the invoices might have to be sent back but as long as we get all the documents we don't usually have a problem with making the payments a lot of it is you know between working through the program staff and the finance staff and the contractor to make sure everything is on in place for HUD's requirement because we can if we send you the payment and it's not correct we're gonna have to pay some we will have to pay the money back and we don't want to do that so we try to make sure and it's basically like in terms of a reimbursable program they do the work and we pay them.
- 3:24:42 Senator just to piggy off of what Miss Shelford was indicating as well so I was told we do have at least three vendors in which um that we do have outstanding payments for however it is largely due to lack of documentation okay what are those three vendors and what are the amounts we're happy to tell you the vendors offline not necessarily in this public forum if that's okay and we could get you the amount please do through the chair um does this affect then the continuation of the program no no these three events are still actively working yes senator very well do you have a cost value of uh the lumber that is in your possession for both districts I don't believe we have a cost value, Shelford, because it was used for the STEP program.
- 3:25:56 \$14 million? So what was turned over from the STEP program, and as far as I can recall, it's \$14 million, i can double check and make sure that that's the correct amount because it's been a while please do and submit that uh mr chair also with regards to your excuse me e-wrap now i understand that uh you have many landlords that have received the payments have been owed now there has been some questions around late fees what is the process regards to late fees who is responsible for the late fees how is this being handled in some instances um we pay up a certain amount of the late fees we would pay the rent and then the balance the tenant would have to pay some of the late fees not all of it so what determines in some instances and how much you're going to pay and who gets that payment because we received

information landlords that they haven't received that one minute what the landlord might not have received is say for instance there are like three hundred dollars in late fees we would possibly pay half of that it just depends on how much of the rent we're trying to pay and bring up to date the rent itself and not the late fees some of it the tenants would pay i'm hearing you but i'm not getting like a clear response so is there a cap in the rent that you're paying and if that cap is not met uh then you pay late fees help me help me understand so we pay up to 18 months of rent that's owed by the tenants our goal is to try to get the rent whole now the late fees is separate from your rent

3:28:14 so we try to pay the rent up to 18 months if we have any Money that we can you know give to a late fee. We will do that, but our goal is to pay the rent Yeah, I understand that so what you're saying that if it's up to 18 months of rent and They owe less than 18 months you have some money available and then you pay the late fee for that Yes And it's based on different situations why we pay the late fee for example i would love to get back to you on that because it's like i said situation by situation i know we don't pay out all the late fees for sure but i'll i'll get you what the possible instances are all right my time has been called uh thank you madam chair and thank you for holding this hearing clearly um there is a little bit of progress there's much work to be done i look forward to the day when our community members will be able to know for sure especially those in vision program that their homes will be completed thank you very much inquiry you know i'll take record today senator bladding point of inquiry it's important it really is um thank you madam chair um in respect to the last point of um questioning when it comes to the payments whether it be late fee whether it be 18 months whether it be hotel water light the main purpose of those funds is to avoid folks from being homeless and losing their apartment so you're telling me if someone

3:30:08 will be handling the rent and all had to pay late fee in respect to that landlord or whomever um you decide whether you pay a certain amount of the late fee i don't believe that's what the money was about the money is about keeping people off the streets period it didn't specify that to pay one thing and not the next it does not work like that it does not work like that and it should not work like that based on the mandates so i look forward again to having further in-depth discussion and the 25th thank you so much madam chair for the time thank you and the era let's go to europe are you i know some funds already recaptured the excess amount but are you are you subject to more funds being recaptured if you don't issue a certain amount of payments yes in december um if 40 not issue payments if 40 percent of the grant isn't obligated there may be more recapture but we do have a plan in place to obligate those funds you said december yes yeah in october how much have you obligated so far of that how much of the 40 percent what percent of the 40 percent well it would be like five million that we would obligate now that we're working on the agreements and then tell me of this give me percentages of 40 how much have you obligated as of october 4th 5th I did the calculations, I just don't have it on me, but we know by December based on the plan we have in place, based on the amounts we have paid out of ERAP II, which this will

3:32:09 we ear up to we would have obligated at least 45 percent. 25? 45. 45? Yes. So you would make the 40 percent by December? Yes. Because if these funds are spent the only people that suffer is the people of this territory. Excuse me? If these funds... Of course. We don't want any more funds to go back. Because they're already suffering. Okay. And funds already went back right yes how much 16 million because we're in June because we didn't spend it obligated what was the reason it was based on Treasury they reallocated the funds to other states and territories that could use it we We're known as a small state.

3:33:02 But we have used our money? No. Okay. Senator Blaine, you're itching. What do you want to say? Point of inquiry? Point of inquiry, and then we're going to Senator Verley? No. Thank you. Senator Joseph, you're next. Go ahead. Thank you, Madam Chair. Hence, it is critical that we utilize the funds for what they were intended for. Give the people that money, whatever it be for. lay a fee, whatever, give it to them, the money's for them. Spend the money. We don't want to spend send back any money. Spend the money. That's what it's for. I know in the past we have resistance in putting people in hotels. We have resistance in paying water bill. I mean, we need to spend the money. That's what it's for. Period. I recommend we do whatever is possible based on a case to utilize those funds by any means necessary once it's authorized to the funding. Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

3:33:57 If we have to spend this money, people need help, we can't be holding the money like with the guardians and then, I mean the guardians but, jeez, um, Senator Joseph, sorry, sorry, pause. Senator Francis had a point of inquiry, Senator Francis, I'm sorry. Thank you very much Madam Chair. really quickly wanted to ask uh the odr director adrian william dr lane whether or not i know that we had issued or allowed for a line of credit to be issued an instrument i want to ask whether or not if there ever been a reason for us to activate that line of credit and for what senator thank you for the question uh we did not have an immediate need to utilize that line of credit because uh we petitioned hud not hud but to be able to pay invoices on invoice rather than to have to pay in advance uh fema granted that so that really was a real paradigm shift in a way that we managed the recovery um there may be opportunities for that in the future only because we're projecting the

match for the fema funding the 90 10 cost share the amount that has been identified in cbg funds is insufficient based on the trajectory that we're on right now with obligations that we're receiving from fema we anticipated uh five billion dollars of the eight billion dollars to fema funds and we now see that there's an opportunity with all of these replacement decisions to get move up to 8 billion but again only 500 million dollars has been set aside in the cdbg funds for match so we are already identifying a problem as we move forward in finding the match for these projects so thanks for the question thank you Thank you Senator Francis, Senator Joseph.

3:36:11 Thank you so much Madam Chair. I really tend not to go on any type of excessive concerns relative to programs and management and always and the delivery of services. I really have some deep rooted issues with housing finance authority and how we are implementing these programs I know everybody is doing the very best you can but we need to try to do and and just shift into another gear because every time it rains I don't know if any of you have ever had to encounter it but I have lived through it where there's water coming down and I love the rain and there's water coming into a unit you have to be mopping instead of enjoying the rain and it is not a wonderful wonderful experience we aren't placed here to suffer we have very highly educated human beings who live in the virgin islands who are in leadership positions um and if you are in control of certain things you and I know all of you are doing it I'm very much convinced you are you show up every day to help our people these are our people and the envision program to me based on what I have read I've heard from residents especially our elders is not working really well to benefit our people who are in dire need so dire need of the services so they could be able to live in comfort peace and enjoy not to be suffering and having a level of tribulation every time it rains so I'm hopeful uh within the next maybe three months uh we will see more of these three months more of these uh units being completed more of them coming back online people coming into their homes and the like and and that leads to my question do you have thresholds and that you're holding contractors to or what is in place that we can hold people to so that they can complete these units timely for the contractors it would be meeting or keeping in line with their project schedules for our architectural and engineering contractors is the completion of the drawings associated with the repairs for the homes and so

3:39:14 that's what is you know preventing because of the technical service so is Is there any other way you've developed that we can really saturate those type of services, those type? I know construction work is not complex. I'm going to just say it. It's not complex. The paperwork is what gets complex, but construction work is very basic. What is it that we need to do? Have you identified to really fast-track this process? What are those things that are needed to fast-track so we can saturate it so our people aren't suffering like this anymore? Senator, as I've said, the issue is the majority of these homes require architectural drawings. These are substantial repairs.

3:40:13 Okay. Thank you so much, Ms. Handley. Now, talking about construction, Interim ED on page eight, I wanted to ask you regarding this Ross Mixed-Use project that you mentioned here. I'm not a construction contractor, but I do dabble a little bit in construction. And I understand that we do have a need for affordable housing, low to very low income and affordable housing here in the virgin islands I just wanted to understand your your and your team um thought process to have this three-story building consist of two of its floors to be commercial and only one floor to be residential so two-thirds of this building that's going to be at uh estate ross is going to be uh commercial and only one story is going to be a residential why is that and we have such a huge need for very low low income and moderate housing it doesn't make sense I would think that we would have at least two-thirds of it be residential and one commercial. What was the thought process in having it two of the stories commercial and only one story residential?

3:41:52 I believe, and it sort of predates me to some extent, I believe the idea was to bring some revitalization to that area um to that area where it's next to the um the fire station uh polyburg so to bring some commercial act more commercial activity there I'm so sorry barbara plaza is located right across the street I'm just thinking it it doesn't for me looking at the dire needing I'm just talking about the human beings who have rain falling down on their heads right and that and we have a number of human beings here in the virgin islands who are homeless how does it make uh a really sense to have a two three story building that two of the stories are commercial and not uh residential sure and again um for the top story residential the other story I believe as mr griffith testified before will house the vi housing finance authority right now as well we are paying um exorbitant rents as well and would have that space for the authority as well as to be able to collect some revenue for the authority to uh to run to operate I still have some concerns relative to the thought process in that because I'm looking at people having homes that are safe decent and sanitary and that they can go in and it's really about families as well to be able to secure themselves so I'm sure you've done some cost assessments on that but you're not going to be um how how far along because you have this need for added space because of of the hud funding and all of the work that is required and the bodies that is required to implement manage and monitor these funding do you see you do you see that you're going to be needing to use that floor continuously absolutely one minute beyond the what 20 26 because when when does your last grant expire what year mitigation will expire in 12 years after receipt of the funding

- 3:44:23 and you do anticipate that after that time you will see a reduction in your workforce in your need we will see a small reduction in the the workforce yes but the office spacing is still required because even now not um we still would have two shared spaces um and and you own the location that you're currently housed in french town correct yes okay i just i really would put uh families for me um and see how you could expand the number of units because families are important and having them have saved decent housing that's a major issue major i i look at it as a major issue for us rather than having commercial space madam chair I won't go into any further questions. Thank you for the time.
- 3:45:20 Madam Chair, if I could just respond. Sure. Thank you. Senator, you're absolutely right, but it's also why we have affordable home projects such as the Estate Mount Pleasant, Fortuna, Whispering Hills, Solitude, why we're sending out notice of available funding for developers to bid on those contracts. It's why we keep our partnership with the Virgin Islands Housing Authority, as well as why we have the Own-A-Lot Build-A-Home. So it's not just the Ross Mixed-Use, that's just a small component. But we do have other programs now in disaster recovery, and that will be funding in mitigation for housing.
- 3:46:03 i just i just want to clarify that the housing units that you have coming on board and that are on board those are homeownership these mixed-use apartments are rental apartments the housing authority has a huge weight in this i'm telling you because the young people them they're working they want to go leave their parents home and find some place so that they could do you know be independent that's a sign of economic self-sufficiency when you're able to have your own apartment and pay rent and most of them want to do that that's a little bridge you know stepping up the ladder for them and so i definitely would have uh looked at rethinking it because especially for the four one-bedroom and to see if you could expand the rental units for this specific project. Thank you, Madam Chair.
- 3:47:07 Thank you. The question was asked earlier as to late fees, correct? What was the response? For ERAP, it's based on the lease agreement. On the lease? The lease agreement. Because the federal guidelines state that ERA 1 and ERA 2 includes reasonable accrued late fees, if not included in rental or utility areas, and internet service provided to the rental unit. ERA 2 can be used for relocation and expenses such as first, last, and security. ERA-2 does not require direct impact by COVID.
- 3:47:57 It's on the federal government website, but go ahead. So it's based on the lease agreements. And like you said, what it is, it says in terms of late fees. It says reasonable accrued late fees. So we want to pay the rent. and include some late fees if we can so we want to pay your rent up to the eight you have 18 months that you could pay the rent for and our goal is to make your rent whole you usually the rental fees wouldn't be as high as your rent it would just be like a fifty dollars for late fee And your rent could be \$1,200.
- 3:48:41 So IRAP 2 now, under U.S. Treasury, says experience a reduction in household income, incurred significant costs, or experience other financial hardship during or due, directly or indirectly, to the coronavirus pandemic. Yeah, so IRAP 2 is not all coronavirus, so we know that. And you asked before, so, like we try to pay the late fees, but our goal really is to make you hold on your rent, because the late fee doesn't add up to as much as your rent will add up. But some people can't even afford a late fee. You have some landlords that are a little crazy with late fees, you know. So we can't include a late fee in a check, one time?
- 3:49:33 We can and we do, but like I said, if it's not reasonable, you have to think, if a landlord said they want \$300 a month in late fees, it's not reasonable for most of the instances. In some instances, I'm saying it's like case by case, and it's based on your lease agreement. And we have up to 18 months to make people whole, so our goal is to go to the 18 months. Now, going back to a question, I put in my notes here, somebody said that contractors have a hard time after doing a job, submitting their paperwork, right?
- 3:50:15 Somebody told me that. Documents. Documents. Do you have a case worker for contractors? No, Senator. No, common sense. No offense. If you are seeing contractors submitting documents and they're struggling with their paperwork, just like how for the fishermen, there was a problem with the fishermen and getting them to do their documents, so we hired the strategy group to assist them with their documents so they can receive their disaster funds. If contractors are submitting paperwork to you and you're seeing a recurring issue over and over and over it doesn't something doesn't say well let's assign a case worker to contractors so we can ensure that things come in because when a contractor's paperwork is off people work for them right we have a domino effect here people work for them and then they don't get paid so you don't have a circulation of dollars you don't have any corporate income tax being paid any gross receipt taxes or any individual income taxes money is not a A dollar should circulate in an economy roughly five to seven times.
- 3:51:28 So, what's the plan? Because every contractor can't become one of the raw people. What can we just say, okay? Help me, help me, Ms. Hanley. Senator, no, that is not what is happening. Talk to me. The construction manager that is assigned to that particular contractor would work with the contractor to assist them with correcting the paperwork. as well as our

architect has provided assistance to the contractors as well moving forward grant engineering services will bridge that gap between VIHFA and the contractor so they will provide the assistance to the contractor with filling out the required documents so that the documents are correct before they come to VIHFA. Okay, and Director, what's the total admin cost for your CDBG, CDBG-DR programs? What we've expended thus far?

3:52:30 Total. \$25 million. The admin? Of how much? much out of the one one billion but you can't spend 25 on 1 million 1 billion oh 1 billion how much remaining 25 I went to admin cost how much went to other areas like construction and it's been about 37 plus million in housing 153 million in infrastructure another five plus million in economic revitalization so I could get you the total. 5 million economic revitalization is a total amount for that category? 5.7 million. How much? 5.7 million. And how much you spend in admin costs for economic revitalization? We just have one admin cost at 25 million if you want me to then use something to break it down per program. Please break it program so miss Lavener is you the policy lady so the amount that we spending amount are we spending the amount of responding admin costs in comparison to actual kind of work done is that a concern for HUD just fine is Senator, just again, just before Ms. Lavender speaks, I do want to indicate that the admin dollars charged very early in the project is being reallocated to the projects itself where it should have been first and not to admin costs.

3:54:33 Go ahead, Ms. So with the fact that it's being reallocated to the programs within itself, it'll bring us back down as to where right now we're at 46 percent it'll bring us back down to an a safe and a percentage where we should be once we reallocate those costs back to program and when is that gonna happen in six months point of increase Santa Joseph yes thank you so much madam chair miss Ms. Clendenning, could you indicate what is your percentage of administrative costs, your cap, allowed by HUD? Is it either 10 or is it 5 or is it 15? 5. 5%. Okay. Thank you kindly.

3:55:22 All right. Let me ask a few questions. what's the we have projects right now over six months in the environmental phase you have a timeline to get these products from the environmental phase to next phase should i go to mr um pell the engineer no okay um and miss lavener um who oversees environmental as well could just give you some of the um regulations we have to go through because of the um hud rules regulation so an environmental could be a little unpredictable in in terms of timelines we've had considerable challenges in that area uh so much so that we've asked for and we'll receive some technical assistance within the next two to three weeks to help us with the environmental pieces of every project is there anything you want to add miss lavenu we are we are um working throughout our stream stream on our environmental processes we do know that there are certain expectations that may work stateside that does not apply to the Virgin Islands and therefore we do have some HUD consultants that are coming to work with us, look at our processes and help us streamline our processes within the November time span.

3:56:56 So what's your target timeframe once you've streamlined processes? How long are you looking for a project to be in environmental phase? Is your target goal six weeks, a month? Because six months now is what we're looking at well that's the reality right now six months or more to be in that phase so what's your target goal once hot has helped you to streamline those processes so once they've helped us to streamline those processes and we can implement those processes we do hope to roll that out within within the next month once hunt visits us um the whole phase can it all can depend on the type of project that it is um and for specific projects are specific timelines and specific phases for our own a lot it can take about four months or so it just depends on those specific projects so there is not one set timeline per project okay but we are working to streamline those processes so that we have a shortened time span but it doesn't take the six months it doesn't take the eight months with the Senior Environmental Manager. Keora Vieira.

3:58:01 Can I log on, please, before I conclude? Get that, Mr. Dorsett, what's your programs? Good afternoon again, Donnie Dorsett, Economic Revitalization, Senior Program Manager. Okay, tell me what's happening with the revitalization neighborhoods the historic districts the historic towns that program senator we're waiting on on the substantial amendment number three approval and then we will begin talking to me like at a walk day what's amendment number three so the substantial amendment number three of course there was a USVI action plan that was done in 2018 so this is going to be the third amendment to this plan and within that plan under an economic revitalization we're going to have a neighborhood revitalization program funding for that is approximately 14 million 32 000. you have a deadline i'm sorry is there deadline to spend these funds the deadline would be the september 26th but for us internally economic revitalization we're looking at may 2026. so what's needed to start this program beside the third amendment after that what's next after that we will issue our notice of funding availability that would be open to both public private non-profit organizations we have a preliminary time frame for that we're looking at at least by december issuing the nova by february all applicants should be in and then hopefully by april 2023 everyone should be able to proceed

4:00:07 all right let's talk about skills for today currently under the skills for today you have approximately 285 individuals who are training for the national center of construction and educational research for work-based learning we have approximately 96 individuals let me just go back up to NC CER so far we have certified 125 individuals this isn't much

of a difference from when you here you know well senator i would say that the the process is um continuing i think that um it's 285 we have individuals in a pipeline who have not begun training yet and in terms of certification those who are completing they have to take the examinations everyone doesn't take the examinations the same time is there a timeline for this entire skills for today to be completed it is currently scheduled to end you know the applicant after they finish everything and have to take their certification is there like do you have a year to study two years or no timeline no there i don't have the specific dates for the timeline but after you complete the study perhaps in the next two to three weeks it depends that is done by the contractor and they would set the times as to when the individuals will take the examinations all right let's talk about dredging

4:02:04 currently the dredging projects charlotte amali harbor and and crown bay east gregor are under economic revitalization uh that's approximately 38 million how much is going to the shots amalia harbour 23 million plus the 17 from the pfa senator that's different that's different from disaster recovery currently it's 23 million that was written for charlotte and molly hold a second the governor announced that he's given 17 million he's going to reprogram 17 million from the pfa to dredge the harbor you're telling me the harbor had 23 million allocated so the concern i have is only one harbor outside so i don't know how much if you're gonna dredge the north the south like what what is that you want so if i may senator um as mr dorsett was indicating we're only speaking about the money here the we don't have the approval yet to spend any funding associated with dredging So that's a question. The testimony says you have dredging projects. Even if you didn't get the approval, I'm concerned that we're going to spend \$17 million of the PFA funds, that we could really reprogram someplace else and really use the CDBGDR funding that you have for the dredging once approved. So if the governor proceeds with \$17 million in dredging, what does that do for the \$23 million that you have?

4:03:49 But again, there's no surety right now from HUD or no real, just based on the first denial and our plea, there's no assurances, right, which was why we said we appeal or we're appealing. We don't have any assurances that we will have this funding for that project. Lutheran Social Services.

4:04:19 No, that doesn't fall on the mic. That is Ms. Zakenya Ross. Ms. Zakenya. And Ms. Kiora is on, Kiora Vieira, if you have a question for her. So who just joined me?

4:05:05 Kiora Viveira, she's the senior environmental program manager. Ms. Kiora, what's the hold-ups on the environmental side? Good afternoon, again, my name is Kira Vera, I'm the Senior Environmental Manager. With environmental, our holdups really stem from consultation requirements with other local and federal agencies.

4:05:37 That can be seen as one of our biggest delays with the environmental review process as we don't have jurisdiction over any of the regulations. does require us to go into consultation with a lot of or multiple agencies throughout the local and federal government and obtaining responses from those agencies can be very timely okay so on the local side you're struggling yes with both local and federal yes okay which local agencies are you struggling with um you have to consult with of course gpnr is one of our biggest agencies that we consult with but we also consult with health department of health health department of energy waste management authority and port authority there's a list of government agencies that we do have to communicate with that i can provide for you okay so why are we having that that struggle or bottleneck there.

4:06:41 Director Clendenin, do you go to cabinet meetings? No, Senator, I do not. Okay, do you have discussions? Of course, you're not part of the central government. But we work closely with ODR, Office of Disaster Recovery Director. So who's, so the good environmental engineer, we have a little back, a little issue here with our local agencies. I can't control the federal side, we can't do that, but the things that we could control, let's control. Also, who, Ms. Director Williams-Actaline?

4:07:16 Made aware of any issues that we have with any of the government agencies. Anytime it's elevated to me, I will intervene and ensure that it gets resolved as quickly as possible. Okay, so I don't want any backlash today because I didn't even know this was an environmental person so that we have an environmental, what's the position again, senior environmental manager. So can we have a discussion with ODR and the environmental manager on closing the gap on a local agency so we could move from this environmental phase?

4:07:58 Yes, Senator. Director Actelene Williams? Oh, absolutely. I reach out to Kiara regularly so she knows that she has an open line to me if there's any problem I will move in and try to resolve it. Okay so Ms. Kiara, looking forward to that, 10,000 helpers where are they on their project? Because we talk about homelessness but we have to get a shelter and a housing facility open for our our um our indigent population. What's the status on that?

4:08:39 Ten thousand helpers um did submit an application for the notice of available um funding under the disaster recovery program. so it's just been all right um do you want to miss vera yes i i sure can hello the kenya ross here again so 10 000 helpers was actually um identified and um they have submitted application and currently they're going in to the um

capacity capacity assessment which is a risk assessment phase so they can get a subrecipient agreement um also we did do a site visit with the engineer to see the extent of the damage so as soon as um we get the risk assessment done um we would be able to proceed and when what's the timeline and risk assessment i'm hoping um by next week it should be completed okay hearts and service it's currently it's currently in the um it's currently in the pipeline so you are asking a question let me yield to santa blight and santa blight and you may proceed i'm coming on okay i'm trying to get on yeah did um you know hurts and service submit the application also no i'm not aware of that agency can you double check for me please thank you for that thank you double check for me please thank you okay you said hurts and service arts arts and service parts and service double check on that for me please um i'm i'm confident that they are they did not submit an application for for that okay no problem yes they

4:10:26 have not submitted an application thank you you're welcome how many um projects right now are in that environmental phase? Currently we have the Sister Emma Cottages and Croyville currently undergoing environmental review. Sister Emma Cottages and Croyville. We also have the Envision of course. The Envision Tomorrow program is ongoing and the Own a Lot Build a Home is currently undergoing environmental review as well. okay um the envision program you have any issues there in an environmental side is there anything preventing um go ahead i think with regards to envision staffing would be our only concern currently which we are working diligently to rectify outside of that i don't think we have any delays with the envision tomorrow program and you said pineapple what did you say build a lot buy a home as well own a lot build a home okay since we're on an environment this isn't really my purview but has anyone done a study and in bordeaux there's this big dome um before used to be a red thing spinning um and it's the faa tower that connects to the airport and the radioactive waves are immense and their homes through the vihfa that are built immediately under the dome and the people in that i'm a resident of bodo the west end and the people on that street that have those homes almost one and a half of those people that live in Bluewater Crest have cancer and some have passed from cancer and you have lots that you are selling on the other side by pineapple that are directly again under the dome. Can I request on public record an

4:12:37 environmental assessment of that area? Those radioactive ways and people I mean the people go and test and test and it's really bad so I don't know I before we sell those lots I really want a thorough environmental assessment of that area we don't have a cancer center the cancer registries are updated no more cancer if we could avoid it okay um i do think if this is a project coming to the dr program that that request can definitely be submitted and we part of our public engagement process we do have to consider all public comments and requests so that can be done under that process as a resident where's the application where do i find it no it could be there's an online there's that on our website where you can submit answer concerns oh okay well i'll be sending an email with my concerns so yeah a little assessment of that area wonderful thank you um miss constable my friend good afternoon sorry how are you you gave me some good updates the last time update me on which project um which one briefly what are we starting with what's your first project my first project is round of heart go ahead so they're on schedule completion date march 2023 we have made all payments to wapa um they are currently in the process of executing the contract for their external third party review

4:14:48 and they're also working on securing a vendor for their best study so that project is ongoing okay um okay so we don't have any any concerns any findings from from hud right or fema or anybody not that i'm aware okay um what's the next project mitigation next spot um convenience centers So that's under, if we want to stick to WAPA, we can go back to the water side.

4:15:24 We have the slope stabilization. Okay. And that project is just pending the third substantial amendment to the action plan. Please tell me what's the total amendment. Is your amendment the same as Mr. Dorsett's amendment? Yes, it's the same amendment. There's one, but we've had the initial action plan. We've had a second amendment and this is the third. Okay, good. Next. okay so then that's it for wapa moving to wma with the virginia waste management authority um the convenience centers they're in the environmental review phase that's miss vera again that's with with this project the entity is conducting the environmental through one of their their contractors also the question is miss miss miss vera has oversight so yes she's definitely involved okay pause a minute for them miss vera what's how what's our status looking there are we moving along smoothly with the convenience centers so it's with management projects as verlin stated they do have a contract working on we're providing them with technical assistance as far as their environmental reviews with the convenience centers specifically i don't see any holdups in the completion of their environmental reviews we did take a preliminary look at their environmental um what will be required as part of their review and we definitely have confidence that those can move forward in a timely manner good my team is comfortable okay so that's wma convenience centers then we also have the phase closure and then at same sub-recipient and the the plan there is to close the anguilla landfill in six phases and use the southern part of the landfill to receive municipal waste until a landfill is

- 4:17:23 constructed and that project is in the environment in that we we're kind of doing two things at the same time we understand that with that project they may have potential environmental issues so we're trying to address those issues um before it becomes where the project cannot be funded so we're trying to do that and at the same time work on approving the application okay now let me jump back to ms vera the landfill is you environmental um this is that's you their project in and out yeah in completion we are providing technical as well for okay um so do you see any better yeah you see any hiccups in that area yeah hello okay i can hear you can you hear me yes yes i can hear you now you have any hiccups in that area the the current location of the landfill um will cause us to have to go into some extensive consultation with the department of interior and epa these are steps that are necessary to move this project forward and it will delay the completion of their environmental review but i am confident that we can get it funded and completed so when we close the landfill what's the um the new site and we realized that and we realized that the expansion would add maybe in like five years so they have that time to come up with a location they are working on a location and we're hoping
- 4:19:25 through one of our other funding pools to assist them in that regard so while they're dealing with the closure and they have that southern portion of the land bill to receive waste they can go ahead and try to identify a site that can be um the site of the future um landfill okay um so why we're looking for landfills are there any alternative uses i mean beside a landfill it's probably in your role but while you um manage this these funds any discussions on wasted energy and we live on a little dutch you know like we can't continue to find land for waste yeah we we did explore um the waste diversion we actually have a training that's coming up that was provided by the epa and i'm hoping for staff to attend as well as the sub recipients so that would open um a way to other alternatives so we are considering other options okay let's gonna the last one for you is um the street address right oh yeah street address oh well we're excited about that project okay um they receive a notice to proceed so they do have the authority to use grant funds so currently um that sub-recipient um they're working on their solicitation packages to secure the event for the various activities under that project so we we're moving smooth we're moving we're moving okay miss constable good um mr dawson you and his numbers of training because we keep talking about capacity and i i know it's not your job to recruit first of all who's doing the what what does your outreach look like who's contracted for this icf i know icf but who is doing the um the sub recipient is the department of labor and who is doing their advertising
- 4:21:25 do you know they hired a public relations individual and they go out to recruit originally they started first with the um housing communities and they've also now you know they've been doing social media blitzes and hits um because we can't be talking about capacity every time my agency come here we can't find the personnel we can't find them and then we have these skills facility programs and then you know the the government we just at the end of the budget cycle we had roughly 35 million dollars in vacancy savings 35 million so and then you managing it so i can't put the onus on you when labor comes and ask them some questions but when you go in your meetings with them tell them that we need more people in this program okay and then um if you are denied the dredging the funding for the dredging we will have to resort to the 17 million from the pfe correct okay um who's lutheran social services who would be that who's listening ross mrs kenya ross oh miss ross yes so lutheran social services is um undergoing environmental like kiora was um speaking to the consultation we were having an issue with that and our most recently we have a non-conformance zoning um situation where we're trying to work through um a variant as the way to move forward so the the project can actually be done and kiora can't speak to that but it is it's held up in the environmental process right now okay um what's the time frame then because these are real these are real critical
- 4:23:30 we had um the tropical storm and it was really painful first of all we open no shelter and it was really painful watching those i know this is st croix this is sister emma cottage but it was painful watching those homeless people scramble for shelter so what's the timeline on this one how can we get these critical projects to speed up i'm sorry miss kira if you could just speak to the environmental on that that one yeah what's your timeline down this environment yes with regards to this project we are anticipating another month approximately based on the updated advisory flood plane maps this project has now been designated as being in inside the special flood hazard area so we do have to undergo a federal floodplain process switch the timeline for that's approximately 30 days okay um housing finance notice of funding that's miss ross again that's the notice of funding available yes go ahead oh okay so sorry this project was um is not actually this project was selected before the nofa so once um the environmental is concluded um the notice to proceed and the project agreement is already drafted so we should be smooth saving excuse me smooth sailing once the environmental gets approved and my last question today is the mitigation who's over the mitigation grant again i am you mitigation so this is a discussion that you have to have offline right the pertaining to senator blyden's question yes okay so where are we on mitigation for mitigation includes like it's a broad range correct right um mitigation a number of things are happening however we have submitted the final piece to hud they have requested some information

- 4:25:56

and also we anticipate october 6th as the um deadline in which that will be wrapped up we do foresee uh our grant agreement within a month or two of of that okay because based on the internet federal website you have about 50 different projects that you could use with the mitigation funding right i think based on the action plan it's over 60 plus million um 60 plus projects so we are streamlining working to see what projects can be i'd like to get a copy of the final plan when you're done because i i see you could have a dialysis center skating ring just random stuff that we could do all right this i have drilled you for all day with no break So at this time, you're allowed to give closing remarks at this time.
- 4:26:57

Thank you, Senator, and thank you for the opportunity to come before you and give a status on the disaster recovery projects under the CDBGDR program with the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority. I want to thank the men and women of the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority for everything you do every single day thank you it is greatly appreciated director Williams-Octelaine thank you again senator today you you really did a plantation today but I want to again thank you for the opportunity to share and highlight what's going on with the recovery there's a lot of work to be done in this realm but we'll continue to work on it day by day and making sure that we can bring some resolutions to these issues again thank you for another recovery hearing thank you i just need some answers i'm bombarded with with so many issues from hfa that concerns me um thank you to my colleagues for sticking it out thank you to media to central staff to our Sergeant of Arms security thank you to my staff as well thank you to those listening and viewing the Committee on Disaster Recovery oh by the way this weekend is Puerto Rican Friendship weekend so I want to thank all of our Hispanic population for their contributions to the territory over the years so thank you and the communion disaster recovery and infrastructure is hereby adjourned We'll be right back. Thank you.

People named in this transcript

SUSPECTED, and a finding aid only. Names were matched by machine against the spellings used across all 426 of our transcripts, and the title is the one used in the room. Being named here is NOT evidence that a person attended or spoke · only that the name was said. Speech recognition mishears names, so a spelling may be wrong even where no alternative is offered.

- 10x

Senator Carla Joseph

the surname alone also matches: Clifford Joseph; Karla J. Joseph

heard in this transcript as: Joseph
- 9x

Senator Franklin D. Johnson

heard in this transcript as: Johnson
- 9x

Senator Marvin Blyden

heard in this transcript as: Blayden, Blyden, Blyton
- 7x

Senator Novelle Francis

heard in this transcript as: Francis
- 4x

Senator Genevieve R. Whitaker

heard in this transcript as: Genevieve Whitaker, Whitaker
- 3x

Senator Kurt VLA

heard in this transcript as: VLA
- 2x

Senator Janelle K. Saro

heard in this transcript as: Saru
- 2x

Senator Kurt A. Verley

heard in this transcript as: Verley
- 2x

Senator Kurt Veilley

heard in this transcript as: Veille
- 2x

Senator Marvin A. Blighton

heard in this transcript as: Blighton