Alexander Theater Safe Room & Building Wind Retrofit Project -60% Design Development Package

The St. Croix Foundation for Community Development proposes to retrofit the 1954-built theater to serve dual purposes: as a community hurricane saferoom during storms and a performing arts theater and community center in normal conditions. To support these functions, the design will comply with FEMA P 361 guidelines, ICC-500 standards, and other safety requirements. Covering 24,940 square feet of total gross area, 16,895 square feet of net usable safe room occupancy space, and housed on 2 floors of the existing theater and new adjoining additions on adjacent lots. It will safely house 619 individuals during disaster events. By performing the necessary upgrades and retrofits, this facility will be able to accommodate both roles effectively in the densely populated, Christiansted Town. By combining these two objectives, the project leverages limited resources to achieve multiple community benefits: improving disaster mitigation by protecting loss of life, promoting the arts and economic development, and preserving historical heritage.

The project is proposed to be located on the following 4 lots:

1. Theater – 22 & 23 Market Street & 38B Company Street (B-2)
2. Parcel A – 38-A Company Street (B-2)
3. Parcel B – 37 Company Street (R-4)
4. Parcel C – 36 Company Street (R-4)
5. Parcel D – 23 King Street (B-2)

The Alexander Theater is situated at the intersection of 23 Market Street and 38B Company Street in Christiansted, a historic town on the island of St. Croix, US Virgin Islands. This area is part of the town's central district, surrounded by a mix of small businesses, local shops, and residential properties. The site is easily accessible and situated within a community-focused neighborhood. Its colonial-era Danish buildings and brick/cobblestone street, reconstructed in 2004, boast a rich blend of history, art, and commerce, making it an ideal backdrop for the theater during non-disaster periods. During times of disaster, important considerations for the safe room's location include it being located in a denseley populated area, in a census tract that is home to majority LMI residents, highly accessible by public transit. It is the only community safe room slated for construction in historic downtown Christiansted.

The design will ensure seamless transitions between its dual functions by adhering to FEMA P-361 standards, ICC-500 regulations, and other safety requirements. The facility comprises a total gross area of 24,940 square feet, of which 16,895 square feet constitute the net usable space for safe room occupancy. This net usable area reflects unobstructed, open floor space intended to accommodate individuals during emergencies and is the basis for calculating the shelter's occupancy capacity at 20 square feet per person, in accordance with FEMA standards.

The remaining 8,045 square feet of gross area consists largely of ancillary spaces essential to the safe room's operations—including mechanical rooms (HVAC), generator and pump rooms, ADA-compliant elevator, storage for food and supplies, and accessible restrooms, to ensure the safe room meets all FEMA and local functional and operational requirements.
The project integrates historic preservation with disaster mitigation. It addresses structural and environmental vulnerabilities to protect the site's heritage while modernizing the facility to serve dual purposes, including fulfilling critical, unmet disaster mitigation needs.

The current design has a single Kone service/passenger elevator that provides multi-level access to this 3-story structure allowing for full ADA compliant access to the facility. The site has a substantial change in elevation from the Market Street entrance to the new West entrance that will be used for daily operations. The change in elevation is approximately 4'- 6" and the existing theater space has a sloped floor that will be capped with a new level surface to make all connecting spaces achieve ADA compliance. The Market Street entrance and historic marquee will remain the main entrance for performances and shows at the facility, and serves as additional ingress, egress, and intake for safe room occupants. The existing theater structure is being hardened with a new exterior steel reinforcement that will be coated with shotcrete to achieve full P-361 and ICC 500 missile impact compliance. All new exterior walls for the project will be formed from reinforced 8" poured concrete which are also designed to meet full P-361 and ICC 500 missile impact compliance. The project on the 2nd and 3rd floors has a curved projected structure which provides on the ground floor a covered canopy for the main entrance for protected ADA compliance drop off. On the upper floor, it allows for more safe room occupancy and on the 3rd floor it becomes a utility/ac equipment hurricane protected penthouse structure. This structure will be made from a steel frame system with structural light gauge metal studs clad with a P-361and ICC 500 compliant exterior cladding system provided in the cut sheets. All window and door units will be Insulgard Storm Defender units which meet P-361 and ICC 500 requirements, and the specifications are provided in the cut sheets.

To meet all operations during a disaster hurricane event, the facility will have a 400kW generator and will have above ground diesel tanks that will have storage capacity for a total of 7 days. The main service will be 3 phase, and more details are provided in the engineering basis of design document. To meet all potable and other water consumption requirements for the project, a new 126,420 gallon cistern will be constructed beneath the new structure running parallel to the existing theater building. A comprehensive filtration system will be installed to ensure that all water that will come from roofs or WAPA potable water lines will be treated prior to entering this new cistern. A cut sheet provides specifications for the systems being designed for the facility. The engineers have provided a basis of design which defines the sewage systems and the proposed connections to be made to the lines that exist on Company, Market and King Streets. AC systems will be divided into 2 systems: a central air system will be housed in the open trusses above the existing theater; a ceiling multi-zone mini-split system will be installed in all other office, reception, classroom and ancillary spaces throughout the complex.

Rounding out the design is native species landscaping to allow some percolation on the exterior of the site. A 650 gallon oil/water separator placed on the low point of the parking lot will ensure no vehicular oil spills will not enter the storm water system and harbor waters. A perimeter fence and electronic gates will provide ingress and egress to the site while providing full security to the facility.

St. Croix has long been a center for artistic expression and community engagement, with the performing arts playing a vital role in the island's cultural and social life. However, existing facilities are limited, and there is a pressing need for a modern, dedicated theater to support and elevate local talent. Currently, the island has two main performing arts venues: the Caribbean Community Theatre (CCT) in Estate Orange Grove, a longstanding pillar since 1985, and the Sidney Lee Theater in Christiansted, which hosts concerts, plays, and cultural events. Both face challenges—CCT with limited space and resources, and Sidney Lee with capacity and outdated infrastructure. While these theaters are invaluable, they are no longer sufficient to meet the growing demand for high-quality cultural and performing arts spaces on St. Croix. In addition to addressing this gap, the new facility will incorporate classrooms that serve numerous purposes: as safe room occupancy spaces during disasters, arts education spaces, and as flexible convening spaces for workforce development and other community resilience programs.

Following the 2017 hurricanes, temporary shelters were set up across the Territory to house displaced residents. Key sites included schools like St. Croix Educational Complex High School and John H. Woodson Junior High, community centers such as the Hubert Grigg Home for the Aged, and various churches. These facilities, equipped with basic supplies, collectively sheltered thousands—larger schools hosting several hundred people, and smaller centers accommodating 50 to 150 people.

Designated safe rooms offer a more reliable and resilient alternative as a disaster mitigation strategy. Engineered to meet disaster-resistant standards, they provide immediate protection during emergencies. Importantly, locating safe rooms outside of schools allows displaced residents to be safely sheltered without disrupting the reopening of schools—supporting both educational continuity and community recovery. This is especially critical in densely populated areas like Christiansted, where the need for secure, purpose-built facilities is high.

As the project advances into the Construction Document (CD) phase, the design team will further refine all structural, mechanical, electrical, and life safety systems, incorporating further detailed calculations, specifications, and product selections. This phase will include final load calculations, material performance requirements, connection details, and coordination between disciplines to ensure constructability and code compliance. The facility is being designed to fully meet FEMA P-361 Safe Room Standards as well as all applicable USVI building codes and requirements. At this stage, there remains some flexibility to incorporate design revisions; therefore, we respectfully request timely FEMA review and feedback to ensure that all comments can be effectively addressed during this critical phase of development.