



| Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance

Legislature USVI

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0:00:00 I love you Thank you. Let's go. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah Thank you. I love you Let's go. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Come on. All this world What's that?

0:07:15 Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. You Thank you.

0:10:45 Thank you. I love you Thank you.

0:12:15 Thank you. I love you, I love you Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

0:15:45 The Committee on Budget Appropriations and Finance Meeting of May 21st, 2024, is hereby called to order. Madam Clerk? Can I have the roll call, please? Senator Marvin A. Blighton. Present. Senator Blyden, present. Senator Samuel L. Carrion. Senator Carrion. Absent. Senator Wayne M. DeGraff. Senator DeGraff. Absent. Senator Ray Fonseca.

0:16:36 I'm here. Senator Fonseca. Present. Senator Donna A. Fred Gregory. Here. Senator Gregory, present. Senator Novell E. Francis, Jr.? Senator Francis, Jr.? Absent. Senator Javon E. James, Sr.? Present. Senator James, Sr.? Present. Madam Chair, four present, three absent. Thank you, Madam Clerk.

0:17:07 A quorum has been established. Can you please read? Do we have any correspondence to be read into the record? Yes, Madam Chair. You may proceed. Correspondence dated May 21st, 2024. Honorable Donna A. Fred Gregory, Chair, Committee on Budget, Appropriation, and Finance, 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands, Capitol Building, Charlotte and Mali, St. Thomas, VI-00804. Dear Senator Fred Gregory, I am writing to advise you that I will be tidy for today's meeting of the Committee on Budget, Appropriation, and Finance as I will be attending the ceremony naming the St. Croix Bypass in honor of Aloy Wenthe Nielsen. I sincerely apologize for any inconvenience my tardiness may cause and thank you in advance for your understanding. Regards, Novel E. Francis Jr., Senate President, 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands. Correspondence dating May 21st, 2024, the Honorable Donna Fred Gregory, Chairperson, Committee on Budget Appropriations and Finance, 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands, Capitol Building, Charlotte O'Malley, St.

Thomas, VI-00802. Dear Chairperson Fred Gregory, please be advised that I will be unable to attend the Committee on Budget Appropriations and finance budget hearing set for 10 a.m. Tuesday May 21st 2024 at the Earl B. Otley Legislative Hall due to a previously scheduled engagement. Thank you in advance for your understanding in this matter. Sincerely,
Duane M. Dargatzis, Minority Leader, 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands

0:18:56 dated May 21st 2024 Honorable Donna A. Frett, Gregory Chairwoman, Committee on Budget Appropriations and Finance, 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands, Capital Building, Charlotte Tamale, P.O. Box 1690, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands 00804. Dear Chairwoman Frett Gregory, I will be late to today's Committee on Budget Appropriation and Finance meeting which begins at 10 a.m. in the Earl B. Otley Legislative Hall in St. Thomas. Please accept my apologies for my tardiness. I look forward to joining the meeting as soon as I arrive. Your patience and understanding will be greatly appreciated. Sincerely, Samuel Carrion, Senator, 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands. That ends the reading of the correspondence. Thank you, Madam Clerk. Can you please read today's agenda into the record? The 35th Legislature Committee on Budget Appropriation and Finance will meet on Tuesday, May 21st, 2024 at 10 a.m. in the Earl B. Otley Legislative Chambers on St. Thomas U.S. Virgin Islands. Block One Bill Number 35-0261, an act approving the lease agreement between the government of the Virgin Islands and Dale Brown and Yvette Brown, d/b/a Sieger Farm of the Virgin Islands for Plot Number 9-P, as state vicor plans, Prince Quarter, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands.

0:20:42 Sponsored by Senate President Dovel E. Francis Jr. by request of the Governor. Invited testifiers, Mrs. Lisa T. Alejandro, Commissioner, Department of Property and Procurement. Mr. Dale Brown and Ms. Yvette Brown, owner Seja Farm of the Virgin Islands. Bill number 35.0255, an act approving the multi-year lease agreement between the government of the Virgin Islands, acting through its commissioner of the Department of Property and Procurement and Rumina Construction, LLC, for parcels number 92A, revised submarine base, number six, South Side Quarter, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, to operate an equipment and material storage depot yard, construction company office, and other related purposes. Sponsored by, Senate President Novel E. Francis Jr., by request of the Governor. Invited testifiers, Mrs. Lisa T. Alejandro, Commissioner, Department of Property and Procurement.

0:21:49 Mr. Franklin Victor, President, Rumina Construction, LLC. Bill number 35.0262, an act appropriating \$1,434,950 \$950 in fiscal year 2024 from the Community Facilities Trust Fund for the pre-construction soft cost funding to prepare the Charlotte-Omalley Harbor for dredging. Sponsored by Senate President Novel E. Francis, Jr., by request of the Governor. Invited testifiers, Mr. Carlton Dow, Executive Director, Virgin Islands Port Authority. Mr. Kevin McCurdy, Executive Director, Virgin Islands Public Finance Authority. Block two, the Committee on Budget, Appropriation, and Finance will receive testimony from the government's financial team on the financial overview of the government of the Virgin Islands to include, but not limited to, fiscal year 2024, budget appropriations versus revenue collections to date, total allotments to date, projected revenues through September 30th, 2024, and proposed adjustments for fiscal year 2024 due to revenue shortfalls, if any. Status on union negotiations and status of outstanding payments due to vendors for fiscal year 2023. Invited testifiers, Ms. Jennifer O'Neill, director, Office of Management and Budget, Mr. Kevin McCurdy, commissioner, Department of Finance. Mr. Joel Lee, Director, Virgin Islands Bureau of Internal Revenue. Mr. Ira A. Mills, Tax Assessor, Office of the Lieutenant Governor. Mr. Brent Lierdom, Tax Collector, Office of the Lieutenant Governor.

0:23:46 Ms. Cindy Richardson, Director, Division of Personnel. Ms. Joss Springett Esquire, Chief Negotiator, Office of Collective Bargaining. Madam Chair, that is the end of the agenda. Thank you, Madam Clerk. And we are prepared to proceed. I do see the testifiers from the Department of Property and Procurement, Assistant Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner, Vince Richards, Vincent Richards.

0:24:24 I see Mr. Dale Brown and Mrs. Yvette Brown, the owner of Seja Farms. I also see Mr. Carlton Dow, Executive Director of the Virgin Islands Port Authority, and Mr. Franklin. You're Mr. Franklin, Mr. Franklin Victor, President of Rumina Construction, LLC.

0:24:55 I however, do not see the Executive Director for the Virgin Islands Public Finance Authority. We are considering a measure today with regards to the dredging of our harbor. We recently appropriated, I can't remember how much million, \$17 million for the dredging of a harbor, and there is some additional \$1.4 million that's needed that should come from that. The ask is those funds come from the Community Facilities Trust Fund. However, I'm not seeing anyone from the government's financial team, specifically the executive. The director, by virtue of his position, Mr. Kevin McCurdy, is not in attendance. I am not inclined to proceed with bill number 35.0262, absent of the representatives of the government that has to speak to whether or not the 1.434950 is in fact available to be expended from the Community Facilities Trust Fund for these purposes. I'm certain that we are in full support of this measure, however, the continuous disrespect of the executive branch and not showing up for these types of important matters, I will not tolerate in my committee. So I'm going to ask for a motion to remove bill number 35.0262 from today's agenda.

- 0:26:38 Senator Blyton, you're recognized for your motion. Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that bill number 35.0262 and act appropriating 1,434,950 in fiscal year 2024 from the Community Facilities Trust Fund for a pre-construction self-cost funding to prepare for the Charlotte and Marley Harbour for dredging be removed from today's agenda. I so move. The motion to remove Bill No. 35.0262 from today's agenda has been properly moved by Senator Marvin Blyden, seconded by Senator Ray Fonseca. Hearing no objections? So ordered.
- 0:27:27 I'm going to call for a quick recess to allow, first of all, let me apologize to Mr. Dow and his team because they are here. We've already received testimony, Mr. Dow, from you with regards to the importance of the dredging of our harbor. We know that it's a major economic driver for our, for the Virgin Islands. While it is the district harbor in St. Thomas, It is a major economic driver that supports the revenues, that support the work that we do here and support all of the services that we provide here in the territory.
- 0:28:04 So I'm going to allow you an opportunity to speak and then we're going to go to a recess. And hopefully the next time we put this on the agenda, they will show up absent of the government providing the information. Unfortunately, we cannot continue to move in this direction in this institution and particularly not in my committee. You may proceed mr. Doe. Thank you and good morning to all senators present and the listening and viewing. I just want to and my Director engineering person by and everybody, but I also want to put on record that So all of us could recognize the impact and importance of this The fact that every day that we delay this soft cost money It's not running days and months into us being able to do this dredging. I just want to make sure we are abundantly clear with what impact and what this means.
- 0:29:02 The Port Authority have already expended some monies towards this dredging project. We are permitting a whole host of things that this money should take care of. So every day, this don't happen. The folks are calling and clamoring, why the dredging is starting? it's going to this here today will impact the start date so I hope that all of us could quickly get back together and deal with this matter as soon as possible because it's really have a day impact on when in fact this dredging can start so I really appreciate all of you and the time that you spend today all right well again I apologize for us having to make the decisions that we have to make but absent of the clear financials I don't know that it will be responsible of us to make any decisions today with regards to this particular matter. All right so we're going to go to a two-minute recess to allow the testifiers from the Virgin Islands Port Authority to vacate the chambers. The The committee stands in recess for two minutes. Thank you. Thank you.
- 0:31:35 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
- 0:33:05 Thank you. The committee is back on the record and we are going to, we have the testifiers here before us, but before we do that, I need to ask who speaks to bill number 35, the 0261.
- 0:34:04 I do, Madam Chair. You may proceed, Senator Blyden. Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm here to introduce bill number 35.0261, sponsored by Senate President Novel E. Francis Jr., by request of the Governor, an act approving a lease agreement between the Virgin Islands Government and Dale and Yvette Brown, doing business at Sager Farm of the Virgin Islands for Platte No. 9 P Estate VI Corps Land, Prince Quarter, St. Quarry, Virgin Islands. This proposed measure is offered as already stated by the President.
- 0:34:48 The agreement is for a multi-year lease of 20 years with an option to renew for one additional 10-year term. Dane and Yvette Brown have owned and operated Shade Seja Farm since 1998. As farmers, agricultural advocates, conservationists, and educators, they have been leaders in developing our local agricultural industry and promoting food sustainability. This list will allow Sager Farm to continue livestock and crop on its 15 acres in Castleburg. This list also allows for the property to be used for related purposes. Sager Farm has a farm stand. They hold the annual bush cook, chef, which is a community farm to table event that highlights locally sourced meat and produce and also have an agricultural learning center where they provide access to learn methods in soil improvement animal husbandry food preservation and value-added food production ultimately this lease will allow dale and yvette brown the owners and operators of seda farm to continue their important work in the territory Thank you Madam Chair for that introduction.
- 0:36:19 Do you want me to introduce the next bill? Thank you. Who speaks to Bill No. 35-0255? I do Madam Chair. You may proceed Senator Belay then. Thank you Madam Chair. Bill No. 35-0255 sponsored by Senate President Nouvelle Francis by request of the Governor, an act approving the multi-year lease agreement between the Government of the Virgin Islands, acting through its commission of the Department of Property and Procurement, and Romina Construction LLC for parcel number 9-2-A, revised submarine base number 6, Southside, quarter St. Thomas Virgin Islands, to operate an equipment and material storage depot yard, construction company office and other related purposes. This proposed measure is offered again by the Senate President.
- 0:37:11 The agreement is for a 10-year lease with two five-year options to be renewed. This lease supports the operation of a local small business which provides a necessary service to the community, particularly as we are engaged in many

recovery-related construction projects to include housing as we know we have a housing crisis and they are good corporate citizen and they also employ many local residents in the territory so i'm asking for your support on these two most important measures on today's agenda thank you so much madam chair for the time thank you uh senator bladen and also let me take this opportunity to recognize the presence of non-committee member Maurice James. Thank you for being here, Senator James. All right, so we do have the testifiers here with us this morning, and we're going to start with the testifiers for Bill Number 35.0261, Mr. Dale Brown and Ms. Yvette Brown, and the Assistant Deputy Assistant Commissioner? Assistant.

0:38:22 Assistant Commissioner of the Department of Property and Procurement, Ms. Yvette Brown, Vincent Richards. So I'm gonna ask Mr. Richards to please put your name and title on the record. Vincent Richards, Assistant Commissioner, Department of Property and Procurement. All right thank you and also Mr. Dale Brown please put your name on the record. Brown, owner of Seja Farm. And Miss Yvette Brown. Ed Brown, owner Seja Farm of the Virgin Islands. All right thank you we're We're now going to the bill number 35.0255, Mr. Franklin Victor, President of Romina Construction.

0:39:02 Could you please put your name on the record? Franklin Victor, President of Romina Construction. Thank you. And I see that you have a beautiful young lady there with you. Can you also put your name and association on the record? Jamilad Victor, Admin Assistant, Romina Construction. All right. So we're going to start with the testifiers for 35.0261. We're going to hear these two measures in one block. And we will begin with Mr. Vincent Richards of the Department of Property and Procurement. And then we'll hear from the owners of Sager Farms of the Virgin Islands you may proceed mr. Richards good morning our committee chair Donna a Fred Gregory our vice-chair Novelli Francis jr.

0:39:55 committee members senators Blyton carry on the graph Fonseca and James senior non committee members central and legislative staff fellow testifiers visitors present in the chambers and members of listing and viewing audience I am a Vincent Richards assistant commissioner of the Department of property procurement. I'm here today on behalf of Commissioner Lisa M Alejandro to testify on the proposed lease agreements for the St. Thomas and St. Croix District currently before the committee for consideration. I humbly request this committee and ultimately the full Senate's approval of the lease agreements before between the government of the Virgin Islands and Rumina Construction LLC and Dale Brown and Yvette Brown doing business at Seija Farms of the Virgin Islands. These lease agreements require legislative approval in accordance with 31 Virgin Islands Code subsection 205c.

0:40:54 Their terms are all commenced on the first day of the month following the approval of the governor and the legislature of the Virgin Islands. As a premises owner the Department of Property and Procurement will be required to execute all permits, licenses required for the premises. These two potential lessees have provided the required documentation to support the processing of their lease agreements with the government, including but not limited to their business license and the certificates of good standing. The lease agreement between Romina Construction and the government of the Virgin Islands is for Revised Parcel No. 92A, Submarine Base No. 6, South Side Quarter, St. Thomas, United States, Virgin Islands, consisting of approximately 30,882 square feet or .71 U.S. acres of unimproved land, more or less. The property will be used to operate on equipment, a construction equipment and a material storage depot yard as well as an office and for other permitted purposes. The term of the agreement is for 10 years and the lease agreement provides for two additional five-year renewal options. The annual rent for the above-mentioned parcel will be \$24,000 payable in equal monthly installments of \$2,000 during the term of the lease. The rent payable under the lease shall be adjusted annually providing any including any renewal term in accordance with the consumer price index increases increases established by the US Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics this lease agreement requires a minimum of

0:42:44 1 million dollars in all limits and public liability coverage the lease agreement between Cija Farms and the government of the Virgin Islands for plot number 9-9P, Estate Vi Core Land, Prince Quarter, St. Croix, United States Virgin Islands, consisting of approximately 655,395.48 US square feet or 15.0458 US acres more or less. The property really would be used for crop and and livestock production. The term of this agreement is for 20 years and the lease agreement provides for an additional 10-year renewal option. The annual rent for the above reference parcel per VI code will be \$225.69 during the term of the lease. pardon me. These proposed lease agreements will allow the prospective tenants to utilize and improve the properties and return them to the government of the Virgin Islands at the end of the lease terms and improve conditions. If approved, these leases will allow these two locally owned businesses to improve operations and plan expansions. These businesses will continue to contribute to the local food security and the ongoing reconstruction and recovery of the United States Virgin Islands. The Department of Property and Procurement and Lisa M Alejandro respectfully request that this committee on budget appropriation and finance and ultimately the 35th legislature of the Virgin Islands vote in favor of these proposed lease agreements. This concludes my prepared testimony. I'm prepared to answer

- 0:44:39 any questions the committee may have on the reference lease agreements. Thank you very much Madam Chair. Thank you Mr. Richards. Who testifies on behalf of Seja Farms? I will speak on behalf of Seja Farms. You may proceed. Mrs. Brown. Good morning Senator Donna Fred Gregory, Chair of the Committee of the Budget, appropriation and finance, and to all members of this committee of the 35th Legislature, and a blessed good morning to the people of the Virgin Islands. I am glad to be testifying on bill number 35-0261, an act approving the lease agreement between the government of the Virgin Islands and Dale and Yvette Brown doing business at Sager Farm of the Virgin Islands, Plot No. 9-P Estate, Vicorp Land, Prince Quarters, St. Croix, Virgin Islands. Sager Farm of the Virgin Islands is also known as Sager, was established in 1998 and is owned and operated by Dale and Yvette Brown. Located on Casper Holstein Drive, we manage 31 acres of farmland with 15 acres currently in production and 16 acres under development. Our 15 acre production area includes 10 acres dedicated to grazing for sheep and goats, three acres used for organic crop production, and one acre allocated for restarting poultry, meat, and eggs production. We operate an unfarmed market and raises boar goats, boar goat crosses, St. Christ's white sheep, DARPA crosses for sale. Sager farm produces
- 0:46:35 local fresh meat and vegetables to meet both local and off-island demands. Additionally, we provide agricultural technical assistance, seminars, education, training, and consultations services to farmers and the community. Developing a local island food system is a challenge, but it is one that we at Sager Farm are committed to taking on as part of the island's agriculture resurgence. The territory's agricultural industry has been largely without significant government support for over 59 years. To address this, our community must encourage farmers to increase their production which can help reduce the need to import certain products. To successfully develop a local island food system, we need to focus on two of several key areas. First, marketing local food products require a consistent supply of commodities to ensure availability to the community. Second, we must increase local food consumption by promoting the benefits and availability of locally produced food. This dual approach will help build a sustainable and resilient local food system. Sager Farm of the Virgin Islands is a partnership farm enterprise managed by Dale and Yvette Brown who collectively have extensive knowledge of the industry. Located on the island of St. Croix in the US Virgin Islands, our our farm is dedicated to increasing and improving the standard and quality of the Virgin Islands agricultural production. Our mission includes promoting local food, developing local food system, increasing marketing opportunities, fostering local food economic development, and ensuring healthy food access for all. We are committed to agricultural education, advocating for resurgence
- 0:48:39 of the U.S. regional agricultural industry combating climate change through best conservation practices, protecting our island's environmental development and strengthening local food production and supplies. Sager farms serve as a model farm, promoting advanced agricultural production and marketing techniques. Our operations are exclusively focused on encouraging the territories agricultural industry contributing to its growth and sustainability. Mission statement, our mission is to produce the finest quality raised meat, lamb, goat, chicken, eggs and organic vegetable in the U.S. Virgin Islands to meet local market demand. We aim to exceed customers expectation in standards, quality, deliverability and cost through continuous improvement and customer interactions. Sager Farm is in the business of agriculture, which encompasses the science, art, and practices of cultivating soil and farming animals, plant, fungi, and other life forms for food, fiber, biofuel, drugs, and other products used to sustain and enhance human life on our community. Our operations include the growing and production of crops and the raising of livestock as well as various degree of preparation and marketing of the resulting diverse products. Sage of Farm on the Virgin Islands is an agricultural enterprise dedicated to revitalizing business of agriculture with a primary focus on farming in the U.S. Virgin Islands. While farming is our main concentration and foundation of our work, it represents just one area of the agricultural industry that we are committed to enhancing and supporting. Sager Farm has been dedicated to farming and researching the needs for increased production on local food consumption in the Virgin Islands for the past 18 years. We understand that moving beyond the embryonic stage is vital to the development of our work. Developing a farm enterprise that meets the demand for fresh locally grown produce herbs, meats and eggs is extremely important and necessary. This development is indispensable to the continuing effectiveness and survival of Sager farm of the Virgin Islands as well as
- 0:51:08 overall growth and sustainability of our territories agriculture. Agriculture in the Virgin Islands has gained a poor reputation for income generation, dependability and marketing significant local social and economic contributions. This situation is largely due to the local government failure to fulfill its responsibilities to regulate and oversee the agricultural industry ensuring its economic viability. The US Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture has effectively executed the territories law or incorporated them into its budgetary responsibilities. As a result farmers have been left with no choice but to operate in survival mode, struggling to sustain the operation without adequate support or oversight. However, the timing for participation a change to this reputation is both timely and vital. Improving the image of local food availability and accessibility is necessary to attract markets, increase farmers income and develop new market opportunities. This will enhance our local food system and food security. An informed market about local agricultural products can

significantly benefit other food enterprises and create employment opportunities for farmers, farm, farmers market, value-added producers, food distributors, retailers, wholesalers and the entire Virgin Islands community. By promoting and supporting local agriculture, we can build a strong more resilient food

0:53:02 economy that benefits everyone within the territories. Sager Farm of the Virgin Islands play a crucial role in our agricultural industry through its effort to increase local food production, market and distribute locally grown food through the Virgin Islands. By focusing on these key areas, Sager Farm can make a significant difference in assisting the social and economic resurgence of our territories. To increase local food production, Sager Farm helps to reduce reliance on imported goods, thereby contributing to the territory's food security and self-sufficiency. By marketing and distributing locally grown food, Sager Farm promotes awareness and appreciation for locally sourced products, supporting the growth of the local agricultural sector. Furthermore, Sager Farm's activities create economic opportunities for farmers, producers, distributors, and retailers across the US Virgin Islands. By straining the local food system and promoting sustainable agricultural practices, Sager Farm contributes to the overall resilience and prosperity of our community. In summary, Sager Farm is dedicated to increasing local food production marketing and distribution plays a vital role in social and economic resurgence. Through the effort Sager Farm helps to build a more resilient and sustainable future for the Virgin Islands. The approval of bill number 350261 to lease 9p and 9p and I may elaborate off the testimony that I realized that the assistant commissioner did not emphasize that it's two plot that Sager Farm is pulling

0:54:52 requesting the confirmation of lease for 9p and 9b within the same destination and area Castleburg would signify an endorsement of the ongoing work at Seja Farm and a commitment to furthering agriculture as a social and economic development opportunity in the territory. This lease agreement would provide Seja Farm with a necessary resource and support to continue in efforts in increasing local food production, marketing and distribution, thereby contributing to revitalization of agricultural industry in the Virgin Islands. By granting this lease, the government demonstrates its recognition of the importance of supporting local farmers and promoting sustainable agricultural practices. It would enable Sager Farm to expand its operation, increase its impact on the local economy, and further its mission of enhancing food security and promoting community resilience. In conclusion, the approval of bill number 350261 will not only benefit Sager Farm but also serve as a significant step towards realizing the potential of agriculture as a drive for social and economic development in the territory. Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. I am gonna go now to Romina Construction who speaks on behalf of Romina Construction LLC please recognize the mic of mr. Victor speak one more time Franklin Victor you may proceed with your testimony good morning committee chairwoman the Honorable Donna Fred Gregory

0:56:47 Committee Members and Honorable Senators, Blyden, Carrian, DeGraff, Fonseca, Francis, and James. Good morning to fellow testifiers, legislative staff, and viewing our listening audience. I am Franklin Victor, General Manager and Owner of Romino Construction, LLC. I am here with my wife, Jamilet Victor. We have been married for 13 plus years and have been blessed with four children, Franklin, Michael, Eric, and S. Fethi. My wife is one of Romina's project estimator and also involved in the decision-making process for the business.

0:57:32 Romina Construction is a minority-owned and family-managed business, general and civil construction company. The history of the company leads back to when I started my first construction business as Franklin Victor Maintenance, which later became Romina Construction in 2008. We have more than 29 years' experience in construction business. Romina Construction had and is currently involved in several hurricane recovery construction projects throughout the island of St. Thomas. Romino Construction on September 10, 2023 entered into a one-year lease agreement with the Government of the Virgin Islands and the Department of Property and Procurement for Parcel No. 92A Submarine Base No. 6 South Side Quarter St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands consists of approximately 30,882 U.S. square feet or 0.71 U.S. acre of unimproved land. During this period, we have done debris removal, light excavation, installed a mobile office building, constructed an equipment maintenance shed, installed lighting, camera, and currently installing security fence.

0:58:58 To date, we have invested almost \$100,000 in site preparations, improvements, and upgrades. It's our desire to enter a long-term lease agreement with the Government of the Virgin Islands and the Department of Property and Procurement that is currently under consideration. We will continue to use this lease premises to operate an equipment and material storage yard, office, and other related purposes. This proposed long-term lease agreement will provide the needed stability to operate now and to expand while planning future projects. Without this property, Romino Construction would not be able to continue participating in multiple of recovery construction projects.

0:59:48 This concludes my testimony, and I am respectfully asking that this committee, and ultimately the full body, approve the lease agreement. Thank you, and I am available to answer any questions. Thank you for your testimony, Mr. Victor. Let me also recognize the presence of committee member Senator Samuel Carrion. Please mark Senator Carrion as present. All right. Mrs. Brown made a reference to IA 9P and B in her testimony. Yes, ma'am. Correct, Mrs. Brown? Yes, ma'am.

However, the documentation with regards to this particular measure only speaks to platinum and IMP estate by Corp. Lance, Prince Gordon, St. Croix, Virgin Islands. So I need to get some clarification from the Assistant Commissioner of the Department of Property and Procurement as it relates to what's before us. I'm Vincent Richards property procurement Senate committee chair Fred Gregory the least as before us references and describes the premises as plot number nine dash P estate bi core lands Prince quarter st. Croix us Virgin Islands has a map number has the acreage on there and all the pages on the The agreement is initialed by the lessee, the lessee, and all the parties to the agreement.

- 1:01:44 So where is the confusion coming in? Because we need to clarify that before we move forward on this particular lease. So, you are of the position that the government of the Virgin Islands is leasing plot number 9P, a state VA court plan. Yes, ma'am. And Mrs. Brown, represented in her testimony, 9P, a state VA court plan and 9B. So we need to get some clarification on that. Mrs. Brown, please explain, is it that these two pieces of parcels are attached that gives adjacent is a word that's consistent of the 655,395.048 U.S. acres square feet or 15 U.S.
- 1:02:54 acres? Mr. Brown would answer that question. Yes, please. good morning okay in respect to the properties properties one is existing and also yep please speak into the mic mr we're having a hard time hearing you there is an expanded um property just as well that is 9b um i've worked on that with property and procurement and we were expecting that it would have been incorporated into the into the lease agreement just as well because there has been all requirements met for those properties if you look specifically on the lease on the a business license it states 9p and 9b and that is what we referring to okay so naturally when you agree with the Department of Property and Procurement you would sign a lease document correct mr. Brown yes so the lease document represents what I don't have the lease in front of me the actual but we have been uh working with property and procurement that before that it will have also included nine okay so what we have before us because i want to make sure that the record is very clear as to what the legislature is approving today so today the legislature is approving 9-P. That's what the legislature is approving. The other conversations and discussions that you're having with the Department of Property and Procurement, naturally that will have to come after. Is 9-P
- 1:05:01 already property that you are currently utilizing? Yes. So that's where you're currently utilizing so the approval of that does not give you the additional acreage if you will that you are seeking to utilize expand the farming your farming business it will not if we look at what is before us it would not be a lease for that additional property but we are in possession of the property. Okay so Mr. Richards to help us to clear up this apparent misunderstanding or somewhat confusion that's occurring as we move forward with this particular lease and then I will go to my colleagues.
- 1:06:02 Senator Gregory, these agricultural leases are prepared by the Department of Agriculture and for the Department of Property and Procurement for further processing and we have processed the agreement that we have in front of us that's been signed by all the parties and I stand by the agreement that we have in front of us. I can inquire about this afterwards and if there needs to be an amendment or additional property added to the lease agreement or for for this entity i'm pretty sure that department of agriculture and the department of property and procurement be happy to support uh an amendment and or uh additional properties to this organization this entity so the boy what's the number Senator, the 655, 395.048 U.S. square feet, or 15 acres, more or less, that's what is inclusive of 9-PSDVI co-op land.
- 1:07:11 Yes, Senator. All right. Okay. So we have cleared that up. it means that there's additional work that needs to be done with the Department of Agriculture the Department of Property and Procurement and the owners of Sager Farms in order to move forward with 9-b that is not inclusive of what we're discussing today so I want us to make sure that we are clear on that so there is no inherent confusion around this all right our colleagues these leases that we have before us are very straightforward. We've heard from the owners of both entities who's seeking to get leases from the government of the Virgin Islands to operate their businesses and we know the importance of economic development, any type of economic development in the Virgin Islands. So we also the importance of growing growing our agriculture industry in the territory as a sponsor of the the agriculture plan I am excited whenever I see individuals coming down to the legislature to get their properties approved for agriculture so there were some things I was shared today with regards to agriculture in Mrs. Brown's testimony and I will kind of drill on on that as we proceed with this discussion. So Senator, Senators we're gonna go to a, let's see we have two, we're gonna go to a four-minute round. We're gonna go to a four-minute round and we're going to begin with Senator Marvin Blyden. Senator Blyden you may proceed with your four minutes. Thank you
- 1:09:04 Thank you, Madam Chair. Good morning again to the people of the Virgin Islands, my colleagues, people listening audiences, staff, central staff, and the testifiers. And thank you so much for your testimonies. Seja Farm, Ms. and Mrs. Brown, Ms. Brown, you did a pretty good job on behalf of Seja Farm. Your testimony was on point. Let me ask yourself a question in respect to your testimony. You said in terms of the challenges in the industry because we know food security is a problem here in the territory, and agriculture is critical and important to us here on an island. And you spoke about a local food system, and you mentioned in your testimony also you talk about marketing, the local products, you talk about different techniques, you talk about the benefits and availability of your products, and you talk about access.

Can you speak briefly in a nutshell to us please in respect to Seja Farm, and what do you see coming from your perspective that can assist us in moving the needle forward when it comes to local farming in the territory? Briefly.

1:10:16 Good morning again, Senator. Good morning. In reference to you talk about the food system, one of my biggest advocacy work is around the fact that when it comes to a territory and a Caribbean territory I in myself do not believe that we have a conductive food system in the Virgin Islands that focus around food security and food sovereignty we our dependency on 98% of what we consume to come in to be shipped into us gives room to what my statement because without those shipments we do not have the substance to maintain ourselves and we are open to that Pandora every time we are hit by some sort of natural disaster in the territory and our food system is challenged through those areas and avenues. So I am an advocate around us building as a Virgin Islands territories that we need to focus on how we're gonna rebuild our food system and create a food security system and committee that focus on maintaining some sort of percentage of our food system within the territories the increase of disasters we have the ability to keep our community safe when it comes to substance so please pass over to mr.

1:11:40 Brown sure before I go to be okay go ahead mr. Brown then I'm gonna follow up please. You want me to go ahead? Yeah go ahead and then I'll follow up. Okay. When we talk about food security, actually the Virgin Islands does not have a local food system. Building one is a challenge and what that requires is that the first regulatory agency or part of government that creates that is not up to that challenge. And that's the Department of Agriculture. If we are talking about food security, today our abattoir is closed indefinitely. But therefore that's a big challenge. In addition the department does not have at this time a veterinarian so therefore livestock farmers here in the territory is at a disadvantage. Now when we're talking about importation of food we have 97% plus that are import food but yet still we don't know the number of that 97% of what it's cost or what it's worth and the 3% that we produce we don't know what that is worth either so therefore that in itself shows us that we have no control of the import food that we are we are getting in on a regular basis to actually mitigate or or put in place or even begin to say we need to have x amount of food stored in times of

1:13:35 emergency or how we go about mitigating and having it as a resiliency for the people of the Virgin Islands. Very well said Mr. Brown. Thank you so much Madam Chair. If I may conclude because that's That's a great place to start in terms of the value of the 97% and the 3%. But saying all that, let me ask you in my final statement in respect to bringing us up to point in terms of the workers. We know in terms of farming and agriculture, we really don't have the bodies.

1:14:12 I believe that's a big part. Can you speak to that, please, in terms of the labor? And what that looks like from your perspective and your operation. Do we have enough? Do we need more? And what's happening in that space? Senator, we do need more. The problem is that where we left off, we have not regained that. And that's education. And what we have focused on agriculture around is that it's demeaning. It is not fitting for anyone. but yet still is the bottom of the bottom pole that holds up all the images or careers within the territory or within the world itself. So therefore we need to revisit the understanding that the importance of agriculture and importance of agriculture career is urgent and is pertinent to the development of the industry itself. One of the things that we do at Sager Farm annually and as a summer program and that is educate the students that take part of our summer camp and that is in conjunction with the Department of Labor, Human Services and LEPC and that is to educate our students how their food arrives at the plate, and that in itself give them the motion of seeing food produced from the seed, to harvest, post-harvest, and the culinary that prepares the food for their consumption.

1:16:01 Thank you so much for your response. Thank you so much, Madam Chair, for the leniency. Thank you, Senator Blayden. You're going to get me in trouble today. to give everybody eight minutes. Of course, this meeting is not really to discuss what's happening in the Virgin Islands around agriculture. However, the conversation is always ripe to be had. So I'm happy that Senator Blayden opened the door for the discussion because um the legislature passed act number 8716 in 2023 i think about april of 2023 and um we funded the act a portion of the act in january of 2023 as well One of the requirements of the Ag Plan, based on the plan that was presented to the legislature, is actually the Farm and Food Council was approved in 2023 of April, and that's one year later.

1:17:12 We are in May of 23, and there are 11 members of that council, Five, six are government appointed and six, six are government officials and five are appointed and to date not one person has come down to the legislature for approval. So I understand your frustration Mr. Brown and Mrs. Brown because if we are talking agriculture it cannot just be talk we have to get to the action so you know there was a lot of work put in on you know moving this along and we are hoping that the executive branch will do what is necessary I don't know what the challenge is many times you can't really find people to sit on these boards I don't know what it is the mere fact that it came up today again we definitely will look into it to determine exactly why we have not seen one year later the establishment of the Food and Farm Council in a meaningful and effective way or a way that the this discussion and the work rather around agriculture can move forward

here in the territory. So I want to thank Senator Blayden for pointing that out and definitely Mrs. Brown for sharing it with in her testimony because sometimes and I know they feel like they're the lone rangers there's no support for the work that they're doing that's so important to our food sustainability here in the territory which we have no excuse as you drive through the Island District of St. Croix in particular and you see the vast amount of farmland there is no really excuse that we have as to why we have not made this industry a priority in the Virgin Islands particularly in Island District of st. Croix so you know we need to we need to make sure that we beat

1:19:17 the drum on this and find out exactly what's happening with all that work that was done in establishing the act plan and the food and farm council members. Senator James, you're recognized for your four minutes. Senator Javon James Sr. Greetings to the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands. Thank you Madam Chair for the time. I'm not going to drag it as far as the Department of Agriculture conversation, but just wanted to put it out there that we plan to hold a meeting soon to bring in those individuals and stakeholders, specifically the Department of Agriculture, to answer some questions. The last time we held one there were some hiccups and they got away but this time they better come ready. But as far as the lease I am happy to know that property and procurement that they are doing their thing and I just want to say thank you to Mr. Vincent, Vince Richards Vincent Richards for following through because every time I see him he says Senator I walk in on the thing then you know I say which thing then they lease them they lease them so I'm happy to see this lease come down I'm looking forward to seeing some more. But of course I know the department has to do the due diligence. As far as the one issue that came before us with putting the two properties, no need for me to really ask any questions because Mr. Richard said that can be dealt with. So I just want to say congratulations in advance. I look forward to seeing more farmers coming down here with the leasing agreements. And as far as the other item on the agenda, I have no questions as

1:21:10 well I stand in full support they're straightforward that's with that said I said like I said on June we're scheduling a hearing and I hope they don't come with an excuse saying that they can't make it with that said budget hearing is coming up and I look forward to the discussions to make sure that those areas I need fine-tuning will be fine-tuning and that's why we have the good finance chair who will steer that ship for us thank you madam chair for the Thank you, Senator James. Senator Fonseca, you're recognized for your four minutes. Yes, thank you so kindly, Madam Chair, and pleasant good morning to all the distinguished testifiers, Mr. and Mrs. Brown and also Mr. and Mrs. Victor. You know, Madam Chair, I agree with you. This is not really an agricultural meeting, but I have so much questions for Mr. Brung, right? Because I'm very, very interested.

1:22:20 I was looking at your business plan here, right? You had the head, right? You had 120 head and 240 kids, and you had a 50% lamb loss. Explain to me what happened. Is it a sickness, an illness, or theft? What happened there? Good afternoon. What year was that? This was your business plan, the one that submitted on the lease. It is page 25.

1:23:01 Oh, okay. that that business plan is also in revising but I think I know exactly what you're talking about 2015 we had a drought that drought lasted for I think nine months and we lost quite a bit of kids because it was more important to maintain the adults so if we lost the kids then that would have been one of the problem we also had a drought again in 2021 that lasted for two years and then we just came out of another drought that ended in November of last year okay so So do you get, in a case of a drought, do you get a federal grant? Does the local government replenish your stock or you just have to wing that on your own?

1:24:08 I totally agree with Senator Fred Gregory. And I was trying to avoid this kind of conversation because then it's going to take up a lot. Yeah, because it's important because if you have a drought. I will answer. The government of the Virgin Islands, the Department of Agriculture, cannot and have not assisted farmers from 2015 drought, nor any of the droughts that we have gone through. Monies that have been acquired by any farmer has been through the legislature, and that is just a big drop in the bucket. I have no farmers who have actually stopped farming because of the drought or those that have actually given up. Now USDA Farm Service Agency, they have been extending themselves on different programs from the the programs from the USDA itself, but again because of limited acre, how small our acreages are, those funding generally comes in late and it's definitely not good and so oftentimes farmers would have to have crop non crop insurance from FSA okay good you know you you have you produce lamb right you produce lamb yeah you that's what i was told you got some of the best lamb in the whole island you know because i know a couple weeks ago i was invited up to a thing madam check and i finish up i was invited up to a thing up government house and they pull out some lamb papa the thing them smile like my finger hardly no meat on them i hope that they next time call you and get them lamb chops from you because I showed them with some expensive lamb, he had no meat on them.

1:26:13 Thank you, Madam Chair, for the time. Thank you, Senator Fonseca. You know, when you come to these meetings, once Senator Fonseca here, you always have a good opportunity for a good laugh. And it's always good to have a light moment when we're dealing with these serious matters. So I want to thank you for your comments this morning. Senator James,

you're recognized for your four minutes.

- 1:26:47 Thank you Madam Chair, good morning Virgin Islands, good morning colleagues, good morning testifiers. And first I want to express my thanks to Dale and Yvette Brung because of just taking this mantle and carrying this on your back it's like carrying like atlas in a sense and you've done so much for us here and St. Croix I know with everything you said everything you said in your testimony is you've been doing so much more that and so much more but you know since I am a real estate person and the lease agreement is concerning to me that you would come here today and there is a discrepancy in exactly what you're leasing but that's a that's a problem especially when we're saying that agriculture land is so important and I just want to start by asking you how the well let me ask this 9b is what you presently occupy and possess correct 9p is what we are that we've been on for the past 15 years and so you're renewing that lease we had never got a lease for 9p this is our first time coming for forward to get the lease we have been just waiting for our lease this long waiting this long yes okay and now you're adding 9b 9b we acquired about five years ago yeah okay yeah okay in my memory too i'm thinking you know i've been hearing you talk about both plots or parcels
- 1:28:35 so are they contiguous or adjacent adjacent uh there's a farmer between um both properties oh there's a farmer between you yes oh okay um have you already started to work on the one that is not covered today we started the cleaning process the virgin science department agriculture started a process of cleaning the land but due to the machine shutdown that was put on a hole we're hoping to get that process restarted before the end of this year because we have some plans to continue the development how has the I understand from my staffer Mr. Mercado that not having a lease affects your ability to get grants is there a relationship between that yes there is a restriction explain explain it to so people understand the significance of having a lease agreement many of the programs we do we seek granting additional funding through granting to USDA in our series and the different agencies and those agencies require us to provide our lease agreement to ensure that the property we are and we are on the contract to have the property and do the development on the property for 15 years we have been struggling and having to get a renewed letter of giving us the right the right the temporary right to go ahead and use the property because of the hold up on the lease agreement and so it infringed upon that portion of uh getting approval for certain grants because we do not have that certain grants we just can't get it at all because we have to have 30 seconds yeah you know i really want to stress that because if we in the virgin islands are not providing you with the funds you need we are now denying you
- 1:30:33 also you know we're not we're not helping you directly and we're adversely impacting you indirectly by not giving you a lease in a timely manner because then you can't get funding from other sources correct yes um so you know i want to impress on um the department of agriculture and the department of property and procurement the if we're serious about agriculture we need to understand that all the pieces need to be in place in order for agriculture to happen and that we can't be putting barriers in the place in in front of farmers every single time and business people you know just like any other business person that needs to present a lease of their premises in order for someone to recognize that they all they have position and a right you also need to have a lease in place to prove to others that you have the right to seek whatever grants you're seeking. I want to ask, I think you mentioned before though that I wanted to final because I'm the chair of the Education Committee and I think you did say you do have a summer camp because I want to stress that also.
- 1:31:49 Yes, every summer for the past four years we've taken 40 students. Some of the students come through the Department of Labor, the other 20 students come through a program that we do we apply for grants with LEPC and if we get the grant the funding cover whether or not we get the grant we carry out the program the program consists of 20 students like I said during the age of 10 to 18 and then the summer program the Labor Department of Labor they provide their students for skill 14 to 15 that we do school training with them and what we do those students for the for the six weeks of program they are not allowed to bring anything with them to eat on campus they come with their hands empty other than if they bring a bottle of water we provide everything those students eat for six weeks their food are farm-to-table meals their lunch and their snacks or whatever foods are in season locally that's what this their snacks are no potato chips no no candy no nothing um they pay a hundred dollars registration that's it that's all they paid regardless of whether we have the grant and funding or not to cover it we cover it at those classes we allocate their resources their food from all the small farmers that we work with throughout the um the island and that compromise of their lunch from chicken fresh goat fresh lamb everything um for those six weeks the students do a six-week course within from seat to table that means we teach them how to plant their own seed and how to harvest the food from that seed but we also have a culinary side where the children goes into the kitchen with the chefs that are preparing lunch and they also work with those chefs to learn how to prepare those lunch and how to prepare meals from the stuff they're growing in the field so they get an all-around agricultural development and a culinary skill set for the summer every child like also every child that leaves the summer program leave with a serve safe certificate that certificate is better than having a health card that's distributed by the Virgin Islands Department of Health. I agree, I agree. I just want to thank you

- 1:33:56 for what you do because like you said you still do it even if you don't get the the money to do and I'm not a committee member but when it gets to where I am you know in a Rules Committee I definitely will and in the full session support. I just hope that before it gets there that the other we find some way to include the other um plot plot 9b correct yes yeah yeah and i thank mr harrison for his work that he's doing because after 15 years to finally be here to get the lease is i i wasn't going to be here today but my husband said you have to be here this has been 15 years and i understand his position i am just hoping that the 9b the lease we don't have to wait another 15 years to come before you to get that second part um allocated and approved yeah i don't i don't think we will madam um the other day i didn't have any other questions for the other um business because clearly that business also needs a long-term lease to for stability as he stated in his testimony madam chair um as you can see we we need to make this happen with it by somehow getting the other um plot including and thank you for allowing me the time thank you senator james i think that senator blighton set the precedent for the eight minutes today so we're going to keep going um i want to i want to get back to the leases very quickly before i go to senator carrion so uh we we i'm looking at the um post-audit report that we've that was conducted for these two leases as before us and I'm gonna start with mr. Victor so mr. Victor or I probably need to ask the assistant commission of Richards about the
- 1:35:55 documentation because in order for us to approve these leases as before us there is certain documentation that must be provided to this committee and I'm seeing that the business license for Romina Construction LLC just be this is based on a post-added report hopefully the post-added division requested the additional information and didn't only look at what was in the file but actually picked up the phone and called to get the additional information from the Department of Property and Procurement so we're about to find that out right so So the business license says that the expiration is 1013 of 2023. That is long gone.
- 1:36:40 What's the status of the business license for Arena Construction LLC? Vincent Richards for property and procurement. Senator, all the testifiers, all the businesses before us today are current on their business licenses and current on their certificate of good standing. I believe this week my staff, our staff reached out to these individuals and they have forwarded the the documents and they're listening now and they're gonna re-forward them again to Ms. Russell so before the end of by 12 o'clock you'll have all copies of their current business licenses insurance and everything okay so the business license the trade name registration that's not that's not applicable in all instances correct business licenses as well as certificate of good standing and insurance all current all current okay all current so let me ask you about liability insurance I'm learning that many of our insurance I guess brokers here are having a challenge with issuing certificates of liability insurance have you been have y'all like have you been experiencing businesses who's trying to attain leases from the government having challenges with getting liability insurance? Senator, one of the biggest challenges with agricultural leases is getting maps, current maps of their current locations. That's one of our biggest challenges and the second one is getting liability insurance for these properties kind of operations we have been in communications with Department of Agriculture we've been the communication with the lieutenant governor's office and the the insurance industry to see if and even the USDA to see if there's some
- 1:38:33 way of bridging that gap whether it be by changing the limits and or something So specifically, so there is a challenge with getting liability insurance in the territory for businesses right now. And I'm not certain what the discussions are with the lieutenant governor's office, but we do know that this is not unique to the Virgin Islands. This is something that's happening throughout the country, right? But before I stay on the liability matters, so you're affirming that the business license for Seja Farms is up to date, the trade name registration, the certificate of liability insurance, because that says 4-18-24, and the certificate of good standing is all up to date.
- 1:39:31 Yes, Senator. I was just checking my phone and going through my email and I saw the staff did request the updated documents from all these individuals and they did transmit them. Okay. So we'll look forward to getting that information. If you can ask them. You said that they sent them over already to my office? They're going to send them. They're going to resend them. No. Let's be clear because that's two different things. They're supposed to send them. I'm going to make sure they're sent by 12 o'clock, Senator. Okay. send them over please because in order for us to make an informed decision this is this this is part of the requirement so i asked the question specifically around the insurance because in in the instances of the um the farm main business what's the what what is the purpose of the insurance the liability insurance uh senator the the government of virginia owns a property and by extension is responsible for what happens on the property and to any individual who steps foot on the property so the you know god forbid anything happens it's to protect the government insurance to not be liable or to be protected if something happens if there's a claim god forbid and in their instances if there are instances when individuals are not able to get insurances because of the direction that the market is doing is there any discussion on the government's end as to how they propose, how we as a government, how the executive branch proposes to ensure that these businesses are able to move forward as far as identification, I don't know.

- 1:41:08 But these are discussions that need to be had because there is a challenge with liability insurance in the territory. Have we? The department, the departments are aware. I'm not prepared today to answer that. policy okay question well that's something that we need to explore so i am prepared to explore that you know with the banking and insurance division all right um i had a note here so mr victor tell me how many employees do you employ in the the Romina Construction LLC?
- 1:41:55 Currently, we have 12. Put your name on the record. One more time. Gemma Ladd-Victor. And currently, we have 12 employees. Currently, you have 12 employees. And do you have any contracts with the government of the Virgin Islands? Yes, we do. Yes. Okay. Mr. or Mrs. Brown, same question. currently myself and mr. Brown are only two full-time employees we have on a regular where based on our production and harvesting we bring in part-time employees for a certain period based on the product that we're putting in for production so we do we carry our workload is carry out through part-time employees okay all right and one more thing before I go to senator carry on so we've been discussing this matter with regards to the Department of Property and Procurement and a Department of Agriculture Department of Agriculture working on the leases and then the Department of Property and Procurement coming before the Senate to defend the leases. I think today's a good example of why we need to close that delta. Because once they send the lease is over, you know what you have in front of you, but you don't know the intricate details. And this is for you, Mr. Richards. Are you in agreement that you may not necessarily know the intricate details of the leases that's tied to agriculture in particular. What are your thoughts around that current process? I mean, we've discussed it many times, but we haven't seen any changes occurring around it, and I'm certain that it creates much frustration with the farmers in particular. I think there was a comment made that Ms. Brown made that says that they don't want to wait another 15 years, which is not within your control. Senator, I support the current structure until it's mutually adjusted. It will not take 15 years to make the adjustment that's being requested here. But were you aware?
- 1:44:22 Was I aware of the additional requests? Correct. No, I wasn't. That's the point. like because and I said that's the point because if you are aware it just makes sense for them to be able to move forward with their work I know they're probably already clearing the property but they're not legitimately on the property per se because there's not an approved lease I know usually you guys would probably do a one-year lease I don't know if that's the case in this instance but there is a level of frustration because when you want to expand your business in a certain manner you just want to do it and move forward so well I agree well I hear you rather because I don't agree that you support the current structure as you know the executive branch as the other side of the table I just don't see it as a structure for efficiency? You may respond.
- 1:45:22 Vincent Richards. Senator, I understand and I agree with your perspective. Again, I repeat again, there is a document that's before us and before this body that has attachments to it, that has maps attached to it, that has proof of the government ownership, and all the parties that agreed to this agreement has signed this agreement and initialed all the pages on this agreement so they've attested to it. If there was a conversation or a thought or a desire afterwards to amend it, there wasn't anything in writing to the Department of Property and Procurement that said that this wanted to be changed. A mere desire is a mere desire. When you put pen to paper and say this is what you want to do, this is what we do. So I stand by the document and the package the full and complete package that we have before us today um i didn't expect you not to stand by it because this was before us but the question on the table is do the browns know that they had an opportunity an option to write to the department of property and procurement or is it that they do all of their paperwork etc with the department of agriculture i mean we don't need to go back and forth on this clearly the system that we have in place has a challenge there are challenges around it and our job is to make doing business with the government easier so i see a delta and i heard it in their voice that they are um uh challenged by what's you know the fact that they don't have the other extension today um but we will follow up on it for them because that's part of our job as well, right? I'm going to go to
- 1:47:07 Senator Carrion. Today is definitely going to be a shorter day than we expected. Senator Carrion, you're recognized for your four minutes. Thank you, Madam Chair. Good morning. Already still morning to you, my colleagues, testifiers, viewing and listening audience. I must say I couldn't agree more with you in this instance in regards to identifying where the challenges are so that we can correct this problem because clearly we shouldn't have individuals waiting so long to be able to get a lease agreement. But I want to commend the Browns for your persistence and perseverance and truly is a demonstration of your commitment to the territory but also to the industry of agriculture and its revitalization. So thank you so much for not not giving up and continuing the fight. Since we're still in this line I just would like to ask Assistant Commissioner Richards what would be now the process in order to add on the 9B estate vi corp section that is not included uh in this instance uh vincent richards um to add add on to if you wanted to add on you would have to uh reject this document send it back through the entire process and start all over again um what what's an alternative is approving the current document and then we can amend it to add the additional property afterwards in a very short order that would have to go back to the process as well but it'll be quick much quicker and easier the the latter way as opposed to the first

suggestions starting entirely over Patrick, so your recommendation, of course, to this body is if this body feels fit to approve, accept what we have before us, and then add an amendment, I guess, and bring forward the second part. That's what you're saying, correct? Yes, Senator. Okay. And just for the viewing

1:49:30 and listening audience, and for our identification also, and others that might be in the same train if we could say what is how is this process if you can just elaborate a little bit how is this process we're talking specifically about agriculture Lisa yes sir a farmer would approach Department of Agriculture they will determine the the area that they want to use it'd be surveyed surveyed and mapped out and then the terms would be established in terms of the length of the trip the length of the lease agreement between them and Department of Agriculture and what kind of activities were going to be happening on the property um the the rate is codified in the VI code so that's that's that's pretty simple and then they will just basically submit all their documentation to our Department of Agriculture. Agriculture was transmitted to the Department of Property and Procurement. We'll review it, make sure it's legally sufficient, and then we'll execute it and then send it to the Department of Justice and the Governor's Office for consideration, ratification, and then it's transmitted to... 30 seconds. Then it'll be transmitted to the VA Legislature thereafter for consideration. Very well. And in a perfect scenario when the lessee has all the necessary documentation, license, insurance, good standing, etc. What would be the length of time that this process would take?

1:51:11 Senator, in the last 12 months after this, and the last 12 months time, six to nine months is realistic. Six to nine months should be the maximum length of time. From beginning to end, Senator. Pardon me for speaking over you. Very well. And lastly, Madam Chair, if I may, where do you see that, where's the gap? Where are we falling short in delivering and executing these type of contracts? For instance, in this case that we've had these to individuals that have been dedicated demonstrated for 15 years and been waiting for this lease where we have to improve to ensure that this doesn't happen again senator capacity the Department of Agriculture needs more administrative capacity to process leases the system is not perfect but it's good and it's getting better every day you know in this committee you can see the tempo of of leases that move through this committee and in the last 36 months you know you know quite frankly there were times when you guys were telling me I was sending too much leases down here I'm down here a little too often so it's it's good but it's getting better is it perfect no it's not but to answer your question specifically is more administrative capacity for packaging and processing of lease agreements in the Department of Agriculture.

1:52:51 Thank you for sharing that and I hope that we can really dig deep and see how we can find a solution so that this won't happen again and Mr. Brown, Ms. Brown, if you can on the chair's time can you express the importance of this and if you had some consequences before for not having the lease and what this would mean for you. Thank you very much Madam Chair. What this has done what this is gonna do for us is give us the leverage so that when we go before on the different agencies such as USDA and other platforms or even philanthropy grants and stuff like that or any programs that we gear at to develop in our cultural arena that we are not told we don't have the correct documents to showcase that we have the approval of to use the land a letter of temporary use is no longer being accepted and that was a big challenge for us recently in a program that we were doing that we had to go back and forth and beg to get approval because we do not have a lease on hand and I can't wrap my hand around the reason for all these years why we never got our lease approved but we I'm very I'm like I said I'm very very thankful to Mr. Assistant Commissioner Harris for the work that he's doing and bringing us to the table today I was Richard Richardson I'm sorry I'm sorry Commissioner, Assistant Commissioner Richardson for your name. I am thankful for that because like I said 15 years is a long wait and it has put a lot of blockage in the process to get where we are today but having this opportunity we are grateful and because of that we are like you said we will take the the lease for 9p today if approved and hope that within a few months that we can get the second lease approved so we could have a combine of the boat lease because both properties have been paid for and have been we have been paying for both

1:55:06 properties and keeping up our payments to make sure that we have the lease. Thank you for your response. Senator Francisco you recognize your point of information. Thank you Madam Chair. Mr. Franklin just a couple quick questions here um you involved with road paving with federal contracts franklin victor yes senator okay i want i want you to explain me something um what is is there any particular degree that asphalt starts to melt in other words what temperature surface temperature that our asphalt starts to melt or decompose. Do you know what that temperature is?

1:55:54 Franklin Victor, we don't do asphalt, we do concrete. Okay, so your federal contracts are all concrete? Concrete. Okay, thank you very much. Thank you, Senator. Just let's go back to the leases. So Mr. Richards, Mr. Vincent Richards, So in the post audit report, I'm seeing that the lease in particular for the Romina Construction LLC was signed on August 11th of 2023 by the Commissioner of the Department of Property and Procurement, by Mr. Ian S. Clement of the Department of Justice on 8th 14th of 2023 by the Honorable Governor Albert Bryan Jr. on August 28th of 2023. We received these leases, when did we receive these leases?

- 1:57:05 Leszana Montagu. What is the problem? What's the problem? The concern that was heard here is a legitimate concern. The governor signed it. I thought that the governor was the last signature before it comes down to the legislature. Was there an issue that they had to go back? What's the issue? Vincent, Richard for the Department of Property and Becurement. Senator, honestly, I truly can't, I cannot explain what happens after Lisa M Alejandro signs the document and it leaves the department of property procurement. August 28, 2023. And we continue to talk about challenges with generating revenues.
- 1:57:58 That's what we do. That's what we do. How long have you been waiting for this lease to be approved, Mr. Romina? yeah well yeah it's close to a year oh it's more than a year sorry jambalad victor so it's close to a year we've been waiting for the lease this this lease has been signed by the governor since august of 2023 we are how much I don't understand what happens in government.
- 1:58:44 I know that you can't answer those questions because, like you said, once it leaves the Department of Property, but is there a follow-up process in your office? Vincent Richards for the Department of Property and Becoming. Yes there is, I mean, there is. I follow up with the executive branch, I follow up with the legislative branch, I follow up with everybody to try to get it to move through the process. Okay. I see that the one for Mr. The Browns was signed by Louis Peterson on February of 24, 8 by Commissioner of Property and Procurement February 21st of 24, Assistant Attorney General February 29th, and by the Governor on 3-7.
- 1:59:33 Progress. Not enough. I'll work on it. I promise. Not enough progress. These folks need to be able to move on with their businesses. Let me take this opportunity to recognize committee members, Senator Novoley Francis jr our senate president please mark with some senate president nova francis jr as present as he is the vice chair of this committee but before i go to senator francis let me just ask because we have got to close out this section um the annual production the Browns. This is for the Browns. What's your current annual production? You talked about production and the inability of the Virgin Islands to identify or collect data on annual productions. What's the annual production of your farm currently and what are you proposing as um additional production as a result of the additional lease the additional acreage that you're seeking uh good afternoon dale brown we have two we have several enterprises on the farm two of the main enterprises are crop production and livestock production. Currently we want to increase crop production by at least 25 to 30 percent and for the livestock we want to increase that by 50 percent. That takes a significant toll and increase in livestock because now you need to retrofit or put in the infrastructure required to maintain that livestock and to maintain the animal health we are looking forward towards using the 16 acres as the expansion of 9b to do that and doing so will require
- 2:01:57 an infrastructure that is going to maintain these animals and their health for harvest and consumption okay so that's a good segue for me to ask what is your investment your your your improvement investment on the property that we are we are seeking to approve today that investment is going to run anywhere between 50 to 60 000. 50 to 60 000 all right same question for you mr romina i mean mr victor your investment i think i saw in the there's a number in there and at least but what is your investment in the actual build out of the the property. Franklin Victor construction, we are expecting to invest another \$100,000 to upgrade the property. What's your total investment? I think I see that the lease says To date it's \$100,000. So that's me you have to invest another \$250 because I think the lease says 350. Did you see that? Mr. Richards, that's what the lease have in it?
- 2:03:32 Senator, the lease has an estimated \$250,000 investment. It's on subsection 4.01. I guess Mr. Romina says he's already, Mr. Victor has already invested \$100,000. He said he plans to invest approximately another \$100,000. Okay, so it's basically an estimate. Yes, Senator, it is an estimate.
- 2:03:58 What does the language in the lease say? The language in the lease says improvements as per the consideration of the agreement the lessee shall provide at its own expense, cost and expense, the following improvements owned by the lessee at an estimated cost of \$250,000. That's an operative word, estimated cost. Correct. All right. Perfect. Good question. Another \$100,000. All right. Thank you. I'm going to now go to Senator Francis, Novalee Francis Jr. You recognize for your four minutes. I check one, two. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.
- 2:04:35 Good morning to you, actually good afternoon to you, to the colleagues, of course, to the testifiers and the people of the Virgin Islands I apologize for my delayed presence as you know I have attended the naming of the Aloy Winty Nielsen bypass this morning and I want to take this opportunity as well to thank Senator Blyton for presenting these lease agreements on my behalf in my absence I certainly support the boat leases that's before us this morning and as well as heard the conversation in respect to the timeliness or untimeliness in this instance of the approval of the lease 15 years is certainly unacceptable for you know these lease to move forward even one year is unacceptable for us to move forward however I think it's critical that we work within the within the government to make sure that we're working towards improving and closing you know those those gaps that is really distracting for individuals I endeavor to continue to do

business here. In respect to the farming lease is something that I appreciate you know the tremendous amount of work that this body have done in regards to farming you yourself Madam Chair is involved in making sure that you're moving your legislation to support our farming industry. I had a recent conversation with the director of office of management where there was a earmark of the budget for the purpose of providing additional funding that should be utilized for land preparation land security and purchasing of equipment and other means to support our farmers and I'm not seeing that being expended to the level that it should be and I'll certainly be reaching out to the Commissioner of Agriculture as we endeavor to move this forward. I wanted to thank Mr. Dale Brown and Yvette my classmate you know for as a matter of fact we celebrate in 40 years this year

2:06:43 for graduating from high school but I wanted to thank them for their involvement in the farming and continue to do the hard work put forth as in regards to the improvement of their farm and I could see where there have been tremendous incremental improvement being made and your level of patience is as good as job because 50 years is a long time to wait it out but what is your vision what is what is it that you look to you know outside of this 15 or even the 16 acres what is it in the real world that you would like to see happen, you know, where would you like to see your farming production go to? Dale Brown. Senator, we oftentimes take this farming as a passion, but passion can wane passion can go away because of different type of struggle at this time we are passionate but we're on a mission and that's a difference because when this vision the mission is to see the Virgin Islands become productive in food development and when I say productive in food development I am looking at the past and what the Virgin Islands has done for countries or for Denmark and given Denmark its status today so what it is that is hindering us from doing likewise. So the vision is for Seja Farm to be that model where farms can actually and can actually look towards not the status quo that was set over the years but give farms the

2:08:49 opportunity and the leverage to to build themselves with an infrastructure that sustained the development of the island's agriculture. Thank you. Thank you very much for that. Madam Chair, I heard my time call. Can I just conclude on two points real quickly, please? Absolutely. Thank you. And we have our responsibility and in terms of government as well. I mean we have the issue with the abattoir, for example. You know, something that continues to create some problems around here. When we talk about the availability of water, you know, we see what's happening here with the heat that we're experiencing in these early months and you know God forbid what's gonna happen in the months to come if we don't have adequate water. We have the challenges with with pesticides and insects and all kind of thing that can wipe out your entire investment in no time. You know so we understand the challenges that you're involved in and we have to do our part as a government to be able to support that industry. I really want to wrap up real quickly to also ask Mr. Franklin Victor you know what is his vision what is it that he would like to see happen in terms of his business document as well you know where do you intend to take your your industry as you invest another a hundred thousand dollars into your business what is it that you like to see happening and how do you believe the government to support you in that endeavor so um with that um if that once that list is approved it helps us to store um the materials that we use to do construction because most times um we buy material from out of st thomas and that's it's more affordable when we buy bulk like that so we can store it in the yard and

2:10:45 when we're doing affordable housing that helps us so that our price can be competitive so the yard is really going to help us if we can you know get that lease it's absolutely awesome very well thank you my time i've been called i also want to conclude by thanking um the Assistant Commissioner Richards. I know that sometimes these are heavy lift and and you know we will beat you but we appreciate the work that you're doing to move some of these leases forward and we look forward to a continued relationship so that we could be able to bring additional monies into the revenue base and coffers of this government. So thank you for your work there and thank you very much Madam Chair for the time and I ask for my colleague's support in moving these measures forward. Thank you. Thank you, Senator Francis, for your comments. And I do agree that the work that Mr. Richards is doing at the Department of Property and Procurement is a heavy lift. I find myself from time to time calling to assist constituents with, you know, moving their their leases along, but of course they also have to provide the necessary information in order for the Department of Property and Procurement to move these leases along. So it's a two-part relationship that has to occur. I just hope that we can, you know, we've been talking about this for a while, that we can really streamline the work, streamline the process so, you know, some of the frustration can be eliminated, but the businesses definitely need to understand that, you know, there is a process and the process has to be followed. All right. So, there was one measure that was taken off of the agenda just for the sake of my colleagues

2:12:48 that came late, and that measure is tied to being number 35.0262, which is to support the dredging of the soft costs for Charlotte Amali. There was no one that came. The members of the representatives from the Virgin Islands Port Authority was here. They came to testify in support, of course, of moving this project along. Mr. Dow made a passionate plea that, you know, the longer it takes for this to move forward and the longer it takes for us to get, for them to get things moving

as far as the jurisdiction is concerned. However, no one from the government side, the Mr. Kevin McCurdy of the, who is the executive director of the Virgin Islands Public Finance Authority, was invited to the meeting. And when he was called this morning, he indicated that he thought that the meeting was cancelled.

2:13:43 whatever reason, and I'm going to get to what I believe he might think is the reason. So we're going to keep these folks at us a little longer before we make the motions to move forward with these measures, but apparently there was a letter sent to my attention on May 15th, to my attention and my attention only, which is unusual, by the Governor. So this, no access to my emails that says that the Governor's financial team will not be coming to today's meeting once again to provide testimony on the status of the FY 2024 appropriations versus the allotments and the revenues, et cetera. He did say, though, that they just got through with the revenue estimating conference. And one of the, there is a legislation that I actually passed when I became a senator first in 2019, which requires the government to do a mid-year review of the current fiscal year budget to determine whether the current year's revenues align with the appropriations made for that year.

2:15:00 And he indicated that they're working to provide that information. I can't specifically remember what date the Revenue Estimating Conference was, but that information is to be provided one month later. So we are going to respect the legislation that says that the information is to be provided one month later, so we can have an idea of what one month later after the Revenue Estimating Conferences. Can anybody tell me when that date was? I can't remember when the Revenue Estimating Conference was the date?

2:15:35 May 7th, so we're going to look forward to June 7th. So what we're going to do is we're going to kill two birds with one stone. We're going to take night and make day to make sure that we get the information for 2024 before we drill down into 25. So when the government's financial team come, I think the date is to be June 6th. We may have to make some changes. I will ask the indulgence of the president so we can make sure that we are killing two birds with one stone so we could get this work done and so we could understand truly what's the status of the government's finances here in the territory, our expenditures, because there are lots of vendors, lots of services that folks are pulling out of because they're not being paid. And our job is to make sure that we have an understanding of what's going on and make necessary changes adjustments etc or provide the necessary support so we are prepared to do that so I'm not going to belabor this matter any longer based on that I don't know if we need to make an amendment somebody needs to help me out with that as to what we need to do as far as what's on the agenda in block two so there's no action for block two so we don't need to to make any changes but um there's something that I need to do before we get to the vote and then we're going to close we're going to do the vote and then we're going to close the meeting today is the last day to file and submit your intent to run for office with the board of elections for the 2024 elections. And I think it's important that I advise or I

2:17:29 share this afternoon, this afternoon all right, that I want to inform the community and my colleagues that I will not be seeking re-election in the upcoming 2024 election cycle. I came to this decision after careful reflection and discussion with family members, friends, supporters and constituents after 37 years of public service the last six of which have been I have been a member of this body and I think that now I know that now I am ready to write a new chapter by continuing to be a service of service to the people of the Virgin Islands in a different forum and in a different role. I will also be using this time to spend more time with my 91-year-old mother, who will be 92 in August of this year.

2:18:27 But be assured that although I am not seeking re-election, my journey is far from over. And there is much work to be done before my term expires in January. And if you know me, you know I plan to use every day. I have left in the 34th legislature, the 35th legislature, to fight, to push for the causes I hold there and those causes that are there to the people. I will be seeking out new and exciting ways to give back to my community. I do have a foundation, the DFG Community Impact Foundation, of which I'll be working hard to continue the work there.

2:19:12 rest assured my service to the Virgin Islands and our people will not end with my Senate term. I will continue to be the voice for accountability and remain committed to the principle that government works best when we put our collective heads together and leave our egos at the door. I am so proud of what have been what I have been able to accomplish along with my colleagues during my time as senator. Six years ago, around June of 2018, when I announced my bid for the 33rd legislature, I said to you, the people of the Virgin Islands, that I would focus on results that would benefit all Virgin Islanders, not just a few. And I have kept that promise by focusing on sponsoring and co-sponsoring legislation focused on improving the way of life for the people of this territory.

2:20:10 And just here's a small few things that I have worked on with my colleagues of course. Sponsoring the landmark legislation to create a funding source for the government employees retirement system. Sponsoring legislation for the rights of victims of crime and domestic violence. ensuring funding for WAPA while ensuring and insisting oversight of which we have yet to see come to fruition. Re-establishing the Tax Study Commission, we know that many of our businesses here continue to talk about their challenges with the gross receipt taxes and the fact that we need to look at our

tax structure here in the Virgin Islands which have yet to come to fruition uh we've done our work here um i've also worked diligently with my colleagues which it failed two times before it was able we were able to pass it which was creating the agency dedicated to the maintenance of our schools which has yet to come to fruition ensuring adequate funding for our student athletes and strengthening our economic development program to attract investors and broadening our revenue base and one of the things I'm very excited about is the fact that we were able under my leadership to ensure that the island district of st. John in particular their capital projects are now only used for capital projects and not to haul trash from st. Tom from st. John to st. Thomas a security and secure securing and supporting funding for capital improvements include many capital improvements. One that's notable that I really want to see started is the Sugar Estate Repair Project. Also the site planning for the Red Hook Sports Complex in St. Thomas which is very much needed and sponsoring legislation for government employees to support their long overdue retroactive wages, securing retirees

2:22:15 bonuses, and paying retirees their retroactive annual bonuses as well, and the University of the Virgin Islands long overdue retroactive wages from since 1994 and prior, and just so much more. But another hour and another place, there will be plenty of time for me to reminisce and have remembrance of all the good work that I've done with my colleagues, and I'm looking forward to the work ahead as we work on the 2025 budget cycle and focus on my legislation legislative agenda to the end of this term but before i end and go back to the matter at hand i would like to make one thing absolutely and abundantly clear although i'm leaving the list the senate and today is the last day to file your intent i am not leaving the people of the virgin islands i am not going anywhere i will remain a fierce advocate for good government and sound public policy in the virgin islands when my term ends i will continue to be that person you can count on thank you thank you to the people of the virgin islands particularly those of the st thomas st john district for your confidence in allowing me to represent you for the past three terms. It has been a privilege and an absolute honor. I will continue to do the work to secure results that benefits all Virgin Amateurs, not just a few. So I want to thank you. I wanted to do this today because it's filing deed and I have not sent out anything and I think it's important

2:24:01 for me to let the community know that I am not going to be on the ballot this time, But I will continue to be that person for the people of the Virgin Islands. So do I hear a motion? Thank you very much Madam Chair and colleagues I move that bill number 35.0261 an act approving lease agreement between the government of the Virgin Islands and Dale Brown and Eva Brown doing business at Sage of Farms of the Virgin Islands for plot number 9-P estate VI court lands Prince Quarter St. Croix Virgin Islands be approved by the Committee of Budget Appropriations and Finance and sent forward to the Rules and Judiciary Committee for further vetting. I so move.

2:25:12 Senator Marvin A. Blyden. One second. One second. Bill number 35-026. Bill number 35-0261 has been properly moved by Senator Novali Francis Jr., seconded by Senator Ray Fonseca and Senator Marvin Blyden. Here are no objections. Rule call, please. Senator Marvin A. Blyden. Yeah.

2:25:41 Senator Blyden, yeah. Senator Samuel Carrion. Yes. Senator Carrion, yeah. Senator Dwayne M. DeGraff. Senator DeGraff, absent. Yeah. Senator Ray Fancica. Yeah. Senator Fancica, yeah. Senator Donna A. Frick Gregory. Yes. Senator Frick Gregory. Yay. Senator Nobel E. Francis Jr. Yay. Senator Francis Jr. Yay. Senator Javon E. James Sr. Yes. Yes. Yes. Senator James Sr. Yay. Madam Chair 68. One absent. Thank you Madam Clerk, Bill No. 35-0261, an act approving the lease agreement between the government of the Virgin Islands and Dale Brown and Yvette Brown doing business as Sager Farm of the Virgin Islands for Plot No. 9-P, a State VI Corp lands Prince Quarter, Prince Quarter, Prince Quarter St. Croix, Virgin Islands has been favorably approved by this committee and will be forwarded to the Rules Committee for further consideration and action. Thank you. Do I have motion? Senator Francis Jr. recognize your motion. Thank you very much Madam Chair. Madam Chair and colleagues I move that bill number 35.0255 an act approving the multi-year lease agreement between the government of Brazans acting through its Commission of Department of Property and Procurement and Romania Construction LLC for parcel number 92A, revised submarine base number 6, Southside Quarters and Thomas Verzales to operate equipment and material storage depot, a yard construction company office and other related purposes be approved by the Committee of Budget Appropriations and Finance and sent to the Rules and Judiciary Committee for further bedding in consideration. I so move. Bill number 35-0255 has been properly moved by Senator Nogley Francis Jr. seconded by Javon James Sr., Senator Marvin Blyden and Senator Ray Fonseca. Hearing no objections, roll call please. Senator Marvin A. Blyden. Senator Blyden. Senator Blyden. Senator Samuel

2:28:09 carry on yes senator carry on young senator doing MD graph senator the graph absent senator we refund seeker senator Francica yay senator Donna a Fred Gregory yes senator Fred Gregory yay senator Novel II Francis jr. senator Francis jr. yay senator Javon E James senior yes senator James senior yay madam chair 60 is one absent thank you madam clerk bill number 35 that's zero two five five an act approving the multi-lease agreement between the government of the Virgin Islands acting through its Commissioner of the Department of Property and Procurement and Romina construction LLC

for parcel number nine to eight revised submarine Base No. 6, Southside Quarter, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, to operate an equipment and material storage depot yard, construction company office, and for other related purposes has been favorably approved by this committee and will be forwarded to the Rules Committee for further consideration and action.

2 : 29 : 26 Thank you. I will give the testifiers an opportunity to give a 30-second close, but let me just say congratulations on, you know, finally getting to that hurdle. And I'm certain that, you know, based on the testimony that we received today from you, these leases will both be approved when it gets to the Rules Committee and to the whole body. I look forward to voting yes on these two leases as before so we're gonna start with Mr. Romina uh your 32nd or or or whomever miss miss I keep saying Mr. Romina Mr. we're gonna have to change your name we don't change your whole name today we are we apologize Mrs. Victor you may proceed with the 32nd close Jamalad, Victor, I want to say thank you for voting to approve the lease.

2 : 30 : 33 We're very grateful because it's really going to help us. It's something that we've always you know wanted and so we're so grateful. And I also want to thank you, Madam Senator, for your time also for everything that you have done for the Virgin Islands. I mean, you talked about the gross receipt. And I can say that we felt the, I mean, before now, it used to be very difficult. The license was tied to it. Even if you probably couldn't pay a month of your gross receipt, you couldn't get the license. So it used to be very difficult. And I know that for the past, like, four years, it has changed. So I can say that that work that you did, you and the rest of the senator, that we felt the impact.

2 : 31 : 28 So we're very grateful for every other thing that you have done. And I pray that God will continue to be with you in everything that you want done. I also appreciate the fact that you said you're going to take care of your 91-year-old mom. That is something that we see children here. don't really you know take care of their you know their parent they leave them they go away and sometimes this parent just here they suffer there's nobody to you know care for them so i really appreciate that and thank you thank you help me tearing up a little bit all right uh miss brown or mr mrs brown mrs brown is a spokesperson today right I just want to take this time to thank this committee on the behalf of Sager Farm for bringing us to this fruition at this time after 15 years and thank you to the assistant commissioner for getting our lease um put together and finalized to be brought before the committee Our work will move forward and we are looking forward to speedy action with the second portion of the lease property. As a matter of fact I am having faith that in the next two months we're going to be called before this committee to approve the next piece of the lease. But that's just my say. Thank you Senator Fred Gregory for your work and your dedication to the people of the Virgin Islands I wish you great success in your future endeavor and also in your work in taking care of your mom something that I no longer have the privilege of doing so having your mother around is such an essential piece of our lifespan so good luck and Godspeed with you in that and again once again thank you to everyone that has made this a success for us today and approving our list. Thank you for your kind words Senator Fonseca point of personal

2 : 33 : 39 privilege and then we're going to close the meeting and know that we got FY25 budget to come contend with. Thank you, thank you Madam Chair. You know I wanted to um also add that you know to the people of the Virgin Islands um you You know, Madam Chair, Senator Donna Fred Gregory, has a unique combination of skill set and experience that is extremely rare in the Virgin Islands. You know, it's been a tremendous pleasure working with Senator Donna Fred Gregory. leadership skills is impeccable her ability to concentrate and get the work is just beyond you know repute and it's been such a pleasure working with Donna Fred Gregory and I'm so happy to learn that she is not going to leave the Virgin Islands in fact she's going to continue to serve the people of the Virgin Islands in whatever capacity the good Lord bless us. So I am wishing an abundance of blessings and praises upon our Madam Chair and thank you and best of luck in all your future endeavors. Thank you Senator Fonseca for those kind words just know that we are only in May. The legislature closing in January. We got a lot of what to do. We have our budget before us and I am super excited to work on the FY25 budget. I worked on the 24 budget and that was a heavy lift and we know that we have challenges as we move forward. So it's a fervent hope that the information that was shared in the the revenue estimating conference as it relates to these projects coming online that we see these

2 : 35 : 35 projects because we really need the revenues to ramp up in the Virgin Islands so we've allowed everybody to close and without further ado the again I let me just thank my colleagues for allowing me the indulgence of sharing the fact that it's just so interesting that today is the last day so I said I would take the opportunity to you know advise that I won't be putting in another bid for the senate at least not this year so without further ado we've accomplished most of what we wanted to accomplish today there's still a lot more to do and hopefully we'll get the information from the governance the government's financial team to make a determination as to whether or not there's any action that's required of the legislature because it's important for us to make sure that once we appropriate those dollars if the revenues are not showing that that there's some sort of action that's occurring. So we look forward to getting that information and we will figure out how we can combine those two meetings and get this moving forward for 2025.

2:36:43 Without further ado, the Committee on Budget Appropriations and Finance is hereby adjourned. We'll be right back.
We'll be right back.

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.

- 19x **Senator Marvin Blyden**
heard in this transcript as: Blayden, Blyden, Blyton, Marvin A. Blyden
- 11x **Senator Novelle Francis**
heard in this transcript as: Francis, Francis Jr, Francis Jr., Nobel E. Francis Jr, Nogley Francis Jr, Novali Francis Jr
- 11x **Senator Ray Fonseca**
heard in this transcript as: Fonseca
- 9x **Senator Samuel Carrion**
heard in this transcript as: Carrion, Samuel L. Carrion
- 7x **Senator Marise C. James**
the surname alone also matches: Javan James; Giovanni James Sr
heard in this transcript as: James, James Sr, James Sr.
- 6x **Senator Fred Gregory**
the surname alone also matches: Donna A. Fred Gregory; Frank Gregory; Donna A. Frett-Gregory; Donna Frett-Gregory
heard in this transcript as: Gregory
- 5x **Senator Donna A. Frett-Gregory**
heard in this transcript as: Donna A. Fred Gregory, Donna A. Frick Gregory, Donna Fred Gregory
- 5x **Senator Dwayne DeGraff**
heard in this transcript as: DeGraff, Dwayne M. DeGraff, Wayne M. DeGraff
- 4x **Senator Javan James**
heard in this transcript as: Javon E. James Sr, Javon E. James Sr., Javon James Sr
- 2x **Governor Albert Bryan Jr**
- 2x **Senator Frank Gregory**
the surname alone also matches: Donna A. Frett-Gregory; Donna Frett-Gregory
heard in this transcript as: Frick Gregory
- 2x **Senator Marvin A. Blighton**
- 1x **Senator Donna Frett-Gregory**
heard in this transcript as: Donna A. Frett-Gregory

Bills and acts referred to

Matched by number against our own acts corpus. The number is what the recognition heard, so it may be wrong; where it resolved, the title is the one the Legislature gave the act.

- Bill 35-0026** Act 8714 · April 14, 2023 · An Act amending title 22 Virgin Islands Code relating to insurers becoming members of a Federal Home Loan Bank and matters relating thereto aa--Qe==
- Act 8716** Act 8716 · April 14, 2023 · An Act amending title 7, chapter 1 of the Virgin Islands Code by adding subchapter VIII, establishing a Local Food and Farm Council in accordance with mandate five of the Virgin Islands Agricultural Plan ---0
- Act 8714** Act 8714 · April 14, 2023 · An Act amending title 22 Virgin Islands Code relating to insurers becoming members of a Federal Home Loan Bank and matters relating thereto aa--Qe==

Referred to but not found in our acts corpus: Bill 35-0261, Bill 35-0255