



Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance-STJ

Legislature USVI

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0:00:00 Let's get started. We'll be right back. Come with me to St. Croix, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful girl. Come, come with me to St. Croix, I will make you happy, oh baby, I assure you that, if you come, if you come with me, with me, come with me to St. Croix. I will make you happy, oh baby, I assure you that, if you come, if you come with me, With me. Come. With me. With me. Beautiful. Beautiful. Girl. Beautiful. Beautiful.

0:01:43 Before. With me. Boy. More. And after we marry, oh baby, a boy and a girl will cut. If you come with me, with me, come with me to St. Croix. Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful girl. Come, come with me to St. Croix. Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful girl Come, come with me to sing glory We'll be right back. Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful girl Come, come with me to St. Croix Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful girl Come, come with me to St. Croix I will make you happy, oh baby I assure you that if you come If you come with me, with me Come with me to St. Croix I will make you happy, oh baby, I assure you that If you come, if you come with me, with me, come with me to sing boy Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful girl Come, come with me to sing boy

0:04:00 Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful girl Come, come with me to sing boy And after we marry, oh baby, a boy and a girl will come If you come with me, with me, come with me to St. Croix And after we marry, oh baby, a boy and a girl will come If you come with me, with me, come with me to St. Croix Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful girl Come, come with me to St. Croix Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful girl Come, come with me to sing, boy you Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

0:07:35 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

0:09:05 Thank you. We'll be right back.

0:10:05 We'll be right back. Thank you.

- 0:11:05 We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. You Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll see you next time. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you.
- 0:30:35 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
- 0:32:05 The Committee of Budget, Appropriation, and Finance is out of recess, Madam Clerk, can And I have the item in block number three. Hello.
- 0:32:39 Continuation of the Committee on Budget Appropriation and Finance hearing on Wednesday, June 18, 2025, 6 p.m., in the Cleone H. Cricky Legislative Conference Room on St. John to receive testimony on the following bill. Block three. 6 p.m. to 8.30 p.m., Bill No. 36-0092, an act approving the lease agreement between the Government of the Virgin Islands and St. John Taxi Service Corporation for parcel No. D-2, Estate, Cruz Bay Town, Cruz Bay Quarter, St. John, Virgin Islands. Invited testifiers, Mr. Vincent Richards, Assistant Commissioner, VI Department of Property and Procurement, Mr. Sean L. Claxton, President, St. John Taxi Service Corporation, Ms. Carmen Wesselhoff, Taxi Driver. This concludes the reading of today's agenda, Mr. Chair.
- 0:33:47 Thank you very much Madam Clerk. Can I have a quorum call at this time? Senator Marvin A. Blyden, Senator Blyden, absent, Senator Dwayne M. DeGraff, here, Senator DeGraff, present, Senator Ray Fonseca, Senator Fonseca, present, Senator Novell E. Francis jr i'm here santa francis jr present senator hubert l frederick santa frederick present santa marie c james santa james absent santa court a vale santa vale present mr chair five present two absent uh thank you very much madam clerk please let the record reflect we also have non committee member present here. Today we have at large Senator Angel Borges, Jr., as well as Senate Secretary Avery Lewis and Senator Carla J. Joseph. Madam Clerk, is there any correspondence to be read into the record? Yes, Mr. Chair. You may proceed with reading of those correspondence. Letter dated June 18, 2025. Addressed to Honorable Senator Novel E. Francis Jr., Chairman, Committee on Budget, Appropriation, and Finance, 36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands, 3022 Golden Rock, St. Croix, VI-00820. Dear Senator Francis Jr., please accept my sincere apologies as I am unable to attend the continuation of the Committee on Budget, Appropriation, and Finance meeting scheduled for today, Wednesday, June 18, 2025. Scheduled to begin at 6 p.m. in the Cleone H. Creaky Legislative Conference Room due to a prior commitment. Kindly excuse my absence. I regret any inconvenience this may cause, and thank you for your understanding. Respectfully, Maurice C. James Esquire, Senator 36, Legislature of the Virgin Islands. This concludes today's
- 0:36:12 correspondence mr chair uh thank you very much madam clerk you could mark uh senator maurice james as excused at this time we have the individuals seated in the testifiers table and i'll just go quickly to have them do a mic check and introduce themselves and then we'll go to the bill sponsor uh to present bill number 36-0092 assistant commissioner uh good evening vincent richards assistant commissioner for the department of property procurement good evening and welcome sir sean claxton president st john taxi association good evening and welcome standard then yeah said our name again please patrick a hendrickson senior taxi driver very well uh thank you very much at this time bill sponsor you recognize for presentation on bill Bill number 36.0092.
- 0:37:28 Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon, colleagues. Good afternoon to the listening and viewing audience. Mr. Chair and colleagues, I rise to offer Bill No. 36-0092, which seeks legislative approval for a lease agreement between the government of the Virgin Islands and the St. John Taxi Services Corporation for Parcel No. D-2 in a state Cruz Bay Town, St. John. This lease formalizes the occupation and use of government-owned public property that has been operated without legal documentation. This lack of formal lease is an administrative oversight, and it presents a tangible legal and financial liability to the government of the Virgin Islands. Without a binding lease, the government is exposed to potential legal disputes regarding property rights, indemnity in case of injury or damages on site, and challenges around operational control or regulatory enforcement. It creates ambiguity in the terms of responsibility, accountability, and oversight. of formal lease in place the government of the virgin islands and the taxi operators of st john remain exposed to serious vulnerabilities the government faces ongoing legal liability without indemnification protections and no control over how the property is used and no enforceable standards for safety maintenance or revenue collection at the same time the taxi operators are unable to secure permits funding or investment in long-term improvements due to the uncertainty of their occupancy this legal vacuum discourages accountability it delays modernization and leaves both parties unprotected at least is not only a formality it is a necessary tool that brings order structure and protection to critical public service operations on public land

- 0:39:31 by approving this lease we're not only providing the saint john taxi services cooperation with the legal stability needed to invest in critical infrastructure such as a proper boot or staging area safety signs and improved visitor experience tools but we're also protecting the government of the Virgin Islands from unnecessary risks. This is not simply a courtesy for the taxi operators, it's a legal safeguard and a responsible governance measure. A lease is the baseline of any responsible use of government and public land. It is how we ensure proper land management, revenue collections, and enforceable standards of use. Allowing this situation to persist any longer without a formal agreement undermines the duty to the public and sets a dangerous precedent this is about economic development risk management and legal order it empowers local community-based non-profits such as the saint john taxi association that has been delivering essential transportation services while also fulfilling civic responsibilities such as supporting cultural events, offering discounted free rides for the youth and seniors, and acting as ambassadors to our visitors. Colleagues, I urge you to support this measure and bring legal clarity, economic opportunity, and community investment to the heart of St. John.
- 0:41:02 Thank you. Thank you very much, Senator Bolkes, for that comprehensive introduction of Bill 36-0092. at this time we'll go to the testifiers table to receive testimony and mr assistant commissioner riches you're recognized for your testimony uh thank you good evening uh committee chair novelly francis jr uh committee members the honorable uh senators kurt a vla duane m degraf ray fonseca hubert l frederick uh mr senate secretary uh avery lewis and Senator Carla Joseph, members of the central staff, the legislative staff, fellow testifiers and visitors present in chambers and members of the viewing and listening audience. My name is Vincent Richards. I'm the assistant commissioner of the Virgin Islands Department of Property Becurement. I'm testifying today on behalf of Commissioner Lisa M. Alejandro to offer testimony on the proposed lease agreement for the St. John District, which is before the committee for consideration. Today the Department of Property and Becurement requests this committee and ultimately the full body's approval of the lease agreement between the government of the Virgin Islands and St. John Taxi Service Corporations or St. John Taxi. The lease agreement requires legislative approval in accordance with 31 VI code subsection 205. The term will commence 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 procurement will be required to execute any and all permits licenses required for the premises this lease has provided this lessee has provided the required documentation to support the processing of their respective their lease
- 0:42:58 agreement with the government including but not limited to their nonprofit letter which is a 501 C C 3 and a certificate of good standing the lease agreement between the government of the Virgin Islands and see John taxi service corporation is for parcel number D to a state cruise bay town see our cruise Bay Quarter, St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands, consisting of approximately 2,700 square feet or 0.062 U.S. acres of land. The property will be used to operate a taxi stand and other related purposes. St. John Taxi approached the Department of Property and Procurement and the government in 2023, seeking a long-term agreement for the property. The Department of Property and Procurement decided to offer the organization a one-year revocable license agreement. That was ratified on September 27, 2024. During that evaluation period, the Department of Property and Procurement witnessed a sharp reduction in complaints. And as the St. John Taxi developed an organized and uniform ground transportation taxi service at the main point of entry and exit for residents and visiting guests to the island of St. John.
- 0:44:31 The bright orange polo shirts are impossible to miss. The term of the lease agreement is for 20 years, and the agreement provides for an optional renewal of two additional five-year periods. The annual rent for the above-referenced parcel will be \$9,600 annually, payable in monthly payments of \$800 during the first two years of the term of the lease agreement. The lessee shall be required to pay the lessor, the government of the Virgin Islands, an adjusted annual rent amount of \$12,000 for the third closer.
- 0:45:11 The lessee shall pay an adjusted annual rent amount of \$12,000 for the third, fourth year of the lease agreement. And on the fifth year of the lease agreement, they'll pay \$14,400 annually, as well as the sixth year of the lease agreement. The rent payable on the lease shall be adjusted after the sixth year of the initial term, every year day after including any renewable terms in accordance with the increases of the consumer price index in accordance with the in accordance with the consumer price increases established by the United States Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics this lease agreement requires a minimum of one million dollars of general liability coverage this proposed lease agreement will allow St. John Taxi to utilize, improve and maintain the subject property in the St. John District of the US Virgin Islands. The property will be returned to the government at the end of the term of the lease agreement in a well-maintained condition. The Department of Property and Becurement and Commissioner Alejandro respectfully request that the Committee on Budget, Appropriation and Finance vote in favor of the proposed lease agreement. If approved, the lease agreement will assist this tenant in executing their plan for expansion and improve operations. It will also contribute to the ongoing growth of the United States Virgin Islands and the long-term stability and expansion of our tourism-based economy.

- 0:46:54 This concludes my testimony. I'm prepared to answer any questions the committee may have on the reference lease agreement. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much, Assistant Commissioner Richards. Before we go on to the next testifier, I'd just like to recognize the presence of Senator Milton Potter, Senate President. Thank you for joining us, welcome. This time, Mr. Clarkston, you're recognized for your testimony. Good evening, Honorable Chair, Chairman, or Novel E. Francis, Jr., members of the 36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands Finance Committee, and listening audience. Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony in support of the proposed 20-year lease agreement between the Government of the Virgin Islands and St. John Tax Association Services. This lease would allow the authorized continued operation and management of the St. John Taxi located on parcel number D2, Estee Cruise Bay, town quarters, U.S. Virgin Islands. My name is Sean Claxton, and I'm submitting this statement on behalf of St. John Taxi Corporation in the capacity of the President. Accompanying me this afternoon is Mr. Charles Lowe, my Vice President, Mr. Kenneth Lewis, my Treasurer, and Ms. Jermaine Doer-Halliday, my Acting Secretary. We are a long-lasting organization dedicated to providing safe, professional, efficient transportation services across the island the association is composed with 34 licensed experienced drivers who have lived and work in the community and are deeply committed
- 0:48:49 into the growth and well-being the saint john taxi services corporation was officially re-established in 2021 to unify and advocate for all taxi driving operators of the saint john formal organizational structure prior to these prior to this taxi operations on the islands were coordinated to a mutual understanding among licensed drivers who have held long-standing standards and regulation of the previous association the spirit of cooperation kept essential transportation service running in the despite the absence of formal governance. Since we established, the association has taken active steps to stabilize and improve its operations. In September 2024, we successfully secured a one-year lease for the taxi stand, which marked a critical milestone in our efforts to formalize our presence and more effectively advocate for both drivers and the wider community. Today we continue to serve the island's primary organized transportation network, supporting both the daily needs of residents and the demands of our virtual tourism industry.
- 0:50:16 Our members take pride in delivering courtesy dependable service and the association has maintained a strong reputation among the traveling public. Our association is not only a transportation provider, it's a cornerstone of the local economy and a key player in the visitor's experience on St. John. A 20-year lease will enable our association to invest in upgrades to the taxi stand infrastructure, including enhancement to passengers' waiting areas, Dinage, safety, safety, safety systems, and dispatch operations. With security of tenure, we are in a strong position to pursue modernization invites and make long-term capital improvements that enhance both the efficiency of service and experience of the traveling public.
- 0:51:24 The taxis stand directly support the livelihood of dozens of licensed taxi drivers. Their families, a long-term lease, will ensure stability, support small businesses in the community and create opportunities for growth. As a cooperative body, the association also provides a structure for self-regulation, dispute resolution, peer accountability, ensuring high operational standards across the board. The St. John Taxi Services play a vital role in the Virgin Islands tourism industry. Our drivers are often the first point of contact for visitors arriving on the island, and we proudly embrace our responsibility as ambassadors of the Virgin Islands.
- 0:52:13 In addition, daily transportation services, we actively partner with Virgin Islands National Park to support major community recreational events. We also provide transportation for significant local activities, including the 8th of miles, road race, and the annual power swim. These partnerships demonstrate our ongoing commitment to support the cultural, recreational, and community life of the island. The association has a long history of giving back to the St. John community. We have made donations to local schools, churches, recognizing their essential role in education and community. We offer discounted transportation services to students and provide free transportation for seniors participating in social wellness activities.
- 0:53:04 In addition, the St. John Taxi Association also allows community to use the taxi stand and adjacent the bandstand for public events, cultural gatherings and community activities. These spaces are served as central and accessible locations for islands. Residents to come together, host events and celebrate local traditions. Our willingness to share these spaces reflects our commitment to being a true partner in the community. The St. John Taxi Services is a registered non-profit organization.
- 0:53:42 Our mission is to serve the people and visitors of St. John, not to generate profit, but to provide reliable and accessible transportation through collective effort. All incomes are located to the management and maintenance of the taxi stand, in addition to administrative support, equipment, upkeep, and member services. Our operational expenses and revenues currently cover an eight-month period from September 24th to April 2025. These figures reflect our financial activity during this period.

- 0:54:20 We appreciate that on our annual basis, expense and revenues will scale proportionally as the association continues to stabilize and grow. Appendix A and B provide a detailed breakdown of our operational expenses, revenue that in the past is most demonstrating our non-profit financial responsibility. A 20-year lease will give the association the stability it needs to plan and grow effectively.
- 0:54:54 Long-term planning requires a stable foundation, particularly in the areas such as investment partnerships and regularity compliance. This lease is not only an investment in the association, but is an investment in a dependable community-rooted transportation for St. John. We respectfully urge the Senate to approve this 20-year lease for St. John Taxi Stand. St. John Taxi Services Corporation has a proven history of responsible services, civic engagement, and economic contribution. A long-term lease will allow us to continue serving the island with pride, stability, and forward-looking our vision community deserves. Thank you for your time and your thoughtful consideration.
- 0:55:44 We respectfully submitted. Sean L. Claxton, President of the St. John Taxi Association. Thank you very much, President Sean Claxton, for your testimony there. We had another testifier come in, Wesselhoff, who unfortunately had a medical emergency and had to leave the island. However, she has submitted a report, a testimony, which will have the Madam Clerk read into the record at this time. Good evening.
- 0:56:19 Honorable Senator Novel Francis, members of the Finance Committee, other senators of the 36th Legislature present, all other people present, and to those of you viewing and listening, I am Carmen Wesselhoff-Heddrington, an independent taxi driver here on St. John. Thank you for rescheduling this hearing so that it can be held on St. John, since a hearing of this magnitude affects the lives of all taxi drivers on St. John.
- 0:56:54 Thank you for the opportunity to speak on Bill Number 36-0092, a lease agreement between the government of the Virgin Islands acting through the Department of Property Procurement and St. John Taxi Services Corporation To lease parcel number D-2 Estate Cruz Bay Town Quarter, U.S. Virgin Islands, consisting of approximately 2,700 U.S. square feet or 0.062 U.S. acres of land zone W, the property will be used to operate a taxi stand and other related services. I am here before you this evening, not on my own behalf, but I am the voice of the 50 plus people whose signature is on the signed petition presented to you. This signed petition represents the signatures of all who vehemently oppose this body, giving a lease to any entity for this public taxi stand.
- 0:58:03 The Cruz Bay Taxi Stand is a public taxi stand which was made law by former Senator Cleone Cricky Maynard back in 1980. Senator Maynard passed this bill so that no St. John taxi operator would be disenfranchised. But we are all given an equal opportunity to operate fairly and equally without fear of bullying, personal vendettas, or personality conflicts. This public taxi stand should not be leased out, period.
- 0:58:41 In early years, the taxi stand was leased out to St. John Taxi Stand. But history has shown that under a lease, there has always been chaos. In 2013, under the DeYoung administration, St. John Taxi Service was evicted from the taxi stand because of unruly and chaotic conduct. Governor DeYoung said he found it fit to put it under the port authority since they are the manager of the port and ferry dock. For two years it was under the management of the port and it ran smoothly. measures were put in place by the Port Authority before it was turned back to property and procurement in 2015. From 2015 to 2024, St. John taxi drivers manage themselves with the measures that were put in place by the Port Authority and it ran orderly. Therefore, we believe that we do not need any one entity with lease. What is needed is proper management and for the Taxi Commission to do its part in acting on the complaints of unruly taxi drivers so that we can weed out the ones that are making it chaotic and putting taxi drivers in a bad light. Recently, the Department of Property and Procurement awarded St. John Taxi Service Corporation, a one-year temporary revocable license agreement for parcel number D2, Estate Cruisby Town, known as the St. John Taxi Stand. In our observation and what we are experiencing, there is a lot of bias and unethical practices.
- 1:00:36 While this agency does not get into the rules or bylaws of the association or the day-to-day operation, the agency still has the oversight responsibility and should be aware of what is taking place on its property. St. John taxi drivers are always at a disadvantage. Recently, the Virgin Islands National Park has disenfranchised us where they initially charged \$75 to operate in the park to drive on the Almondo-Rocky Library Road. This year, they increased the fee by 466% to \$350. We do not know what it will be next year, because initially, they wanted \$750.
- 1:01:30 Then they are asking for 3% of our gross income. This was delayed until we do not know when. The Cruz Bay Ferry Terminal is the gateway to St. John. Unlike St. Thomas, this is the only port of entrance for taxi operators to work from St. Thomas. You can work at the airport, Crown Bay Terminal, Blyden Terminal, Herman Fredericks Terminal, Red Hook, West Indies Company, Havenside, Megan's Bay, Cokie Point, at a hotel, and the list goes on. Nevertheless, the cruise bay taxi stand of the Virgin Islands National Park are the only two areas of operation for taxi drivers. We are unique and limited.

- 1:02:24 St. John is too small and limited in choices to operate from to give one group a lease and a lease for 20 years. Respectfully submitted, Taxi Ambassadors of St. John. This note attached a 50 to sign in support of not entering into a lease. This concludes the reading of the testimony. Mr. Chair. Thank you very much Madam Clerk. Again that's Carmen Wesselhoff-Hengerton and unfortunately she's not here this evening. However, we wanted to read her testimony to the record. At this time, Mr. Hendrickson, you recognize your testimony.
- 1:03:17 Yes. Can I stand for one minute? My name is Patrick Hendrickson Sr. I'm the ex, what should I say, secretary for St. John and taxi service yes sir you have a problem sitting or yeah no no i'm good i'm gonna say this so straight the way i'm just right now where i'm standing because i was sent home one sunday came dressed as i am they told me that uh i'm not fit to taxis i would change my pants into a dress pants so i'm gonna let you guys see some of the things are being done there on the taxis and i filed dress code i understand you don't you're not supposed to wear color jeans and stuff like that but i don't think there's nothing wrong with how i'm dressed shoes heels covered and i was sent home okay and let me move on the issues i want to adjust talk about is basically um dress code which i just explained to you guys uh the parking situation and the taxi stand is limited parking so sometimes we park there we go to the post office you know and in this situation i parked there for two hours went to the bmv to do some you know some business when i returned the next day they told me this is a warning saying that um if i park there whatever the case may be but anyhow in the meantime there are other taxis sleeping there overnight parked there 24 7 and they have not received a warning you know as for the non-members coming from the beach or whatever to drop off passengers they are not allowed to park on the taxi stand unless they pay them 20 dollars i think that's unfair but they
- 1:05:07 definitely can't unload in the middle of the street blocking the traffic the police will give them a ticket impeding traffic so i don't know what they can do but the members we can park there unload it's okay but i think you know that's the situation with the parking that address and provoking uh taxi drivers some of the members of the taxi service association provoke some taxi drivers they have also said the handle whereas the taxi driver have the blade they could suspend you at any time they'll come and provoke you make an argument when When things get escalated between the two, eventually cause war will exchange to a point where they will eventually look to get physically, fight physically, and at the end of it, the taxi driver gets suspended. If both of them were cussing and trying to ask towards each other, the boat should get suspended. Only the taxi driver gets suspended. I think these are some of the things them, you know, send them taxi drivers look into. The provoking and escalating things that are not called for, you know.
- 1:06:19 And another thing I want to talk about is, I mentioned before, the mistreatment about the members, you know. They can't do certain stuff there. They got to pay \$20 to park and unload. I think that's really unfair. And the wrongful suspension. That's my main issue. The wrongful suspension. A couple, I would say about two weeks back, I was suspended. I'm still suspended from the taxi stand due to the fact that I went on the one way. I came in from Trong Bay. I was in my plain clothes. I was not working at the taxi stand that day. We alternate every other day we will work. So I came in, drop off, the rules are blacked up because carnival, the building boots and stuff.
- 1:07:03 So I decided to come. I look around, I saw no police, which I was totally wrong. I forget card, I will pay my ticket. But anyway, I went down the one way and other taxi driver saw me and yelled and he went and tell the president that I went on the one way and I'm not gonna lie I'm a grown man so I told him yes the next day I come to work all the morning he give me a letter you're suspended I said for what where the dispensing committee who do you know who determined suspended is final that's it you know and then after that I look at my bylaws i see nothing inside there the one we use it i have a copy of it right here i see nothing inside saying that um you should not go down the one way but about friday two days after i got suspended here this new handbook came out i haven't seen it i don't know what's in the in the book you know what i mean but um i think it just unjust suspending taxi drivers for no reason without disciplining community i'm not the only one there are several taxi drivers right now are suspended right now some are suspended and i stand indefinitely without having a hearing or going in front of community or anything like that yes i get a letter bam you suspended we got all family to feed okay i got a son in the army you know i gotta look out for him also still my daughter she's in elementary school still my junior high and I got to look up for them I got to feed them I got to provide for them but you suspect me for wrongfully you know I don't think that's right that is not right I've been attacked to jail for more than 25 years I have never experienced nothing like this in my life before okay nothing like this So basically, there's a lot more I could talk about, but I don't want to drag it on.
- 1:09:00 But for me, giving St. John Tax Service this lease for 20 years is a no-no, due to the fact how the members were treated. And like one of the members say, they heard through the grapevine that if you think things are bad now, wait till we get a 20-year lease. From that point on, I decide I have to open my mouth. That's all I have to say. No, no, no, no, please. You can't do that here. Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Hendrickson, for your testimony there.

- 1:09:35 At this time, I'll open up the floor for my colleagues to have a discussion on this matter. And the order that will be going in this evening, we have, First of all, Avery Lois, Senator Kurt Viale, Senator Carla Joseph, Senator Milton Potter, Senator Hubert Frederick, Senator Ray Fonseca, Senator De Graff, and then we'll come back to Senator Angel Borges as the bill's sponsor. Avery Lois, Senator Avery Lois, you're recognized for your five minutes at this time. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. One quick second, sir, before you start. We did have a letter submitted recently from Cleone H. Cricky in regards to her position in this that we have circulated to my colleagues and also placed on the drive to be viewed by everyone. Sorry about that, you recognize your five minutes.
- 1:10:32 No problem. Again, good evening, colleagues. Good evening, testifiers. Good evening, Virgin Islands. special good evening St. John. Mr. Assistant Commissioner Richard, were there any community engagement or public notice that was conducted prior to analyzing the lease agreement for parcel D-2 in Cruz Bay? Good question, Senator. Thank you. The answer is no. It's not the custom uh practice of the governmental version of the department of property and procurement to seek public input um on a request for a lease agreement okay um mr claxton senator yes to the best of your knowledge outside beyond a taxi stand are there other anticipated um activities will be happening there outside of taxi business yes senator uh in our community since the community is so small sometimes there's functions for fundraisers and we let whoever uh no no no we're gonna have that one tonight we'll go ahead mr clarkston so we let people use the taxi stand to do it to do their duties as are raising raising funds for whatever organization that belongs to also the week of carnival we have the food fair there that the carnival that we know that the carnival is going to use and also for fourth of july for the parade all right um assistant
- 1:12:25 commissioner uh to you again uh there was a rental fee structure that's created uh nine thousand six hundred dollars annually is the first five years six years or something like that help me yeah let me refer back to my testimony senator the first two years I believe it's nine thousand six hundred dollars annually at a monthly rate of eight hundred dollars senator then it escalates in the third and fourth year to twelve thousand dollars annually then the fifth year and sixth year it's It's \$14,400 annually, Senator.
- 1:13:01 Thank you very much for that, Mr. Richards. But my main question to that was, how was this determined being that we have a prime waterfront parcel day? Senator, I mean, we started out, to be honest, we started out at the \$14,400 annually. And then the association basically brought a plan to us to show that they were going to be making capital investments in the property in terms of building of a mobile, a semi-permanent structure to house a dispatch booth on the property and to invest as well as in the landscaping. And we made consideration for them to get them up and running and operating efficiently.
- 1:13:48 If this body approves this lease, do they need CZM input for construction? uh senator to be totally honest with you i have no idea um uh it's it i know that if they do need anything done within the tier one zone that requires ccm approval they're gonna have to get ccm approval and or any other body that regulates um construction or building of any structure whether it be permanent or temporary um on the on the on the site mr clarkston um the The leadership is comprised of myself, Mr. Kenneth Lewis, the treasurer, Mr. Charles Doerr, the vice president, and acting secretary, Dominic Holliday Doerr.
- 1:14:39 Don't lose the mic. If this lease is approved by this body, could you explain to us here tonight what type of size or structure one minute to go there in that position and that's particular space first describe to me exactly where it is the the booth the the cruzman taxi stand is as you come off of the dock you make a left the spaces the 13 spaces to your left from the handicap go down to heading towards the battery yes there's a pole in the middle of the taxi stand that cannot be removed it won't be removed right now for our understanding it was supposed to be removed 30 seconds it was supposed to be removed and the cables were supposed to be buried underground i didn't see that happen so we were going to build our kiosk right around in that space which wasn't going to hamper a space because the pole is there no vehicle can park there it hangs out in the street we would have put our kiosk right there so we could stop using the uh the pole that's under the tree to secure our phone and we will not be on uh operating as a shade tree operation time have some place to work from so go ahead and explain to me what type of structure you intend to it would be the property and procurement said it cannot be bigger than six by six so we'll make it six by six with a computer with a computer information pamphlets just just modernize it so we can change what has been going on for the last 40 50 years working from the street all right thank you mr chairman if anything i'll come back thank you thank you very much
- 1:16:25 senator lois uh assistant commissioner richards uh senator lewis if i may um in the uh package that we submitted there is a a drawing a mock-up that shows what what they propose to build at the property if you don't have it i'll forward it to you via email for you to take a look at as well if i only have your testimony and the bill and um everyone else testimony at this time uh i'll double i'll double check as well thank you before we go on to senator vielle who's next uh mr hendrickson uh well actually uh mr mr cloxton mr hendrickson made some some reference of suspension and some concerns um would you like to address that those concerns that was brought i have no problem with addressing the

suspensions every suspension that has been awarded to anybody that violates our anybody that has one second one second sir sir we we have a little bit of we have structure in this place and if you continue to shout out we're gonna ask you to leave or you can't be doing that go ahead we have a st john taxi service has a handbook with all rules all rules that are placed every driver has received an old one we did a revised one we pass them out in meetings because we don't do business on the street so if you don't come to meetings then you wouldn't have an updated handbook so everything everything a driver or or I would say a taxi operator that works from that taxi stand, once you break the rules, everything is here to be explained what comes with the penalties.

1:18:16 Every taxi driver that would ever get suspended has the right to write a written appeal. It is stated in our handbook. And up until the appeal is called, he's allowed to work. once we have a written something for our organization to go by to call a hearing with our disciplinary committee, he is allowed to work up until judgment is passed. So there is due process that's afforded the suspending?

1:18:47 Yes. Okay, thank you. Senator Curveola, you're recognized for your five minutes at this time. Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. Good evening. and people out of Virgin Islands. Good evening, St. John. Mr. Hendrickson, do you have a copy of the rules and regs? Yes. Yes, I do. Not the new one, what he just said. Okay, you've got to speak into the mic. Not from the, I have the one from before. Okay. Like I said, this is one we walk by, and I was suspended. Hold up, hold up.

1:19:19 Does it have a process for appeal included in what you have in the rules and regs that you have? Not do I know of in this one. Not do I know of. Did the original, Mr. Clarkson, did the original rules and regs have a process for appeal? Yes, yes, Senator. All we did was transfer old information onto new paper with additional rules since we were coming under the new regime of St. John Taxi Association. But is there a process for appeal in the old rules and regs?

1:19:54 Yes. Okay. Thank you. Does the leadership of your association live on St. John? I'm the only one that lives on St. Thomas. The other members of the leadership live on St. John? Yes. Okay, and your taxi service is on St. John? Yes. Prior to you receiving the one-year lease, what was the structure at the cruise bay dock in terms of individuals being able to get a taxi? Well, I would be ashamed to say...

1:20:28 I need you to put it on the record if you can. What was the structure absent the one-year lease? Individuals coming off the boat, what was the structure? Did you go to somebody, or was it a free-for-all and everybody lined up and trying to get passengers? What was the structure? There was no structure. It was confusion. Drivers refusing to take passengers where they needed to go. Okay, stop there. So, Hendrickson, what was the structure before the one-year lease for the St. John Taxi Association.

1:20:56 I personally felt operated much better before St. John took it over. They basically... What was the structure? Tell me what happened. Somebody coming off the boat, what was the structure? The same structure we had from before where we put our number... I don't know what it is. What was it? Can you say what it was? How would somebody get a taxi? Were the drivers lined up? Was there a system in place? What was the structure? where there's a system in place basically we have our numbers on a pad whereas we say okay for example we take turn dispatching because we had no dispatcher I would go down and say well okay the first five cars basically we started shopping from number five if one person come to go to a Westin we say number five Westin and we just continue loading the rest buses at 10 12 whatever And trust me, we had no confusion. It went smoothly.

1:21:53 So, there are a number of independent drivers that are not members of this association. Say that again. Repeat. There are a number of independent drivers that are not members of the taxi association, the St. John Taxi Association. When it was running freely, everybody came. This current group, are there a number of members, independent taxi drivers, that refuse to be members of this association? Yes.

1:22:23 What is the reason why? Because they said it's unfair. They watch and see what's going on with the suspension, you know, without any hearing, disciplining community, anything. Those are the reasons, some of the reasons. one guy told me he's not joining because he's not giving the money because they don't help the community much whereas don't you believe I'm saying from just looking at it seem like there's an independent over here and these might be members of the association on the next side if you have so many independent taxi drivers if you join the association you could bring about change because you got numbers one minute that is true My whole thing, listen, I am from St. Croix, the very sleepy island.

1:23:12 I just came on a boat, and the boat was ram-jam. I've been here recently about two, three weeks ago in the morning, and I remarked to somebody, and I said, my God, if St. Croix only had this type of passengers coming off the boat, our taxi drivers would be so happy, because in Christian's set tongue, it's 1-1 to get a taxi. You guys have a tremendous amount of tourists. I need to learn how to get along and be able to service those tourists in a structured setting. It can't be this argument. You guys have enough food. Everybody could eat. Well, I've got to get along. You have to have a structure.

The government need to make a little money. So the government have a lease. And my question is, if the independents get themselves structured and they want a taxi stand, you apply to the guy right there beside you. And you get a taxi stand so that you guys can operate. If not, you infiltrate the association, you bring your concerns up, but there must be a structure. There's only one question I asked Mr. Claxton when I met him for the first time, because I don't really know him. And my question to him was, you have a path for the independent drivers?

1:24:27 Are you going to make sure that independent drivers are able to work every single day? And his answer was yes, the fee was \$20, you told me, per day? Yes, Senator. And the association members are \$15 per day? \$10, Senator. \$10 a day. Okay, so we've got to discuss that. So there's a structure where everybody could take part in what is taking place? Yes, Senator. Does the independent drivers have an issue with the \$20? No, they pay the \$20.

1:24:55 Okay, they pay the \$20. So the independent drivers have an issue with being treated fairly? Yes. Okay. Can you assure that you're going to treat these members? Because we can't grant a lease, and then we hear it right after that you're discriminating against independent drivers, or you're treating them a certain way. Are you committed to not penalize anybody like Mr. Hendrickson here because he complained? Are you committed to allow them a fair process to be able to operate? Yes, Senator. What goes for one goes for all. Okay. Now, my whole thing is, I mean, you made some complaints with Sir Hendrickson, but the one-way thing wasn't a good one because that was really, the one driving on the one-way street, that wasn't a real good example because that is a clear, that's a clear violation.

1:25:43 Right now, I'm out of work for two weeks. Yeah, but listen to what I'm saying. You guys need a structure, and you need rules and regs. I don't care where it comes from, but there's a need for rules and regs across the board with everything in reference to this great industry that you guys have in St. John. So there's a need for rules and regs, and I'm really happy to hear that there's a uniform policy and some other stuff because it's necessary. And sometimes the image that we portray to those who we're receiving the money from isn't really the best. So I really expected to hear an argument in reference to perhaps what they're doing wrong, but like dress code and all of that. Those are stuff that needs to be agreed on. I would recommend to the independent taxi drivers that you guys collectively get together. If they got 20 members or you got 20 members or you join the association, you guys want voice as them.

1:26:42 Yes, sir. Yes, I work there. and i followed the rules never got suspended wear the uniform and stuff that day when he suspended me i was not working in takistan every other day we work i was working independently i was on my own were you driving a taxi yes but did you go down the road to that to drop individuals off at the sun no i backed up by the the battery gate dropped them off and then i went back to the one way which was wrong but at the same time what i'm saying i was not working on this taxi stand that day i did not have on their uniform so when did you get suspended i got suspended i think about the 11th 11th or the 12th so right now you need to appeal your suspension you're allowed to work until the appeal is heard put them to the test but i already missed what four days appeal the suspension appeal your present suspension to the association during appeal process you're allowed to work and then let us see how it's going to be resolved i already hired a lawyer to what to what were you wasting money for appeals to them i felt i felt i was unjustly dealt with i know but but they i was not working in the tax system mr hendrickson there's a process in the rules and regs for you to appeal so when you appeal i guess that is part of your It was a defense that you were not working the taxisam, but still at the same time, whether you're working or not working, there was a violation of a one-way.

1:28:16 But I'll go back to the chair because we need to move on. Thank you so much for your answers, though. Thank you, guys. The President Obama- Thank you very much, Senator Veille. Point of information, Senator Bulquez. Please recognize the mic of Senator Bulquez. The President Obama- Thank you, Mr. Chair. Question to the chair, to the President of the Association. If, in fact, a member is suspended, does that stop or preclude them from working anywhere else on the island or just at the stand? No, Senator. The driver can work from any given beach on the North Shore Road.

1:28:52 Okay, so it's just that they're suspended from conducting business at that stand. But it doesn't preclude them or stop them from working anywhere else on the island? No, Senator. Okay, thank you. And in addition to that, Mr. Claxton, the appeal needs to be in writing. is a document that's submitted to you in writing in regards to the appeal? Yes. Okay. And obviously there was, you were able to prepare testimony here today in regards to that. So, I mean, I think a one-pager in terms of an appeal will be acceptable.

1:29:23 And then, you know, you're allowed to work until such time that the due process is exhausted. You just talk about the fact that you have to feed your family. And here it is now that you're expending additional monies to hire an attorney when, in fact, you know, you could be able to hopefully amicably resolute this situation by appealing and continuing to work. Yes, Mr. Hendrickson. Yes, I went ahead, attorney, because I went to the Taxicab Commission and she said she could not do anything about it.

- 1:29:52 He sent a copy of the by-law, some new by-law they have. I don't have any. I haven't received a copy of it yet, so I don't know what's really going on. Okay. All right. We'll continue the rounds of questions, but it seems to be a fix to this. And again, you appeal, and then again, afford due process to get back to work and move forward on that. You guys are the ambassadors. You're the first at the Taurus Sea and the last when they leave. It's important that you have a good showing and set an example of what the Virgin Islands represent. All right. We're not hodgepodge where, you know what I mean, you're not properly attired. you know there's no structure because that's the sentiment that goes back out into the wider area once the individuals get back to where they came from and then you know that again impede us being able to receive tourists. Tourists are number one industry. It's important that we're able to to hone that and make sure that we're good ambassadors on that we have. At this time the chair would like to recognize Senator Carla Joseph for her five minutes.
- 1:30:58 Thank you so much Mr. Chairman. A pleasant good evening to you members of the committee, my colleagues, as well as the listening and viewing audience and those individuals who are present this evening. I wanted to ask some questions first off from Mr. Richards. Mr. Richards, I noted in the lease agreement there's an article of incorporation that is included and they have the persons listed as Kenneth Marsh, Patricia Varlock, Randolph Thomas as being the of the St. John Taxi Association. This was done in June of 1993. Is this the official articles of incorporation. Vincent Richards, Department of Property and Becurement. Senator, that was a document that was provided to us. By? That was a document that was provided to us by the St. John Taxi Service Corporation and And that's what we use to process the lease agreement, Senator.
- 1:32:34 Okay, great. Because then I got this handbook that has in another version. So I'm just a little confused which one is the official. Maybe, Mr. Claxton, you could shed some light on it. Because in this handbook that you have, it has a new Article of Incorporation. I'll tell you what page it is on, actually. It starts, so I just wanted to know which one we're working with. It starts on page 11, Articles of Incorporation. It says St. John Taxi Service Corp.
- 1:33:20 Senator Vincent Richards-Vermeij, I'm reviewing a document now that we submitted, and it is dated January 31st, 2024. There was an amendment. I saw an amendment, a first amendment that is dated January 31st, 2024, but what I am, so I wasn't talking about, because that's an amendment to the incorporation document. That's why I'm kind of confused which one we're using, okay, because I see this as a package also included.
- 1:34:05 So are you following me, Mr. Richards and Mr. Claxton? So which one is it? Because you have articles of incorporation in this handbook. So which one is the official one? Senator, I don't know what you're looking at because you have the information over there. Okay. I will be more than willing, if somebody could show you, but this is what was given to us by Property and Procurement. This document here, it says right here, Articles of Incorporation St. John Taxi Services Corporation, Nonprofit. And then, this one is, and I don't see an amendment to this where it puts this other article of incorporation in place.
- 1:35:07 So, I mean, I'm just a little bit confused relative to which incorporation it is. But this one here is the one that's included in the lease, Mr. Clarkson. and that Mr. Richards from Property and Procurement indicated on the record that was given to our Department of Property and Procurement in preparing this lease agreement. 30 seconds. Okay, I need to move on because I want to ask a question because that's part of the confusion. It's a confusion here. This is a confusion part. How much number of members do you have in your association, Mr. Richards?
- 1:35:53 I'm sorry, Mr. Claxton. We currently have 34 members. Okay. How many of those members are on suspension? One. Okay. So, you have Mr. Chairman. I'm going to just close up. But I noted that you have two members who signed the petition against this agreement. That's why I asked that question. You have two members who signed the petition, because I was doing a quick, two members that I saw, who signed the petition against this agreement. I really think that we need to have a moment to resolve some of these issues internally, because it could erupt into something bigger.
- 1:36:41 And you are our ambassadors, and when you're an ambassador, this is not how we operate. You have two members here beside the one who is suspended, who signed this same petition, who is against this lease agreement. And that concludes my line of questioning, Mr. Chairman. Thank you so much.
- 1:37:13 Thank you very much, Senator Carla Joseph. Next, the chair will recognize Senator Milton Potter, our Senate president. You'll recognize for your five minutes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Good evening, colleagues. A special good evening to residents of St. John. A special good evening to the testifiers who are before us today. And the taxi industry really holds a special part in my heart because my father was a taxi driver for many, many years, and he raised us basically on the income derived from taxi drivers, from his professional taxi driving service.
- 1:37:53 So and the industry really, when you think about it, when you look at the tourism industry here in this territory is really the last remaining hold that local Virgin Islanders are still in control of. It really is. So I would hate to see an issue like this to further tear an industry that is still in the hands of of indigenous, of Virgin Islanders, indigenous St. Johnians. So I

hope this is something that we can get resolved. I wanted to ask Mr. Claxton, thank you for your testimony, Mr. Claxton. I wanted to ask you to straight out the gate, because you were very transparent in your testimony, you indicated with regards to just a general financial overview of the St. John Taxi Services Corporation. you mentioned that the total expenses over eight months was \$45,458.44. Total revenue was \$39,095 for operating deficit of \$6,363.44. I wanted to give you an opportunity to tell us in light of this new lease agreement that you will potentially be entering into.

1:39:18 are there going to be any challenges meeting the terms of the lease agreement? No, Mr. President. We're actually prepared to pay the first five years immediately. Okay. So, So, what would be the source of your revenues, given the expenses that you just reported, versus the revenues?

1:40:00 Well, everyone in this quorum is not a member, so we really don't share our financial business on the street. But the association is not broke. We are prepared to pay the first five years. and the dues that we collect from members and non-members alike will support us in paying our lease we know as we go uh financial financially things move up inflation so therefore our dues will move up we are prepared to cover our our expenses okay thank you thank you for that thank Thank you for your response.

1:40:35 What happens, how does it work right now? And what will happen, what will change if the lease agreement was approved? What will change in terms of just the way, you know, the process of hiring taxis in the Cruz Bay area? What would change? Well, the 20-year lease naturally will give us stability to keep improving the rules. keep improving the rules and enforcing the rules that we provide the best service that we can. Without a lease, there's no one to govern the drivers. So as we, as the association, have a handbook with rules and regulations, there is structure.

1:41:24 Okay. So, in terms of the rules and regs that you have developed, um, are the members of the association involved in developing the rules how does that how does that work we keep meetings we started off with the rules that was in place before from the beginning what we what we did as a new organization we refresh them 30 seconds so that they can be fully explained because the way it was it was back then it was kind of crazy to understand and so what we did we just refresh and add new rules while we add new rules we keep meetings for the body to know what's going to happen take for example a lot people don't know that our administrator came to the organization and asked for help for the drivers for the drivers to stop driving down the one way they had posted no signs the administrator came to the association me as the president and the rest of the administration and asked that we asked the drivers not to go down the one way it's illegal and if anybody goes down that one way as a taxi driver we can be responsible for i then kept a meeting with my colleagues and the body i told them in a meeting this is the warning any driver that goes down that one way once they are working from the taxi stand will be suspended it's in it's even in the rule book that's it thank you for your response i don't know if mr chair will allow mr hendrickson to respond yes i mean yeah he just mentioned once you're working from the taxi stand

1:43:34 should be suspended i understand that i respect that rule but i was not working from the taxi stand was independently came in and then left from there he said himself okay thank you mr let the record show that mr hendrickson is is an active member of st john taxi association so it applies to him whether he's out of uniform or in uniform in or out of uniform you are a member of the organization. Thank you. I want to take advantage of this, your generosity. Thank you very much for your response. Thank you. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Senate President Potter. I'll come right now to you, Senator Fonseca.

1:44:18 I wanted to follow up on the line of question from the Senate President because besides rules, while I appreciate and could support structure, I think it's important that you don't appear to be heavy-handed in that area. I think that there's other areas that certainly need to be considered. Training, communication, technology, safety. These are some of the other things that I believe that will be essential for the association to ensure that they're providing to their membership so that there will be some cohesive relationship developed with the association.

1:45:00 Do you agree with that? You're directing the question to me? Yes, I asked you, do you agree that training, communication, technology, safety, all of those things, not just the rules, because the rules are important, we want to structure, but we don't want to appear that it's heavy-handed, and we're not considering all those other necessary and celebrate things that will impact the association and the people. I do agree with your statement.

1:45:27 Thank you. Senator Fonseca, you recognize for your point of information? Yes, yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Okay, Mr. Clarkson, so you're representing to this body that you're ready to pay five years up front, which is \$9,600 times fine, which is \$48,000, but your operational expenses show that you only made \$39,000, and in fact, you lost \$6,363. dollars how are you able to pay 48 000 if you're losing money are you operating some other type of business other than this taxi where are you getting this additional money you have a special reserve or something give me some explanation when i said that i was only what would i say I was drawing a reference that we are prepared we are prepared to pay our bills Okay, but that's not what you said You said five years Okay, thank you, Mr. Chair Thank you very much, Senator

Fonseca Senator Viale, recognize your point of information Thank you so much Mr. Clarkson, a reference to your procedure for suspension Do you hold a hearing before you suspend the individual?

- 1:46:55 You will get a warning letter? No. Do you hold? Okay, Mr. Hendrickson was suspended. Hendrickson or Hendrickson? Hendrickson, yeah. Hendrickson. He was suspended. Did you have a hearing? No, we did not. I'm going to answer your question. No, we did not. Okay, because I'm reading your rules, and your rules, it goes directly to suspension. And being a farmer, which I never want to go back to, but being a farmer educator, you always have a due process hearing before the suspension so that the individual could be able to tell you exactly what took place and you could be able to tell them in person what the charges are against the person.
- 1:47:35 Yes. I went directly to Mr. Hendrickson and I asked him, Mr. Hendrickson, did you go down the one way? Yes. Why did you go down the one way? Oh, it had traffic. I said then to him, well, then you know the rules. This is something that's actually... I understand that, but maybe a good structure would be to just have a hearing, and then as a result of the hearing, you hear the penalty. But you have the hearing, you hear it, you have it, discuss it, and then whoever is in disciplinary committee... This is why, Senator, you have the right to appeal, so we could sit down, discuss it, And you can work up until the judgment is passed. I'm just trying to save you some harassment. That's all.
- 1:48:25 Point of information. You conclude, Senator Veille? Yes. Because I think earlier he explained the process that, well, there is an opportunity for an appeal to be done, and then we continue to work until such time a due process is afforded, and then they'll make a determination going forward. Senator, how do you recognize for your point of information? Just for my clarification, and I don't know if you may have mentioned it before, Mr. Claxton, who do you appeal to specifically? I mean, I know you're the president of the organization. You write the letter to St. John Tax Association and we'll address it.
- 1:48:57 You don't necessarily appeal it to a different part, a different aspect of the association? It comes to the same person who... It comes to my colleagues and I. Then we put together the disciplinary committee We set a date. We invite the person that was suspended to it. He has a chance to bring his case, present it. And then the disciplinary committee, which we have nothing to say, will make the decision. And from henceforth, it goes.
- 1:49:28 Okay. You clarified it because I think originally what I was getting was that the same person who was suspended was the same person who was hearing the appeal. And there would be some concerns about that. You said there is a separate and distinct disciplinary committee that will hear the appeal. Yes, sir. Okay. Thank you. Thank you very much. At this time, the chair will recognize Senator Hubbard-Frederick. You'll recognize for your five minutes.
- 1:49:58 Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Good evening, colleagues. good evening testifiers good evening st. John listening and viewing audience good evening all I want to direct some questions as it relates to the the actual organization the St. John Taxi Service Corporation is that the formal name of this organization mr. Claxton what is the formal name of this organization the former name of the organization is in John taxi services corporation corporation and and what is it is it a nonprofit is it a LLC what is what is the designation it's a nonprofit organization is there another organization connected with this There's not another organization connected with this, no.
- 1:51:11 It's a standalone nonprofit, 501 . Yes, we have to provide all those documents. Okay. And the voting process is you're governed by a board of directors that selects the members, the board of directors. We don't have a board of directors. What we have is a president, vice president, acting treasurer, I mean acting secretary and treasurer. OK, I have a document here that shows that there's a board of directors, so I'm confused. What you're looking at is when, I want to believe the documents that you have is when the association was formed back in 19, 19 something. I don't know what you're looking at.
- 1:51:57 Would you like to take a look at this so I can show you the board of directors? Can you hold my time, Mr. Chair, please? Time deeper, please hold the Senator's time. Are you familiar with that document? Have you seen that document? Excuse me?
- 1:52:34 Yes, I'm familiar with the document. So there's a section in there that talks about a board of directors. Yes, that paper that you're looking at was created in 1993. So when we were asked, do we have any, what's the word? Bylaws. Bylaws, we just based it off of what we had.
- 1:53:08 We didn't rewrite, we didn't take anything off of the books because the association was already together. We just started it fresh because it had gone stagnant, so we decided to put it back together, but all of the paperwork was still there. Okay, so, and forgive me, but I really want to understand if this organization was properly reformed. Is it just thrown together, you picked out parts that you needed, or is it legally formed under our laws, of the Virgin Islands, and filed with the Lieutenant Governor's Office? Yes.

- 1:53:45 Okay, did you provide these bylaws to property and procurement, Mr. Vincent Richards? Did he see these? we provided it to property and procurement i can't tell you what they do once we deliver now which documents did you give him though you remember we gave him we gave him the we gave him the bylaws that was already there okay can you submit to the chair the official documents of this organization i think they should be in the records of property and procurement i don't have it on hand No, I'm asking you, can you submit it to the chair so we could all review it?
- 1:54:31 Yes. Because I'm not sure which organization I'm even talking about. Yes. Okay, thank you. So what's the term of an officer right now? Is it one year? I think it's every two years. See, that says annually. and it says every year okay well okay so now you're making me uncomfortable with this now I can't I can't be asked to evaluate something in which you being the president can't even tell me how your members are selected all the members are selected the terms how long how many members does it take to vote for someone for a position how many members does it take to vote for someone for a position it says two-thirds so you haven't been reading the documents it who it's who shows up to the election at that time it says two-thirds of the membership one minute when we put the So, sir, I am uncomfortable now. Now you're making me very uncomfortable because I came in here open-minded, and I thought you would be in a position to feed me information because I don't know. And you're telling me things, I just read it, and I'm like, okay, he's saying something other than the documents. You're the president.
- 1:56:06 You have to know your organization. 30 seconds? I'm the president of Mines. I can tell you everything about Mines. I've got more than one. Well, I'm not going to know everything, what I do know most. So I would have to refresh my memory with the documents. Let me ask you another question. It's a lot of information. Yeah, well, you still need to know your organization. How many? Time. How do we get new members? How much do you have to pay to join your organization?
- 1:56:49 Currently, it's \$375. \$375? Currently. Do you have any intention of increasing the price? Yes, as inflation goes up. By how much? It all depends on how inflation goes up. Mr. Chair, can I... In the next five years, we don't know. The price of cheese. So you're telling me if one of these new members joined, they don't know what to anticipate in terms of paying your fees because your fees now, now you've got a lease you could charge whatever you want.
- 1:57:25 It doesn't work like that. Tell me how it works. We keep a meeting, we discuss it amongst the members, and it goes further from there. I don't make no decisions when it comes to monies and whatnot. I bring it before the board, they vote on it in-house, and we go from there. Okay, you mean the board of directors. We bring it before the members. Who's over you? Who's over who? Me? Yes. We all work together.
- 1:57:58 Okay, you didn't answer my question. Well, there's nobody over me. The board of directors is supposed to be over you. They have the oversight. The members vote and decide what they are going to pay. I offer it to them. They agree. We vote, and we move on from there. Mr. Chair, thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you very much. Senator Joseph had a point of information. Then I come to you, Senator Bulkas. Senator Joseph, you recognize your point of information? Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. My colleague to my left raised a very pertinent question because we have an issue regarding organization. If the Sergeant in Arms would be so kind, this was a document I was referring to, which states and is part of the lease submitted by the Department of Property.
- 1:58:54 Media, can we put some volume on these mics, please? Thank you. It's a bit cold in here, so if I hear me sound like a trembling, I ain't accustomed to no cold place. That's why I live in the Virgin Islands. It's a little cold. This document that I have in my hand is the Articles of Incorporation for St. John Taxi Services Corporation nonprofit, which is included in the lease agreement that the governor sent down by the Department of Procurement that was included and that was executed. it even has an amendment. Sergeant of Arm, can you kindly take that to Mr. Richards first and ask Mr. Richards if this is indeed the document he represented that was submitted by the St. John Taxi Association Incorporated. Vincent Richards for Department of Property Recurment. Yes, Senator. These are the documents that are in our file currently. Yes. Thank you. Now, hand it to Mr. Claxton. Mr. Claxton, does this document look familiar to you? Yes, Senator. You realize that the document that was handed to you first by the sergeant of arms also contains an article of incorporation. So we we don't know which one is the functioning one and that's what is kind of because you're representing that the other one is a functioning one you have no idea about the this one so we have been confused and it is leaving us a little bit not
- 2:00:44 feeling good well I can explain no no I see I'm seeing the documents please retrieve those documents I like to keep my documents You can proceed, Mr. Clarkston. The first set of documents that was turned in was when we were trying to get the lease at first. Then it took, I would say, almost two years before we heard back from the government. So then we had to submit new paperwork.
- 2:01:29 And that's what happened. So in the submittal of the new paperwork, you're saying that what the other paperwork was deleted, no longer in effect? Well, I don't know which one's property of comment used. When we were asked to turn the

paperwork in, we just turned in the paperwork. One went in and, like I said, it took about two years. So we had to redo everything from scratch. So then it became a second set of paperwork. Mr. Richards, can you provide some guidance in terms of what paperwork is now valid and is being utilized by property procurement in the decision-making process? Mr. Chair, I didn't get to look at what is being referenced, so I can't give any... What is currently being used to validate this lease request at this time? Mr. Chair and Mr. Chair in the in the package that was submitted Mr. Chair in the Vincent Richards from the department of property and procurement in the package I was submitted there is a set of order articles and cooperation that were dated originally in 1993 and then they submitted to us a set of org an amendment to those articles that were dated um January 31st 2024 senator and also in the pack also in the package there is a uh certificate of good standing a copy of their insurance and so forth and so forth and so forth so both of the submittals was forwarded to the legislation for consideration you're saying both the 1993 as well as the current the 1993 and the

2:03:16 one dated 2024 was submitted and is a part of the electronic file for that was submitted to the office of submitted to the office of the governor and then the office of the governor transmitted to the legislature senator thank you point of information senator balkas thank you Mr. Chair Mr. Chair, let the record reflect that when you incorporate, you form or activate a separate legal entity, or in this case a non-profit under law, that has the ability to, a distinctive legal ability to enter into contracts, own property, lease property, sue or be sued in its name, etc. The Articles of Incorporation are the original documents from the inception of the forming of this organization. And this organization, just like we have terms for presidents, the organization continues to be active and in its continuation while you elect new members. And of course, with the amendment as proposed or mentioned by Property and Procurement, so there's nothing, illicit or some sort of issue concerning having the original incorporators of that organization listed on the statement of organization, etc. Thank you for that, Mr. Chair.

2:04:40 Thank you very much, Senator Bulquez. The chair will recognize Senator Ray Fonseca. At this time, you recognize for your five minutes. Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair, and good evening. And then a couple of questions to Mr. Hendrickson. So this is the area when you come off the dock, it's on the left going all the way down to the Morris de Castro area. Correct.

2:05:10 Okay. About how many spaces taxi can it accommodate? I think it's about 13. 13. Yes, yes. Okay. Thank you. so Mr. Claxton how many spaces it can accommodate the spaces we are trying to acquire is 13 spaces 13 spaces and so you charge the members a different fee from the non-members yes senator how much do you charge the members it's ten dollars for right now since we're operating temporary release and the non-members is 20 20 dollars okay you know so I was doing a little calculation and it's 13 spaces and if you charge the members 10 and non-members 20 you average it out say 15 it shows that if you fill it up one time you would collect a hundred and ninety five dollars just on 13 persons and based on just 28 days in a month you collect ten thousand nine hundred and twenty dollars now you gave us a testimony here where your highest month was only five thousand nine hundred so I don't know numbers don't lie that is the math so do you when you mention that you're able to pay forty eight thousand up front for the whole five years because you're saying here this is testimony before the committee and budget so this monthly operating expenses do you want to change these numbers or are you still sticking with

2:07:00 these numbers. The low monthly connection that you saw was a slow month. But like I said, previously I was kidding around when I said five years. But we are prepared to pay our bills. So you're open for 30 days in a month? Well, it's more than 15 drivers that show up to work. That's just the spaces. Sometimes we park on the side of the road because we have no space. This is why we rotate the numbers to lessen the cars per day that comes. So 50 taxis wouldn't show up one day and block up the whole of Cruz Bay. Well, see, now, if you go to 15 drivers, you even put your income at higher than I just told you.

2:07:47 So the numbers don't add up no how. If you go by 15 drivers, let me show you, 15 drivers times, you average it out to 15. because some is 10, some is 20, that's \$225 just for those drivers. Then if you multiply that by the 30 days in a month, you come up to \$6,750. And that's just one driver using the space for all day. And I'm sure you have more than one driver. So the numbers is grossly inadequate based on the numbers. So how many persons comes there, I want to ask Mr. Clarkston, how many drivers are there in a day? Is it 13 drivers for the whole day or more than 13 drivers? It varies. No, not you. I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I want to ask Mr. Hendrickson, I'm sorry. Mr. Hendrickson, how many drivers come to that space in a day? I'll cut it in half due to the fact that some days we have like 10 drivers, 8 drivers, like Sundays we have less taxis because some people go to church and what's not so I'm not going to be all frank and say we have 13 every day sometimes we cut it in half. Okay so see based on that even like I said the bare minimum is \$6,750 and 50 and none of your um none of your figures are sure that so it the numbers don't add up for me okay let me just go to another question so um were any others offered the opportunity to get this lease Mr. Vincent Richards this was anybody else interested in this lease uh senator Vincent

- 2:09:37 riches department of property and procurement um in my nine years no no organizations approached us to um to manage the operations at the uh saint john taxi stand senator okay so one quick question 20-year lease with the option to review for another 10 years how did you time how did you come up with a 20 years lease based on on what criteria um senator that was that was requested by the organization and we acquiesced at first at first in my testimony we did provide them a one-year agreement to basically uh make sure that everything ran smoothly um and that um previous complaints from the public the general public had quelled in the one year that we gave them a trial run period and that we saw actual organized operation and then after that we entered in the formal discussion about a long-term agreement and they requested and we acquiesced I know you've asked me about that before with previously I've been here before in terms of how we come up with it but um they did specifically request the terms that we we offered yes because you know this is the second time we've had a issue with leases with property and procurement up here in the st john so i'm a little bit concerned about what's going on up here um was time called mr chair was my time okay thank you very much for the um no um i don't have any further questions my mind is made up on this thank you mr jay thank you thank you very much senator fonseca senator digraph you recognize for your five minutes at this time uh thank you mr chair good evening colleagues good evening testifiers of your listener present you know um june 18 today is june 18 2025. june 18 1979 i started working for the government we used to come up here to fix police cars and i remember the taxi stand never having a problem may 1987 i joined the police department and first assigned in saint john and i came up here and i have always known that taxis stand to be independent so i think i will start off with mr claxson to you and your organization thank you for the service that you provide to the independent taxis thank you for the services you provide st johnny was so big you know i hear my colleagues talk and all them spoke well and they said but for me i don't support based on i think it should be usage for all that's my take because of the amount of years i've been coming st john and because of it's one port it's too much um value here for us to get into uh mr clarkson is this mr hendrickson is this i didn't come for
- 2:12:40 that we are black people you know so i ain't come for that that picking aside i come for telling you how i feel because of the amount of years i've been coming here and knowing saint john and that's my take on it so in terms of it it just to me start to get to a point where one trying to make the other look bad and i don't think as a as a body we should entertain that and because again i hear st johnians we are all family and something for me don't get along but I think in terms of you know letting a lease come between us I one I don't think on St. Thomas St. Croix we have different ports like was mentioned so you could pull up you could have leases here in this St. John has one main port one basic entity of what provides revenue for the territory so I think everybody should have a buy-in that's that's my opinion yes you have a set opinion yes senator the port is open for everyone anyone to come and work any taxi driver could come and work from that doc got it but like i say for me my opinion is i don't feel one entity should have a lease on it and especially a lease on it for 20 years i came up here and i met with the independent taxi driver i told them the same thing i wouldn't support it if it were you trying to get a lease if it was them trying to get a lease for a year for five years i don't support it so as long as it come down to anyone are you private independent any entity trying at least dwayne maurice the graph will not support so that that's my take and and i've been doing this for nine years at center so i'd tell you up front i i don't support it but not because i have an issue with anyone or not because i favor anyone i think as a virgin islander saint john deserve where
- 2:14:48 everybody has a chance because the island but so big so we gotta get along one way or the other you know i mean division gonna cause problems in this territory that's why we lose whistling key that's why we lose a lot of things in this territory you know because of division because sometimes we pick money over people. Sometimes we pick issues over people. So, you know, let's one time try to unite. Put all our issues aside. Try to unite. Mr. Hendrickson, you were wrong for going on the one way.
- 2:15:25 If you had a bus, you had a bus your full ticket. You were wrong. So, you will make that clear for the record. And you admitted it. I'm not chastising you. you admitted it so to pay a fine of 150 police i'm a police for life wrong if you're gonna do the crime pay the time wrong is wrong let's don't justify because when a young person come and say oh well i shouldn't because he mashed my toe we won't tell him because he mashed you to your right you're wrong yes period so don't justify it and turn it and twist it and thing we're done you know administratively that's what you have but i'm saying now and for for for those that are old-time taxis don't know me and i had i had a nickname up in st john when i kill you used to call me roll car because i grab the duck if you're in by your taxi i bus you a ticket right away so that's what i'm saying so it's it for me i ain't come here to pick nobody's side I could care less but all I use taxi driver all I use St. John so it's an easy choice for me and I do not support a lease for anyone for any amount of years on St. John thank you for the time Mr. Chair thank you very much Senator DeGraff and I'll take a stab at it before I move on to the bill's sponsor I am certainly of the mindset of structure I think structure is very important I'm not seeing an either or here. I think there's opportunity for both to exist. I have a little concern about the costs for members and non-members. I don't think that it should be a doubling of that cost. I think that there should be some discussion about how do we levelize that. Even if \$15, \$10 and \$15, I could see as being reasonable. I wanted to ask you, Mr. Claxton, and what is it that you get for a

membership outside of being able to park in the parking area? Is there anything else that is made available to the taxi drivers for being a part of the membership?

2:17:37 Yes. We currently have a helper driver program for the members. If something was to go wrong with your taxi and you need help, the association can let you have a loan up to \$1,500. to assist in getting your vehicle back on the road, et cetera. The organization gives free transportation to seniors. The members does that. That helps out the community. We also have a couple more stuff.

2:18:15 So there seems to be an even split between the members and non-members or some of the independents have an opportunity to partake at any given time. So all of the independents right now, some of them actually taking advantage of the membership at some point by paying the \$20, or some that totally just don't come over or be a part of your association? Well, truthfully speaking, the list that was provided here with the petition, when i went over it i would say it's only like 35 percent of these people that sign the list are actively driving most of these drivers are renting out the most of these people that sign the position is renting out the plates they don't even work that signed the petition but as far as your question i would i would i am going to reiterate this any driver whether if you're coming from the western whether if you belonged to a paradise taxi or whatever has the right to come and put the number down as long as the obey by the rules and wear the uniform anybody on st john that drives a taxi can work from that side so what do you believe is the reluctance of those or the apprehension by the independent not to join the association they don't want to see structure it wants to this is this is you're asking me my belief right they want to come and just do what they want and there's no nobody can tell them what to do so they don't want to follow the rules and regulation that has been provided for everyone to follow Mr. Hendrickson what do you believe is the apprehension of the independents not wanting to join the association question

2:20:13 really and truly they're talking about bidding for the taxi stand they're trying to organize something right now I don't know if it's possible and they have some ideas I think that could help everyone you know they want to run it the same way like how it was run before without the organization there was a problem before that prompted the organization and association to come back together so what what is that that problem was uh basically to keep any outsiders out from being understand and making us pay more money that that was a big talk pay money to walk there and say like say ten dollars uh they want us to pay like 20 or 25 dollars and we that's why we started the organization back to keep those people out why you joined the organization say that again why you joined the organization i've been a member for a long long time and it was running good to me was it was a little misunderstanding and disagreement with some of the officials but it wasn't as bad as this this is i feel like this is like a bully situation whereas the officials or those in charge we come here to work let's just walk you may not be talking to me i don't be talking to you if i come and say uh clarkston there is temple here for a tour you know just pass up come pass them on whereas some some official would basically hide them and keep them for themselves it is we walk in you don't have to be my friend we got to walk together did you have a problem before the um did you have a problem with the association before your situation with the um the violation i've been getting yeah yes i would say yes the problem i basically had for like um you know where uh st john um official between wars that you're provoking you and stuff like that you don't

2:22:15 do that in a work environment don't provoke nobody you never know how my day was till that we have to be mature and go beyond that or what we come to work just come to work you have to talk to me like i said you know hey these people want to talk to you about tour you up for the tour talk to them simple as that some people right there they walk away and these official guys the heads so i don't know man it's just the the independent drivers they're seeing all this and they said they want a part of this let's work professional talk to me talk to you a part of being professional is the structure yeah part of being professional is the structure gonna work if if me and you're talking and it's my turn to load we got a list my turn to load and i have ten for two and you you hide them on the side and like don't let me know what's going on that is wrong that is wrong all right we got to work together all right at this time i'll yield um and senator bulk point of information senator bulk is real quick before um you take the mic point of information senator lewis thank you thank you mr chairman good evening again colleagues good evening testifiers good Good evening, people of St. John. At this time, I am not a member of this committee.

2:23:52 But I do know, I want to say this here, I know at times we try to handle things on our own and it don't work out very well. I see this happening in St. Thomas as well. Daily when I was an administrator, we had issues with people coming and stand and so forth. and people tourist downtown didn't have no way to go to get a taxi because we didn't have structure senior administrator could tell you we had numerous meetings trying to get them to organize have a dedicated location see mr richard's there when we bid over the vendors plaza we've been talking about having putting a kiasse for the taxi them and so forth and different things that's we included a welcome center and everything in town but we really needed structure i hear you all about running it how it was long time ago and everything but i know at some point in time we're

going to be coming back to the same government to assist with structure and before i resume this mic i just want to say i just want to say this here that's about every year a lot of of the leaders in this territory attend something called C-Trade. I can't tell you about your pocket. I hear a lot of big numbers here today. I don't know who all could attend, but I think it will behoove you to gather a team just to go to C-Trade as an entity to hear how the market has diversified, how it evolves, hear what the tourists want, what they like. It's about building memories and experience.

2:25:40 Taxi drivers, a lot of times, are the first point of contact. You build a memory. So we could stay here fighting on different things. I know in the law, it talks about uniform and the distance away from your vehicle and all kind of things. Right now, absent of taxi commission having enforcement, we need structure more so than anything else until they get their act together I know I already told them about themselves already but I'm going to emphasize I hope that you have got a team to go to see trade just to see how the industry has evolved and the important part that taxi drivers play in this community thank you very much Mr. Chairman Thank you very much, Senator Lois. Senator Viale, you recognize your point of information? Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

2:26:41 Mr. Richards, you alluded to issues before the one-year lease. Was PMP getting complaints in reference to taxi operation at St. John, if you could put that on the record? Just so I could know. Vincent Richards, Department of Property and Becoming. Senator, in my tenure, I've gotten complaints during when he was executive director Saro, when he was executive director Smith, then executive director Gumbs, and now he's acting executive director Smith again. from complaints from taxi drivers, complaints from customers on disgruntled, not disgruntled, but unhappy customers. And from What were the complaints? You're saying complaints, but what were the issues discussed?

2:27:36 Believe it or not, the customers will call about bad experiences. Bad experiences. I'd rather not go into it, but we've had a myriad of complaints from actual customers and writers who just wasn't happy with the service that they were getting in St. John Taxi System. And then many times we had to bring clarification to the Taxi Commission in terms of who was actually organizing or what authority the organizations had or individuals had to organize at the property. And our answer was, you know, there was no, we were powerless to basically help the Taxi Cab Commission enforce their rules and regs.

2:28:35 We also got inquiries from the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs on a regular basis. so that's one of the reasons why I said we were hesitant at first when we were approached by the by this current organization to get involved with I would get involved with one group exclusively because we just know we were apprehensive and thus the one-year agreement and then immediately after the one-year agreement was ratified the complaints just went away I haven't heard from anyone until the last maybe month or so since we read if we we signed a long-term agreement that's when I started hearing complaints from individuals here and there I believe up to last week one individual called me on my personal cell phone and complained about them being suspended I just listened because in the end I couldn't get involved I mean that wasn't that's It's not my lane, but other than the last couple, few weeks, I haven't gotten any complaints whatsoever from St. John about taxi services at all.

2:29:42 Okay, thank you so much, Mr. Chair. I just want to add that I think there's a wonderful opportunity in St. John and a lot of potential in terms of taxi drivers. And just to go with the farmer's speaker, the farmer's administrator, when we went to C-Trade, we met with taxi drivers from St. Martin, colleagues, I don't know if you guys remember that meeting, and they were showing us that among their association, they had created an app to make sure that ride share don't come in, and they had their own app to control the particular market, their rules and regulations, their structure, and she was able to tell us how much the industry had grown because they were investing in the industry. And I don't know what happened today, but sadly, every time we come to these meetings, you're not hearing about growth. You're just hearing about us fighting each other. This one fighting, one that one fighting, but you're hearing about no organization, about growth.

2:30:41 So you guys in fighting, destroying each other. Because the market now, they're waiting to come. The market now, they're ready to take a seat at the table. And if you don't get organized and move like St. Martin and create your own app where people can get service whenever they want, eventually you're going to lose the market that you presently have because you are looking at the competition, you are fighting with him. And it got to change. And Mr. Clarkson, if you're going to move on, you've got to respect everybody.

2:31:14 You know, I'm here, don't answer nothing. I'm just hearing the back and forth, who's cursing this, who this or that. everybody's grown adults making money when the boat full come St. Croix for one week and sucks out and then you're going to appreciate what you have here come sucks out where you're going to get one or two passengers a day and then you're going to begin to appreciate this wonderful market that you have that you're refusing to organize you should have dress code, you should have structure a free independent system doesn't allow structure because you're going to have people that are going to violate and settle to hell with them. So when you don't have any structure, other individuals come and they drive and they do what they want and they violate. They say, we ain't paying nothing. You can't stop us from picking up. You're more of this, you're more of that. You need structure. It's at the end of the deal.

- 2:32:10 Let me just know what structure I want because we've been saying, great. And they say, don't make it going hard saying, hey, keep it like it was no structure we didn't want that so just let me know because savonarians have no structure leave it like 1974. thank you thank you thank you very much senator vial before we go to send a book because i just really want to say quickly is that i heard the some of my colleagues allude to the fact that the other islands st croix and st thomas have various ports where individuals are able to do pick up and st john only have one but even with those ports they still want to talk to an organization you only have a seat if there's an organization there's just too much involved in independence and and the lack of structure that you still don't have a seat there so even as we leave here tonight even if the independent you have to organize into some entity, because again you go to Wyco, you go to Port Authority, you go to Annie Abramson Port, you go to the Rolston Airport, you still have to have an association to be able to have a seat at the table.
- 2:33:27 Were you calling independent? What that means? Every man for himself, God for us all. Everybody doing what they want to do, and there's no real organization, and nobody wants to see that. There's just too much complaints, and I'll tell you that when we go to C-Trade and those other places, and we have these various conferences, there's a lot, a lot of complaint that comes in about improper attire, the words that's used, you know, there's no real structured tours that's being organized, you know, there's individuals that pop up that don't look like me or you sometimes and don't even know a thing about the place that they're taking you to, and give misinformation about those locations. So we really, really got to think about how do we structure even as independent. I want to move on from there now and allow for the bill sponsor to close off.
- 2:34:21 Senator Bulkers, you recognize for your five minutes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. And, you know, concerning the port of entry, I mean, there was a discussion a matter of years ago concerning another port of entry, whether it was mostly private out in Carroll Bay. but those efforts did not move forward and that could have provided additional economic value i suppose but what i want to say colleagues is it is not good governance for any entity to use public property without a valid lease that's a failure to protect the people's assets and it opens up the government for legal and financial risks As legislators, we have a duty to close this gap and to act responsibly, and it could have been St. Thomas, it could have been St. Croix, it could have been Water Island, I would feel the same way. And the St. John Taxi Services Corporation is a registered non-profit with bylaws, financial records, a grievance system, and they've actually shown that they can operate responsibly for many years in addition property and procurement utilized a method to probe them in a sense of seeing what they were able to accomplish during that one year interim and i just want to say that this lease does not privatize public land it preserves government ownership while creating a legal structure for accountability the stand remains open to all licensed drivers as has been reiterated here over and over members and non-members through a fair access system that already exists now if that wasn't the case i would never support this measure i've spoken to mr claxton on many occasions concerning that very thing are you going to revoke access to non-members
- 2:36:20 and he has reiterated over and over that that will not be the case concerns about past management is outdated since 2021 this group has restructured and compiled a structure of standards with bylaws and the problems of the past stemmed from the lack of oversight not the lease it was a lack of structure confusion pandemonium after 15 years of an informal lease and a one year of demonstration compliance to the department of property and procurement this is the time to act this lease brings order fairness and protection to all parties okay this listen what i will give you this to think about what stops the department of property and procurement from reassigning this property to another entity without a lease talk to me vincent mr richard i apologize what stops you what stops you from reassigning this property to any other entity or for some other public purpose that the government has nothing senator nothing right okay all right so you can wake up tomorrow or the commissioner the governor or whoever right let me just make sure i get the whole structure together you go wake up tomorrow and say you know what me want no taxi stand down there i think i want a little mickey mouse house down there or whatever it is i want right and when the government goes into its process to start the contractual process or start aligning itself to create this structure to have this thing down there after a while when when this one year this is a one year um year to year what would be considered agreement it's not even a lease an agreement and nothing stops the department of property and procurement right now from changing the use of that public property and if we want to sit down here today and think that we're gonna always have that taxi stand to do what we want how we want when we feel like it that is not the case so wake up okay drink some coffee drink your bush tea because I can tell you right now if we want to protect that taxi stand we need to have a lease and that's all I have to say on that Mr. Chair
- 2:38:48 thank you for the time thank you very much Senator Volquez again we have been asked to consider the lease before us there are some deep rooted other issues that have entangled this conversation this evening in regards to some of the nuances that individual drivers are experiencing But really, what we have before us is the least to consider. So that is what, again, that will be considered here today, and we continue to implore and ask the entities, both the current membership as well as the independents, to come together in some way, shape, or form to be able to have those discussions in regards to some of the other challenges, the nuances that you're experiencing so that they could be resolved

amicably. but before us tonight is at least for consideration, and that's the deciding factor that we have to consider here tonight. At this time, the committee will stand at recess for five minutes.

2:40:06 We'll be right back. Thank you. I could never forget them good old days. [3 such phrases repeated 9 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

2:44:36 We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll see you next time. The Committee of Budget, Appropriation, and Finance is out of recess, so I will give the

3:04:15 testifiers 30 seconds to close off at this time. And we'll start off with you, Mr. Hendrickson. I was basically just informed, like, solving issues, like, when we restarted our organization. There was one of you back in the days when a taxpayer by the name of Mr. Puff, he used to pick up all for every boat and as part of our organization, we decided not to do it. And it's been happening a lot lately, some of the members are getting frustrated about it. Certain people coming down there, picking up, and there's going with the people, okay? And if I understand it, it's right by law, this organization, if it's privatized, that no member should be able to part of organization should be able to come and pick up anyone within 50 feet of taxi stand and this is happening every day okay and another issue where you have here basically um taxi drivers working on saint thomas and also on saint john if i understand right if my budget is safe for saint john therefore i walk on saint john stand. I can't walk two items, am I correct?

3:05:34 This is your 30 seconds. This is for you to do your- Okay, Ms. Axton, okay. And for my suspension, my behalf, the rules said, from my understanding, I heard him said, the president said that I have to be walking from the stand in order to be suspended for what I did. Basically, I just feel that that's not justice for everyone, basically. They're still pinpointing taxi drivers who could do this, who could do that. And I just don't think it's a good idea to get my 20-year lease for so long. Because I just, I don't feel that justice will be solved. It won't be fair. I personally feel that five years would be good enough if the independent want to bid on the lease, they should have a right to bid on the lease too also. You know, they feel they could make some changes and better it. But from talking and listening, our whole issue is basically just communication, whereas we have to respect each other as taxi drivers, people, whatever, and basically not try to put down people or provoke each other into anything but um the 20-year lease i'm against it i'm done well thank you very much mr cloxton 32nd first and foremost giving thanks to christ secondly i want to thank governor brian for giving the association a chance to prove ourselves also i would like to recognize mr keema jones pro for putting st john tax association first since we were the only entity that were formed and that is organized to push us and try to put st john taxi association ahead secondly i would like to

3:07:37 thank you mr francis and your body and we're closing i would like to say with the 20-year lease we shall move forward and the organization is willing to work and will continue to work with non-members and members alike thank you thank you very much mr clarkston assistant commissioner Richards? Mr. Chair, thank you very much for the opportunity. Thank you to all the members that are here. I don't envy anyone of you in the position. On behalf of Commissioner lisa alejandro i'd like to ask continue to ask you again for your support of the measure and we look forward to working with uh st thomas st john taxi association um going forward thank you very much uh thank you very much mr richards and all of you at this time i hear motion so the graph you recognize for your motion ah thank you mr chair i move bill number 36-0092 an act approving the lease agreement between the government of the virgin islands and the st john taxi service corporation for parcel number d2 estate cruise bay town cruise big quarter st john virgin island be held in committee at the call of the chair i so move Motion properly made by Senator DeGraff, seconded by Senator Fonseca, Senator Frederick, roll call. Senator Marvin A. Blyden, Senator Blyden, absent. Senator Duane M. DeGraff, Senator DeGraff, yay. Senator Ray Fonseca, yay. Senator Fonseca, yay.

3:09:49 Senator Novel E. Francis Jr. Nay. Can you repeat? Nay. Senator Francis Jr. Nay. Senator Hubert L. Frederick? Nay. Senator Frederick? Nay. Senator Maurice C. James? Senator James? Absent. Senator Kurt A. We have three yea, two nay, two absent. The motion to hold carries. Point of information.

3:10:32 Point of personal privilege, Senator Bulkas. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair and colleagues, I want to thank you all for today's discourse. um i think it was a good deliberation um surrounding the matter at hand and i believe that with further focus we'll be able to find the middle point um because it's relatively very important that we secure this taxi stand for our people again as mentioned by the uh uh uh deputy or acting commission what your title is again assistant assistant commissioner richard as i apologize sir um this property could likely be up for grabs at any given point in time because

the department or the government of the virgin islands can reposition the property for some other use i think it's important for us to find middle ground and i'm making sure that i'll do my part in that deliberation independent taxi drivers along with the association let's see what we can do to find that middle ground but we need to secure this lease for the longevity of the stand we do not want to lose it if uber comes here or whoever they may have a viable opt in for something to take over so so let's work together thank you for the time mr chair thank you very much senator bolquez and of you recognize your point of information um personal privilege but thank you i just wanted to put on the record and we had a brief discussion um just now in which one of the concern was that we need to make sure that if that particular site is ever utilized by any group that no one is prohibited from utilizing the site because we don't want somebody to to have an agreement and then they get a lease and then they change it and say it's only association members and independents can come so we're going to draft some legislation in case that site is ever leased that is clearly going to state that um no association

3:12:46 that utilizes a site could prohibit independent taxi drivers from having access to the site and cannot charge more than x amount of what the members are paying all right now i'm thinking about 50 percent or just uh drafting the bill here but we're going to put that in as a protection to make sure that everyone is protected and then we need to come back to the table and have that discussion as to how we can move forward thank you mr chair uh thank you very much i just want i just want to say in closure that the vote that had been taken here this evening, again, the vote of majority was to hold the bill into committee until such time that additional information can be provided and that a decision will be made.

3:13:29 This will not, again, affect the temporary situation that's occurring right now. The property and procurement is still the leaseholder of the property and will continue to exhaust the privilege by allowing for the Xinjiang Taxi Association to continue to maintain this temporary lease until such time that this body make a decision moving forward on it. So point of personal information, Senator Fonseca, you recognize.

3:13:58 Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. While I do support the notion of structure, I find that the testimony of the proposed lease was basically flawed and had a lot of inconsistencies. And so for that reason, I cannot support this lease. Thank you for the time, Mr. Chair. Thank you. Point of information, Senator DeGraf.

3:14:29 Thank you, Mr. Chair. I, too, agree with what Mr. Majority Leader said in terms of a companion legislation. So I will support that going that direction in terms of anyone who has a lease that it includes all. So we're looking into that and we go forward with that. Then I will support that and move this air forward. But as it stands now, you're going to stick to my guns. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much, Senator Graff. Point of information, Senator Lewis.

3:15:00 Hello. Yes, good evening again. Good night. It's been a long day. I thank everybody for this process. I'd just like to say I wish everybody a happy Juneteen tomorrow. I think it's a lot of sacrifices as we came on a long journey to emancipation and let's celebrate that. I think today we showed in here our right to freedom of, you know, freedom of speech and everything, and that's what make this process so interesting. Mr. Chairman, today would have been my dad's 82nd birthday. I know my brothers and sisters are listening, so happy heavenly birthday, dad. Thank you. Thank you very much, Senator Lewis. At this time, I would like to take this opportunity to thank my colleagues, certainly to all of the testifiers that testified here today, as well as to say once again happy birthday to my colleague who will be celebrating her birthday, her 19th birthday. Tomorrow, June 19th, Senator Carla J. Joseph, happy birthday. They gave her a whole holiday for her birthday, so we look forward to celebrating her tomorrow. I want to thank my personal staff and all. Let's get home safely. God bless each and every one of you.

3:16:16 The Committee of Budget, Appropriations, and Finance is hereby adjourned. You

People named in this transcript

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

12x **Senator Ray Fonseca**
heard in this transcript as: Fonseca

10x **Senator Dwayne DeGraf**
heard in this transcript as: De Graff, DeGraf, DeGraff, Duane M. DeGraf, Dwayne M. DeGraf, Graff

9x **Senator Carla Joseph**
the surname alone also matches: Clifford Joseph; Karla J. Joseph

heard in this transcript as: Carla J. Joseph, Joseph

7x

Senator Novelle Francis

heard in this transcript as: Francis Jr, Novel E. Francis Jr, Novel Francis, Novell E. Francis

5x

Senator Angel L. Bolques, Jr.

heard in this transcript as: Angel L. Bolques Jr., Bulquez, Volquez

5x

Senator Angel L. Bulkes Jr

heard in this transcript as: Bolkes, Bulkas, Bulkurs

5x

Senator Avery Lewis

heard in this transcript as: Avery Lois, Lewis, Lois

5x

Senator Hubert Frederick

heard in this transcript as: Frederick, Hubert L. Frederick

5x

Senator Marvin Blyden

heard in this transcript as: Blyden, Marvin A. Blyden

4x

Senator Kurt Vialet

heard in this transcript as: Kurt Viale, Viale

4x

Senator Milton E. Potter

heard in this transcript as: Milton Potter

3x

Senator Angel L. Borges Jr

heard in this transcript as: Angel Borges, Angel Borges Jr.

3x

Senator Kurt Veilley

heard in this transcript as: Veille

3x

Commissioner Lisa M. Alejandro

heard in this transcript as: Alejandro

3x

Senator Marise C. James

the surname alone also matches: Javan James; Giovanni James Sr

heard in this transcript as: James, Maurice C. James

1x

Senator Angel L. Bolkis Jr

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.

Referred to but not found in our acts corpus: Bill 36-0092