

Yvette M. Finch, President
Angel Turnbull, Vice President
Jennifer Johnson Secretary
Kyza A. Callwood, MPA, Treasurer
Alcenta DeWindt, Assistant Treasurer



Lyle Battiste, Sergeant-of-Arms
James A.D. Francis, Parliamentarian
Joyce Henneman Martin, Public Relations
Marilyn Krigger, Ph.D., Historian
Alphonse Stalliard, Historian

TESTIMONY

Yvette M. Finch, President
WE FROM UPSTREET, INC.

Presented to:
Senator Myron D. Jackson, Chairman
Committee on Culture, Historic Preservation, Youth and Recreation
October 26, 2016
Earl B. Ottley Legislative Conference Hall

To Offer Support for Bill No. 31-0472, an Act transferring Parcels No. 20, 21, 22, 23 and 24 Prindsens Gade, Kings Quarter, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, and Parcels No. 21, 22 and 23B Hospital Line, Kings Quarter, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, the former J. Antonio Jarvis Elementary School, to the Department of Planning & Natural Resources and authorizing the purchase of Parcels No. 14, 15 & 16 Kongens Gade, Crown Prince Quarter, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, to be used as a School of Art for Conservation and Museum Science, a National Museum and a Cultural/Civic Center and other purposes.

Good Morning Senator Myron D. Jackson, Chairman of the Committee on Culture, Historic Preservation, Youth and Recreation, other committee members, and other senators present, as well as those listening and viewing.

I am Yvette Finch, President of We From Upstreet, Incorporated (WEFUS). We are a 21-year old community based non-profit 501(c) 3 organization. We From Upstreet, Inc. is a leading civic and neighborhood organization on St. Thomas. It was formed in 1995 to advocate and work for the historical appreciation, as well as the civic, cultural, and physical revitalization of the Upstreet neighborhood of Charlotte Amalie. Originally, active members and contributors consisted mainly of neighborhood friends, who had resided in Upstreet. During the past several years, our membership has grown to include individuals who recognize the importance of preserving and promoting the history of this neighborhood, and current development of the area to the well-being of St. Thomas.

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Our entire membership would like to thank you for your letter of invitation dated October 20, 2016, requesting the participation of WEFUS in today's committee meeting, to place on record our organization's support for Bill No. 31-0472, an Act transferring Parcels No. 20, 21, 22, 23 and 24 Prindsens Gade, Kings Quarter, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, and Parcels No. 21, 22 and 23B Hospital Line, Kings Quarter, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, the former J. Antonio Jarvis Elementary School, to the Department of Planning & Natural Resources and authorizing the purchase of Parcels No. 14, 15 & 16 Kongens Gade, Crown Prince Quarter, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, to be used as a School of Art for Conservation and Museum Science, a National Museum and a Cultural/Civic Center and other purposes.

In 2012, WEFUS was recognized by the Economic Development Authority's Enterprise Zone Commission as the official stakeholders of the Upstreet Community. In March of 2014, the organization was invited by the Enterprise Zone Commission (EZC) to participate in a 4-day Charrette. This town planning meeting included several members of our organization as part of EZC's invited panelist. Individuals present shared their ideas, opinions and recommendations to the many challenges that exist today in our Upstreet neighborhood. The last day of this charrette was dedicated to the proposed ideas and solutions. The final proposed recommendations were then shared with a local architectural design team, led by Robert deJongh, John Woods and Mike DeHaas. In June of 2015, the EZC again invited the community and our organization to view the plans, as well as cast our votes for one of three proposed community plans for the Upstreet neighborhood. Based on our community's vision, we selected the plan that primarily focused on sports, arts and entertainment. We were extremely happy to see that the plans chosen by the Upstreet residents and members of our organization, even though still considered in its infancy, is underway.

Based on our organization's involvement in the Upstreet Charrette, we would like to place on record our commitment to support the transfer of the former J. Antonio Jarvis Elementary School, to the Department of Planning & Natural Resources Division of Libraries, Archives

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and Museums. This Bill, as we see it, is extremely important in placing this building into the hands of those professional who are indeed capable to successfully design, build and maintain this multi-purpose center. It is also the consensus and the desire of the residents of Upstreet to see a Creative School of the Arts, and a Cultural/Civic Center be built on Parcels No. 14, 15 and 16 Kongens Gade. This particular location, for those of us who grew up in this neighborhood, once served as a source of social activities, from a movie theater to a popular night club. We feel that the time has come for our government to take the necessary steps to acquire this property and develop the plans to transform this area into a productive multi-purpose center. Another factor to consider is that this location is central to schools, businesses, as well as various organizations, who desire to utilize the multi-purpose center for the purposes of holding programs, activities, and the like.

By way of Economic Development Authority's Enterprise Zone Commission office and the office of Senator Myron D. Jackson, we continue to receive invitations to events, as well as updates on the Upstreet Community's Plan and the Centennial Project titled, "In Search of Identity". In addition, WEFUS truly appreciated your invitation, Senator Jackson, to attend the meet and greet event for the students from the Royal Academy of the Fine Arts School of Architecture in Denmark, and witnessed firsthand their work on the school's structure. We were also elated to be a part of the unveiling of the plans that took place yesterday, October 25, 2016, at the Economic Development Authority. This is why WEFUS must and will continue to support the development of this great initiative for our community.

Senator Jackson, Chairman of the Committee on Culture, Historic Preservation, Youth and Recreation, other committee members, and other senators present, as well as those listening and viewing, this concludes my testimony; and once again, WEFUS thanks you for the invitation. On behalf of WEFUS as its President, I stand ready to answer any questions and to participate in this very important discussion.

Thank you!