

TESTIMONY TO THE 31ST LEGISLATURE'S
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
Status of Catherineberg and Government House

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Good day Honorable Senate President James, Honorable Senators, Testifiers, members of the Gallery and viewing and listening audience.

My name is William Taylor and it is a pleasure and honor to address the Senate on the condition of Estate Catherineberg and Government House in Charlotte Amalie.

Historic Catherineberg was built in 1830 by Hans Henrik Berg – a prominent public official who eventually became Town Recorder, Chief of Police, Councilor of State and Governor.

The upper, cooler floor served as the family residence while the lower floor, the cellar as it was called, functioned as a service floor, storage, pantry and carriage area.

The plan faced East for ventilation rather than South, with views of the harbor and town of lesser importance. It's "U" shape allowed for the upper bedrooms to have two or three exposures for ventilation. The entry porch and stairs funneled the precious breeze to the public rooms thence to the hallways for distribution to the West rooms.

In parallel, the porch stairs channeled ventilation to the lower rooms via an axial East-West corridor, in turn, which cooled all the lower rooms: a veritable wind machine.

Cooking was done in the Porter's Lodge to the West and brought to the Great House Pantry in preparation for serving. Two internal stairs allowed the service, cellar and floor staff to do their jobs. Even though it appears to be a two-story

Taylor Testimony
Committee of the Whole
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house, it functioned as an elegant one-story house supported by and dependent on the people and functions below.

Upstairs, then and now, has the formality of privilege and status. Dining and entertaining were formal affairs served by appropriate spaces and furnishings. Living was servant-supported and not conducive to the activities or style or spaces needed by a modern executive or family.

Catherineberg looks and feels like a museum, which is what, I believe, it should be.

For most of the last 185 years the building did well, stood up and adapted. But in the last two decades or so, the rationale of Catherineberg was lost with the introduction of Air Conditioning. A/C works to reduce the temperature, but to be "efficient", it required sealing up the building and closing off doors and windows. This allowed dampness, mold and mildew to grow - which also affects comfort.

Without natural ventilation to draw away unwanted moisture, the sealing for air conditioning resulted in damaging water conditions which have affected the interior materials and finishes. The bottom line: A/C lowers temperatures but in doing so, increases dampness.

Dew is water droplets condensed from the air on cooler surfaces. As liquid water it soaks in and spreads. It re-moisturizes on wood floors and beams above.

The A/C systems here don't extract moisture, as they do in the Frederiksted Danish School. To the contrary, they contribute to condensation and moisture. This has affected the wood floors and beams, windows, doors and trim. Even the second floor ceiling has noticeable sagging and deflection.

An A/C system designed to work with naturally vented historic structures cannot be introduced without any attic space or chases in the building.

A comfortable place to work and relax is a pre-condition for the Governor's residence. Catherineberg with its very tall ceilings, no attic space and no discrete chase possible, is not a candidate for a benign, historic structure A/C system. Long term residential comfort is not possible here.

Privacy & Layout

Even if comfort could be achieved, the 1830's layout that served the needs of a prosperous merchant family cannot be made to suit a modern chief executive and family with after-hours working staff, children with play dates, modern work and relaxation areas and still retain its historic integrity.

An executive residence for a head of state is of necessity a multi-purposed domicile and extension of the office for late meetings, electronic and in-person conferencing, and the like. Catherineberg cannot be that place.

Transforming Catherineberg on the other hand into a museum turns its "liabilities" into assets.

A step towards that end could be reasonable adjustments, compatible with the ultimate goal.

The lower lounge area which floods every season needs to be addressed. The resulting damage affects both floors. The original architect anticipated this and planned for it but his measures were compromised in the recent past. Adjustments include excavation, waterproofing, drainage piping and similar strategies, as well as restoring ventilation by re-opening doors, windows and arches.

Additional required alterations include the pantry, now Kitchen, to be upgraded to better serve events and visitors; the installation of disabled access to the second floor; reconfiguring the NE bath (which contributed to the lounge debacle below) into a less flamboyant bathroom and kitchenette; and lighting improvements.

Catherineberg as Museum

As a naturally vented museum like the space it was for 165 years, Catherineberg would benefit the Virgin Islands in multiple ways.

It would vividly display how intelligent design needs to and can harmonize with its environment.

It would showcase the role the architecture played in the 19th century society of the Danish West Indies for both the upper and working classes. The building and contents would illustrate the emancipating nature of local joinery and building crafts, as well as the high sophistication of 19th century Danish Neo-Classicism. (The Royal Academy had global impact on this new classicism as far away as Greece, the home of Classicism itself.)

Paired with Fort Christian tours, Catherineberg would greatly strengthen our cultural tourism product.

Concerning the afterthought nature of the upper bathrooms, the NE and NW Bathrooms, upgraded, would not adversely impact the integrity of the museum rooms since the former outside the envelope of the building and the latter is relocated to a storage room to gain the benefit of a window. This maintains an option of brief guestroom or staff use. Neither impacts their adjoining rooms.

The South-West Bathroom however -built into the bedroom - does impact. I call for its removal along with repair of the original finishes.

As a museum, the doors, windows and trim need restoration along with the hardware.

The lighting for museum purposes, along with period lighting, needs to be addressed.

The wood floors, unfortunately of both oak and (mostly) heart-pine, have been moisture-affected, leading to rot and subsequent insect damage.

A rotating crowd of museum visitors (hour tours or less) demands a sound heart-pine floor (with reuse of some of the original boards).

The wood batten ceiling needs repair / replacement. New coatings (primed and painted) throughout are in order.

The exterior service entrance needs upgrading to mimic a main entrance: the accretions removed, the inappropriate 20th century paving reckoned with, new lighting for evening events, building accent lighting and other code issues addressed.

Government House in Charlotte Amalie:

This structure is entirely office space; it is not ADA accessible. The offices are not sound proof; it is not appropriately lit for use at night. Neither the corridors, the conference rooms nor the offices are lit for use at night, which is unrealistic in 2015. The quality of the light provided is extremely poor.

Currently, I have been asked to improve the lighting conditions for a series of rooms on the executive floor, especially needed after hours. The corrections have been reported and the go-ahead is expected.

A sound-proofing issue at the Chief of Staff's quarters and the adjacent public area has been submitted for approval. A solution for the disabled access to the building has been proposed; approvals pending.

I note that a historian scholar from Denmark who has been commissioned to document all their Royal Palaces' furnishings, some of which are from here, has offered assistance for replacement – return items, if possible. I accompanied him on his recent island visits to St. Croix, especially to Government House of which he is well aware.

He also sent a cache of 75 historic photos of Government House St. Croix, which I forwarded to Government House and which are available.

He meets the Department of Interior Secretary's Standards for a scholarly and experienced consultant and is willing to help us. And he has uncovered the 1862 inventory of Catherineberg at the time of Governor Berg's death: a definitive guide for the museum outfitting.

I am pleased to have been able to shed light on the issues of Government House and the state of Catherineberg, its restoration and share my reflections on its historical significance.

Respectfully submitted,
William A. Taylor



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William Taylor AIA
57 Company Street
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St. Thomas, VI 00802

July 6th, 2015

**Ref: Building Inspection - Denmark Hill (old governor's residence)
Catherineberg - St. Thomas, USVI 00801**

Dear Mr. Taylor,

It is our pleasure to supply you with the results of the building inspection at the above referenced location, performed on July 2, by Maxcess Armantrading of our firm. The building in question is a historic manor house on top of the hill at Catherineberg in St. Thomas. This building was used as the governor's residence for many years and dates back to the Danish times when Denmark still owned the Virgin Islands.

We are very familiar with this building as in 2000 our company performed lead based paint abatement on all outside doors, shutters, windows and window frames. In 2001 we removed some asbestos containing floor tile in said building.

Upon our inspection we noticed water damage on the ceilings, walls and drywall. As the building has not been used for a while (and been closed up) this creates a breeding ground for mold and fungi. Persistent or intermittent water and excessive humidity breeds microbiological contamination. Bioaerosols are airborne particles such as molds and bacteria that can be released from living organisms. Dark areas with moist, warm conditions, enhanced by the presence of dust and dirt, make great homes for microorganisms. Moisture associated with condensation from A/C pipes, condensation from high humidity, or moisture from leaks all provide excellent breeding areas for these microbes. Hypersensitive reactions to mold and bacteria may ensue when microbial populations become amplified.

Visible mold was detected as well as walls that are decomposing as there is not enough ventilation in the building. Leaks, as well as A/C leaks created damage to the wood flooring. Visible termite damage was detected in many areas.

Windows, doors, shutters need to be repainted.

Recommendations:

- **Asbestos inspection** - is needed before renovation., We expect minimal asbestos to be present as in 2001 we abated already some areas, however a comprehensive asbestos inspection was not performed at that time.



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- Lead based paint inspection - is needed before renovation. Again, we expect minimal lead based to be present as in 2000 all exterior shutter, doors and windows were abated. However the interior was never tested for lead based paint.
- Walls are decomposing due to not enough ventilation. This historic building needs special treatment of the walls so that they can breath, so that moisture does not create decay.
- Indoor Air Quality Assessment is necessary to determine the quantity and type of the mold and fungi present. After the IAQA a remediation plan can be created
- Mold and fungi Remediation is necessary to make this building safe for its inhabitants.
- Termite inspection is necessary, especially on the structural wooden beams
- The above items should be part of the renovation plans

We thank you for giving us the opportunity to perform this inspection for you and if you have any questions concerning this or any other environmental issue, please do not hesitate to contact us at 771-0550 or 778-3221.

Sincerely,

John Verstraaten, Ph.D., CMRS
Certified Microbial Remediation Specialist

