

Testimony Before the 36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands
Regarding the Proposed Solar Farm Projects at Estate Fortuna and Estate Bovoni
November 18, 2025

Good day,

The Honorable Milton Potter, Senate President, and other Senators of the 36th Legislature.

My name is **Merwin Potter**, and I am speaking on behalf of the **St. Thomas West Alliance**, representing the homeowners and residents of the west end of St. Thomas. We appear before you today to firmly and unequivocally oppose the request submitted by Governor Albert Bryan Jr. for the approval of the proposed solar farm projects at Parcel Nos. 3B & 2, Estate Fortuna, and Rem. 17 Estate Bovoni, Nos. 1 & 2 Frenchman's Bay Quarter.

We have recently learned that the developer owns approximately 250 acres of land and intends to use half of it—125 acres—to install **110,000 solar panels**. This is an industrial scale undertaking of enormous magnitude, one that should **never** have advanced without full public disclosure, transparency, and meaningful community engagement. Yet residents were neither informed nor consulted. No opportunity was provided to review or comment on the proposal. Shockingly, excavation began without notice, despite the clear and substantial potential impacts on our homes, our environment, and our safety.

Solar installations of this scale have a documented history of becoming airborne during storms, resulting in catastrophic damages to homes and communities. To move forward with such a project without informing the very residents who stand in harm's way is unacceptable.

We are deeply disappointed that the Governor would request that the Legislature **circumvent the Coastal Zone Management (CZM) process**, a foundational safeguard created to protect our land, shorelines, and people. The illegal excavation already conducted at the site has visibly impacted the coastal waters—evidenced by the discoloration of the ocean caused by erosion from the disturbed soil. Given the steep, fragile topography of the property, this erosion will only continue and worsen.

Residents living within **500 feet** of this massive project are now terrified. Given the scale of installation and the extreme weather events our territory regularly faces, their fears are not hypothetical—they are justified. During Hurricanes Irma and Maria, the solar panels at Estate Donoe became airborne, destroyed numerous homes, and displaced families in the Wintberg Heights community. Panels were found as far away as Estate Smith Bay. This is a matter of historical record, not speculation.

Moreover, these solar installations pose **serious chemical and fire hazards**. Lithium-based components present a significant danger if damaged or ignited. Our already understaffed fire services on the west end simply do not have the resources or equipment to manage a fire of this magnitude.

The risks associated with this project include—but are not limited to—the following:

1. **Severe hurricane-related damage** to nearby homes and properties due to the project's proximity.
2. **Airborne debris hazards**—including shattered glass and metal fragments—that threaten life and property during storms.
3. **Loss of natural landscape, cultural value, and scenic beauty**, permanently altering some of the island's most cherished views.
4. **Depreciation of nearby property values**, a well-documented consequence of placing industrial energy infrastructure within residential areas.
5. **Soil and water contamination** risks from hazardous materials such as lithium and lead if panels are damaged.
6. **Significant fire risks**, especially in a rural and heavily vegetated setting where electrical faults could spark uncontrollable fires.

These are not abstract concerns—they are **proven, serious, and well-documented dangers**, particularly in a hurricane-prone region like ours.

We were also informed by a Senator of this body that **Indian artifacts** were discovered on the property during the illegal excavation. Despite notification to DPNR, no stop-work order has been issued. This failure to enforce preservation and environmental laws is deeply troubling and must be investigated immediately by the Historic Preservation Office.

Before any major development, the law requires that residents be informed and educated about the project. The developer must provide notice through radio, television, press releases, or similar channels. No such notice was issued. No signs were posted. No permits were displayed. The public learned of this project only because of the Governor's letter to the Legislature.

Upon learning of this, the St. Thomas West Alliance called an emergency meeting on November 14, 2025, to alert residents.

What makes this even more concerning is the revelation that in June 2025, Senator Carla Joseph convened a meeting with the developer, Mr. Christian Loranger, and select individuals—three representatives of the Public Services Commission and two residents from Blue Water Crest. **No other residents**—including those living within 500 to 1,000 feet of the project—were invited. After this meeting, no outreach or information was provided to residents or to the St. Thomas West Alliance. Then, on November 13, 2025, Senator Joseph stated to our organization's president that, "*Mr. Loranger did not want to meet with you all.*"

Only after our community scheduled an emergency meeting did Senator Joseph issue a press release announcing a public meeting with the developer and government officials.

Throughout these interactions, Senator Joseph appeared strongly favorable to the developer's plans, despite repeated, serious concerns from residents.

We respectfully and urgently call on this Legislature to **reject approval of these projects**. The residents of the west end of St. Thomas have the right to safety, transparency, and fair consideration. These proposals present severe and unacceptable risks to our community, our environment, and our heritage.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. I stand ready to answer any questions and to participate fully in any transparent and inclusive process moving forward.

Submitted by: Mr. Merwin Potter
On behalf of The St. Thomas West Alliance -
homeowners and residents of the west end of St. Thomas