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Bill ZAC-22-12
Amending the Zoning Designation of
Plot Nos. 102-A Remainder, 102-B, and 102C Estate Hermon Hill
from R-3 (Residential-Medium Density to P (Public))



PRESENTED BY
DARYL D. JASCHEN
DIRECTOR
VIRGIN ISLANDS TERRITORIAL
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

Submitted to

Senator Novelle E. Francis, Jr., Senate President, 35th Legislature of
the Virgin Islands, Committee of the Whole Hearing

Frits E. Lawaetz Legislative Conference Room on St. Croix

March 10, 2023

3 Good morning, Senator Nouvelle E. Francis, Jr., Senate President, 35th Legislature of the Virgin
4 Islands, Committee of the Whole, legislative staff, and those in the viewing and listening audience.
5 I am Daryl D. Jaschen, Director of the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency
6 (VITEMA). Present with me today are VITEMA Deputy Director of Logistics, Mr. Steve
7 DeBlasio; VITEMA Territory Hazard Mitigation Officer, Ms. Graciela Rivera; VITEMA
8 Construction Program Manager, Mr. Asante Richards; Springline Architects, Principal, Mr. Mike
9 de Hass; and Springline Architects, Principal, Mr. Jerry Traino. The purpose of this testimony is
10 to provide the committee of the whole background to support Bill ZAC-22-12 Amending the
11 zoning designation of Plot Nos. 102-A Remainder, 102-B, and 102-C Estate Hermon Hill,
12 Company Quarter, St. Croix from R-3 (Residential - Medium Density) to P (Public) for VITEMA's
13 main office/center of operations on St. Croix to include an Emergency Operations Center, a safe
14 room for emergency responders to shelter in place during storm/disasters, and a 9-1-1 Emergency
15 Center.

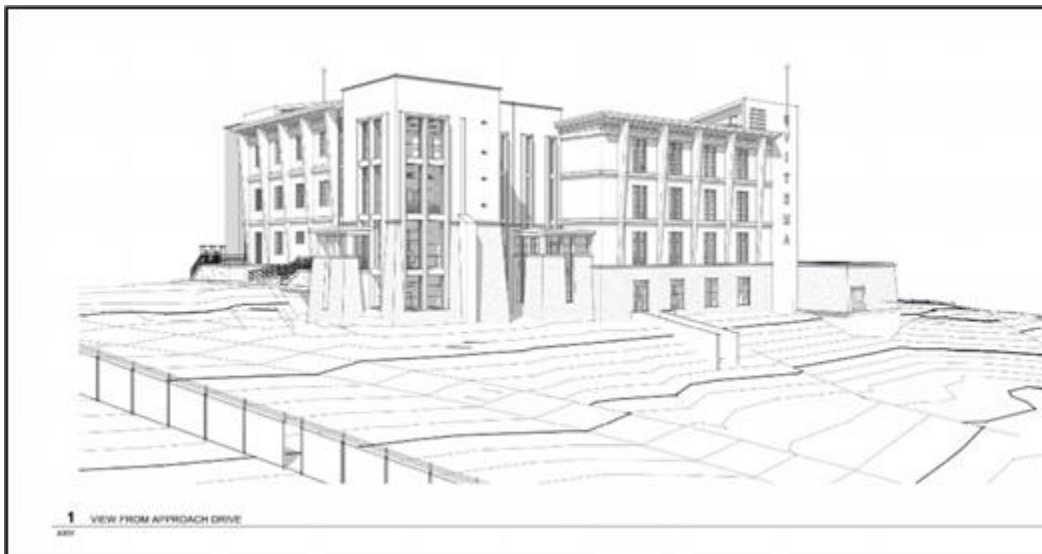
16 Site History

17 In 1992 the VI Housing Finance Authority (VIHFA) and Department of Property & Procurement
18 (DPP) deeded the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA) 4.86
19 acres of Hermon Hill, known as Plot 102-A for the purpose of establishing an Emergency
20 Operations Center (EOC) in the existing 2-story building. VITEMA successfully operated its St.
21 Croix EOC until 2011, when due to mold, the building was deemed unhealthy to occupy.
22 VITEMA relocated its EOC at a rented three (3) story building in downtown Christiansted to
23 serve as a base for coordinating emergency preparation, response, and recovery operations.
24 Adjoining areas, Plot 102-B (0.394 acres) and Plot 102-C (0.502 acres), were both deeded from
25 VIFHA to DPP on 19 September 2008.

26 Hurricane Maria Hazard Mitigation Project

27 As a result of Hurricane Maria in September 2017, VITEMA and FEMA jointly agreed that an
28 opportunity existed to not only retrofit the old Hermon Hill VITEMA EOC but to relocate the
29 district's 9-1-1 operations from a rented building. The expanded capacity provided space to
30 coordinate the combined efforts of local agencies, federal partners, and the private sector to
31 prepare for and respond to a major disaster at a level Category 5 hurricane. The additional space
32 could serve as conference rooms for other government agencies to hold planning sessions and

33 conduct tabletop exercises with virtual links to other training sites or EOCs such as those on St.
 34 Thomas and St. John. Approved by FEMA in 2021, the VITEMA \$22.5 million dollar retrofit
 35 came with several constraints which the Territory must comply. First, the site selected had to be
 36 at Hermon Hill; second, the building had to be contained within the footprint of the original
 37 structure; third, the safe-room design had to accommodate up to 200 emergency response
 38 individuals to serve as a safe-haven while a storm passed St. Croix. Finally, federal funding was
 39 limited to the building, parking lot, and emergency power generation. Earlier, in 2019-2020, an
 40 engineering study determined that the existing building structure could not meet the FEMA
 41 requirements for occupancy, and as such, FEMA approved demolition of the existing structure
 42 and authorization to build up several stories. VITEMA could build up but not outside the original
 43 footprint.



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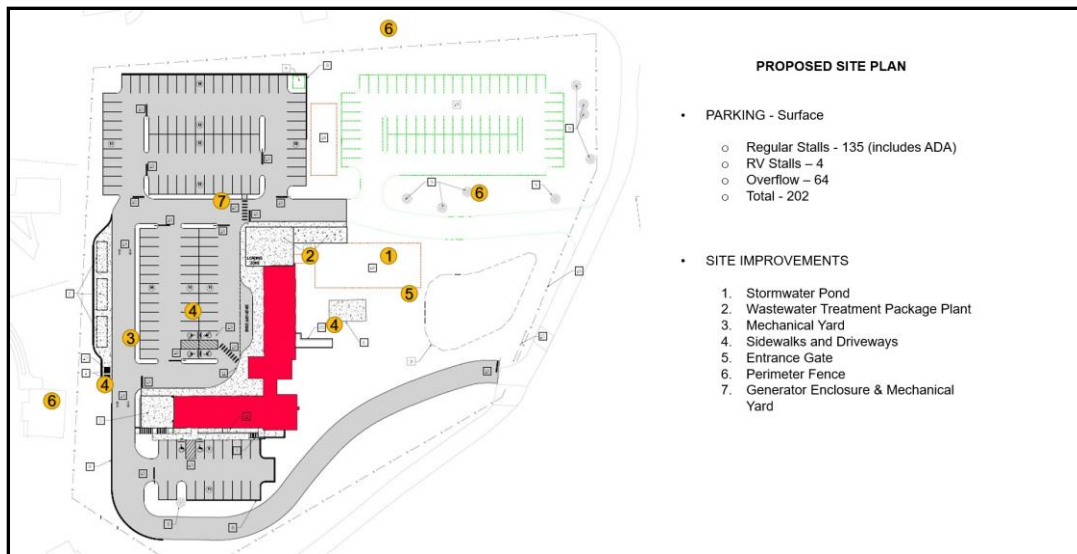
Figure 1: VITEMA Hermon Hill Wind Retrofit and Saferoom Design

46 Today the current design, as depicted in Figure 1 of the architectre design drawing shows the
 47 VITEMA Hermon Hill Wind Retrofit and Saferoom with a three-story south wing (48 ft tall), a
 48 four-story north wing (68 ft tall), with a corridor connecting the two wings, totaling 25,000 sq-
 49 feet. Due to the change in elevation slope, the four-story north wing would be equal in height to
 50 the 48-foot south wing.

51 Parking Area and Daily Operations

52 A depicted in Figure 2, onsite parking accommodates 135 vehicles and room for an additional 64
 53 vehicles overflow. Part of the parking area would serve to hold VITEMA's mobile EOC, its

54 four-mobile 100kw generators, and several mobile light-sets. VITEMA has a fleet of
 55 approximately 10 vehicles which will be parked at the facility. There are normally 10 visitors to
 56 VITEMA per day, Monday – Friday, but there may be an increased number of visitors during
 57 key events, such as curfew pass issue and classroom training events. VITEMA does not operate
 58 any public distribution of food or water from this facility.



59

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Figure 2: VITEMA Hermon Hill Parking Layout and Site Improvements

61 The facility will have a maximum of 8-individuals operating 24-hrs a day in capacity as 9-1-1
 62 operators. During normal operations Monday-Friday, 8 am – 5 pm, an additional 52-individulas
 63 will work out of the facility in the capacity of operations, planning, logistics, admin & finance,
 64 public information, communications, hazard-mitigation, and public assistance. VITEMA’s new
 65 Office of Disability Integration, St Croix section, will also be located at the Hermon Hill facility.
 66 During times when VITEMA offers classroom training to GVI agencies and strategic partners,
 67 an additional 40-individuals will be at the facility.

68 Surge Operations

69 During times of emergency preparation and response, such as during a Hurricane threat, all
 70 training would be suspended, and up to 90-individuals (running 45 per shift) would be on-site to
 71 conduct coordination with local, federal, and private sector partners. Under the FEMA /
 72 VITEMA Community Lifeline approach, agency representatives would focus on Safety &
 73 Security, Health & Medical, Communications, Hazards Materials, Food, Water & Shelter,
 74 Energy (Power & Fuel), and Transportation assessment and restoration efforts. Based on the

75 guidance from the Governor, VITEMA could conduct emergency press conferences at the
76 Hermon Hill facility.

77 Emergency Communications

78 During a major communications outage or training for an outage, the Bureau of Information
79 Technology, FEMA or Private Sector partners, may temporarily erect satellite dishes and
80 communication towers. Normal 24-hr radio communications support 9-1-1 operations, and back-
81 up communication capabilities include devices connected to several antennas approximately 10
82 ft -20 ft in height. No permanent commercial cellular towers are identified to be placed at the
83 facility site, but an emergency private provider, cell on wheels (COWs), station may be required
84 if a 9-1-1 communication outage occurs.

85 Utilities and Demolition of Existing Structure

86 A cistern meeting VI-code along with a WAPA water line feeding the building is required. A
87 septic system is no longer permitted at the site and the structure will be required to tie-into the
88 VIWMA system. An emergency generator with diesel storage tank permits 24-hour operations
89 and will be contained in a noise reduced concrete structure. A storm water retention pond is
90 designed to reduce water run-off but will not eliminate run-off to the neighboring areas as the
91 facility sits on-top of Hermon Hill itself. Approximately 0.6 miles of the Estate Hermon Hill
92 Road will serve as both a demolition haul-out road and a construction road. Coordination with
93 Department of Public Works (DPW) has begun to outline the process to identify any temporary
94 and permanent road repair from damage caused by heavy vehicles. Appropriate measures will be
95 followed in accordance with DPNR requirements to minimize dust, road debris, and noise to the
96 surrounding community during demolition and construction phases.

97 Security and Vehicle Access to Hermon Hill

98 A construction fence will be placed around the perimeter of the facility, but VITEMA will need
99 to seek separate funding to establish an improved physical security posture to include entrance
100 gate-controlled access, security cameras, and landscaping. The paved road going around Hermon
101 Hill, identified as VITEMA Road, is narrow and may need to be identified as a one-way road, in
102 coordination with the DPW or widened to support increased traffic flow in and out of the facility.
103 As for off-road parking, there is not enough room for off-road parking and all vehicles will be

104 required to park at the VITEMA parking lot on top of Hermon Hill, where there is room for 135
105 vehicles and 64 over-flow vehicles.

106 Demolition and Construction Program Managment

107 VITEMA has a full-time construction program manager, Mr. Asante Richards, who will
108 coordinate with the demolition and construction firms to ensure proper work performance,
109 coordinate with the DPW on road and site requirements, ensure DPNR environmental standards
110 are maintained, and serve as a point of contact to the community to address their concerns during
111 demolition and construction phases of the project.

112 Conclusion

113 In conclution, I want to thank Governor Albert Bryan, Jr., and the Director Adrienne Octalien-
114 Williams, of the Office of Disaster Recovery, in recognizing this Hazard Mitigation recovery
115 project as one of the top 100 construction projects prioritized to be completed in the Territory over
116 the next three years. VITEMA, along with Springline Architects, wants to ensure all the proper
117 engineering and architectural requirements are met in accordance with the US Virgin Islands
118 Construction Code, of which proper land zoning is one of the first steps. I appreciate the
119 opportunity to present to the Committee of the Whole, the background and path forward needed
120 through approval of Bill ZAC-22-12 Amending the zoning designation of Plot Nos. 102-A
121 Remainder, 102-B, and 102-C Estate Hermon Hill, Company Quarter, St. Croix from R-3
122 (Residential - Medium Density) to P (Public) for VITEMA's main office/center of operations on
123 St. Croix to include an Emergency Operations Center, a safe room for emergency responders to
124 shelter in place during storm/disasters, and a 9-1-1 Emergency Center. My team and I are prepared
125 to answer any questions you may have at this time.