

Senator Milton Potter

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today concerning Bill #35-0202 concerning Historic Properties in the Virgin Islands. In 2012 we applied for a grant from the National Association of Realtors to advance a Historic Preservation Bill. The bill was presented to the Legislature and sponsored by Senator Hill. Unfortunately it did not proceed to the body of the whole. We did exhaustive work on this bill and utilized the grant we received to buy laptops for students attending UVI to go street by street and neighborhood by neighborhood to document the location and condition and if the taxes had been paid on each historic property in dilapidated condition. We were featured in several newspapers and on radio explaining the importance of saving these historic properties.

Again in 2022 we applied again and were granted another grant to publish the importance of saving the island's historic properties. We developed a website and sent mass email and were featured in several newspapers and on radio programs.

I will attach the documents that I refer to in a separate email.

This is a subject that has been a concern since 2012 and we are pleased that you are addressing some of the concerns we have worked on vigorously for over 10 years.

To address your bill specifically we applaud your effort to relax some of the stringent requirements relating to the restoration of historic properties. We as Realtors could go into lengthy discussions with the consequences the current law has caused in selling historic properties. Many have sought to purchase historic properties but have been discouraged by the very difficult restrictions that are currently placed on a buyer. This has stopped many local and stateside buyers from purchasing and renovating these properties due to the exorbitant cost involved and the inability to find the required items. If these restrictions were relaxed as you propose then we would see the renovation and rehabilitation of historic properties progress at a much faster rate. Our purpose is to make our islands a better place to live especially in the town areas and to honor the history of our islands dating back to the 1600's. We want our towns to be safe, clean, and a neighborhood all Virgin Islanders can enjoy and islands that tourist can marvel over. Our historic properties are a treasure to be

preserved and make us unique and much more interesting than many other Caribbean Islands. We want to retain the street scapes and exterior integrity of these amazing properties but in order to make this feasible it must be at a reasonable cost. The interior of many of these buildings should be habitable and comfortable and allow owners to afford the renovations required.

We recently heard that a person who purchased a historic property and trimmed a few Mahogany trees to open the view and allow light and air to enter the rooms was fined \$25,000 per tree trimmed. In 2012 I flew to St. Croix to meeting with a lovely local young lady who was actually pregnant at the time and had purchased a home in Water Gut. She was very distressed as she bought the property with the hopes our bill would pass which would have required all her neighbors to renovate their homes. She was going to rent out part of the home to assist with the mortgage but due to the fact that no one in her neighborhood renovated their property she lost her home to the bank. There are many many potential home buyers who have expressed the same sentiment asking why should I repair my home and the house next to me is a crack house.

Many of these dilapidated historic homes have fallen into ruin and are now inhabited by homeless persons often utilizing dugs and without running water and electricity these homes have become unsanitary.

We are hopeful your bill will pass and we will assist in any way we can to help in it's passage.

Thank you again for your effort and allowing us to testify.

April Newland

Chair of the Historic Preservation Task Force

National Director for the National Association Of Realtors

Member and Past President of the Virgin Islands Territorial

Association of Realtors.