

November 12, 2024

Hon. Senator Kenneth Gittens
35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands
3022 Estate Golden Rock
Christiansted, VI 00820

Dear Senator Gittens,

On behalf of Our Town Frederiksted, I am writing to express our support for the proposed legislation to address Abandoned and Derelict motor vehicles. This legislation is a necessary step in improving community safety and environmental quality. However, while we commend the efforts outlined in this bill, we believe it does not go far enough in providing a comprehensive solution.

The issue of derelict vehicles poses serious challenges to our neighborhoods, including hazards to public health, environmental degradation, a decline in property values, and quality of life. To truly make a meaningful impact, we need stronger regulations that ensure private property owners are held accountable for the storage of multiple abandoned vehicles. Moreover, enforcement mechanisms should be robust and well-funded to guarantee that the provisions of the law are applied uniformly and effectively.

We encourage additional measures such as:

1. **Clear Limits and Definitions:** The bill should establish stricter limits on the number of derelict vehicles permitted on private property, with precise definitions to prevent ambiguity. For example:
 - a. for every 1/2 acre or smaller, no more than 2 inoperable vehicles plus one additional inoperable vehicle for every adult over 18 with a driver's license who lives on the property. The address on their license must be the same as the property address.
 - b. No inoperable vehicles on any empty or abandoned property.
2. **Enhanced Penalties and Incentives:** Stronger penalties for non-compliance, coupled with incentives for property owners who responsibly remove and recycle these vehicles, can help promote better outcomes. In addition, liens shall be placed on properties for unpaid penalties.
3. **Increased Resources for Enforcement:** The bill identifies both VIPD and DPW as responsible agencies but it is not clear what each agency would be doing. One agency, ideally VIPD, should be specified as the agency responsible for enforcing the provisions of this legislation. There should be dedicated funding and personnel to monitor and enforce these regulations. This includes additional funding to the VIPD motor pool and traffic enforcement bureau. Without this, even the best-intended legislation risks falling short.



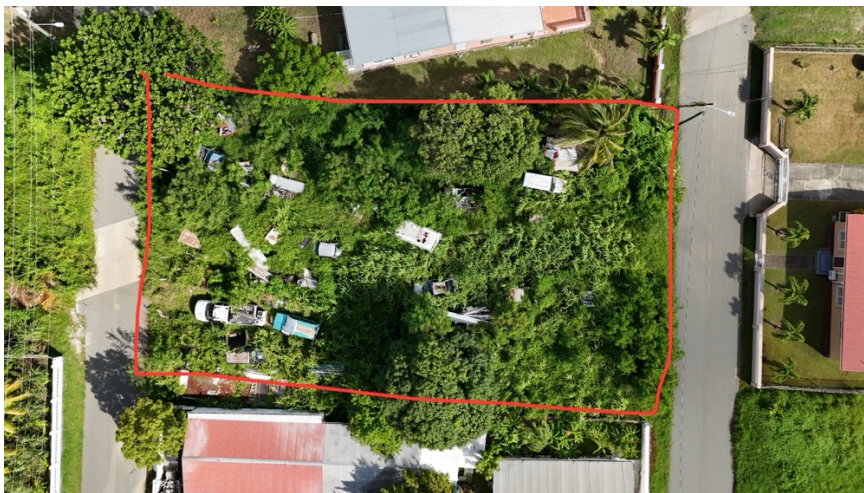


4. **Exemption Requirements:** Any requests for an exemption must be approved by the Department of Planning and Natural Resources AND all property owners adjacent to the property requesting exemption. This includes properties separated by a roadway. Exemptions must be renewed every 6 months.
5. **Establishment of Government-Sanctioned Junkyards:** The government should designate land within appropriately zoned areas on each island for the creation of official junkyards. These sites would be managed by an approved vendor who could generate revenue for the government through the recycling and sale of vehicle parts, as well as through fees for the final disposal of unusable vehicles. Additionally, a section of this land could be leased to individuals, such as part-time mechanics or vehicle enthusiasts, who require space to store or repair derelict vehicles. This solution not only creates a safer, more organized environment for vehicle repair activities but also helps to reduce the clutter and associated issues in residential neighborhoods.

Thank you for considering these additional steps to strengthen the bill and ensure it meets the needs of our community. The legislature must ensure there is a framework in place so that we can hold people accountable for a cleaner and more prosperous Virgin Islands. We are committed to working together to protect our neighborhoods and create a cleaner, safer environment for all.

Sincerely,

Shomari Moorehead
President, Our Town Frederiksted



Example of a property in a residential neighborhood filled with derelict vehicles. DOH, WMA, DPNR, and OOG are all aware. The owner has no intention of stopping.