

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY, JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Hurricane Preparedness

Derek Gabriel Commissioner Department of Public Works September 12, 2023 Good day Senator Kenneth Gittens, Chairperson of the Homeland Security, Justice and Public Safety Committee; committee members; all other senators in attendance today; all those seated in the senate chambers; as well as those in the listening and viewing audience. My name is Derek Gabriel and I am the Commissioner of the Department of Public Works (DPW). With me today to testify on the role the department plays in hurricane preparedness is Jomo McClean, DPW Highway Program Manager.

OVERVIEW

The Department of Public Works plays a critical role in disaster preparedness. In preparation for the upcoming 2023 Hurricane Season, the department is working diligently to ensure all our mandates and functions are met. Our testimony today will touch on the various areas DPW manages for preparedness and recovery, such as damage and structural assessments, gut clearing and stormwater management, sand and sandbag distribution, and route clearance and infrastructure restoration. The department relies on both in-house personnel and contractors to perform the prescribed duties for both pre-storm preparedness and post-event recovery. As such, we host regular trainings for our staff and contractors, along with our infrastructure partners – both private and public – to ensure efficiency and awareness.

Along with the Waste Management Authority, DPW manages the function of ESF-3 where our focus is on route clearance, debris management and monitoring, and engineering support. DPW also supports several other emergency service functions as we perform mass movement (if needed) through the Division of Transportation, shelter preparation, and commodity distribution (if needed). Our engineering and operations staff actively participates in year-round trainings offered by the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and other local and federal partners to ensure we are prepared in the unfortunate event of a natural disaster.

ENGINEERING SERVICES AND CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT

Engineering and Construction Management is a vital part of our preparedness and recovery process. Our engineering team is responsible for performing preliminary and post-event damage assessments to the territory's infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and government buildings. In addition to determining the level of damage, our engineers are tasked with verifying the structural safety of the territory's infrastructure, government buildings, and other resources. A report is then submitted to the Governor to assist in the determination of whether the territory qualifies for federal assistance.

DRAINAGE

Every year, the department performs a stormwater drainage system assessment including all major guts, culverts, and swales. Based on this assessment, a schedule is devised to have them cleared prior to the height of hurricane season. In addition, particularly in the St. Croix district, we use our newly acquired vacuum trucks to have areas in the historic district cleared as much as possible. It is important to note that most of the drainage system is plagued by collapsed or undersized culverts, massive debris accumulation, and other failures that require more than this annual maintenance.

As of September, we can report that all major aspects of our stormwater drainage system have been assessed and scheduled for continuous cleaning and maintenance – again, performed by both in-house staff and contractors. Far too many times, we are removing tires, appliances, furniture, abandoned vehicles, and other trash and debris that is severely detrimental to our stormwater system. I want to take this time to encourage the public to dispose of these items please properly in our landfills and convenience centers and, please, if you see a person or business engaged in illegal dumping, report it to the authorities.

Finally, we are working with the Department of Planning and Natural Resources to re-apply for a gut maintenance permit to allow us to use heavy equipment in our guts for more longterm maintenance. We have learned from past mistakes that our major earthen guts should not be completely grubbed, but rather allow for some vegetation to absorb water and hold infrastructure in place. We have several projects in both districts, either in design or expected to start within the next six months, that will address major repairs and reconstruction to the territory's stormwater drainage system.

SAND DISTRIBUTION

DPW is also responsible for sand distribution, utilizing various sites, and ensuring proper management of said sites. Upon VITEMA's authorization, all government agencies are responsible for sending their staff - by appointment - to fill bags for their respective agencies. In addition to the sand and bags, DPW provides the necessary tools for filling. Pre-filled sandbags are reserved for senior citizens and physically challenged individuals.

We also partner with the VI Fire and Emergency Services to stage sand and sandbags distribution prior to any impending weather. At these locations, our dedicated firefighters and DPW staff assist residents with filling sandbags for personal use. Private residents are capped at six (6) sandbags per household and government agencies receive twenty-four (24) sandbags per department per district. Of course, this cap is adjusted for larger departments with more facilities.

ROUTE CLEARANCE

Removing debris from all roadways in the territory is a DPW responsibility. This is carried out in accordance with priority routes and locations that have been identified by DPW and VITEMA. Said routes are subject to change as needed, however, priority is given to the Territory's hospitals, ports, and other critical facilities. Route clearance involves pushing the debris off the roadways and debris removal is collecting the debris from the roadside and transporting it to the approved Debris Management Sites (DMS). All aspects of the debris operation are completed following local and federal regulations.

Both districts have pre-approved contractors and in-house personnel assigned to certain sectors for immediate reconnaissance once an "all-clear" is issued. Equipment is typically

pre-positioned to allow for rapid response and expedited route clearing, especially for priority routes and critical facilities.

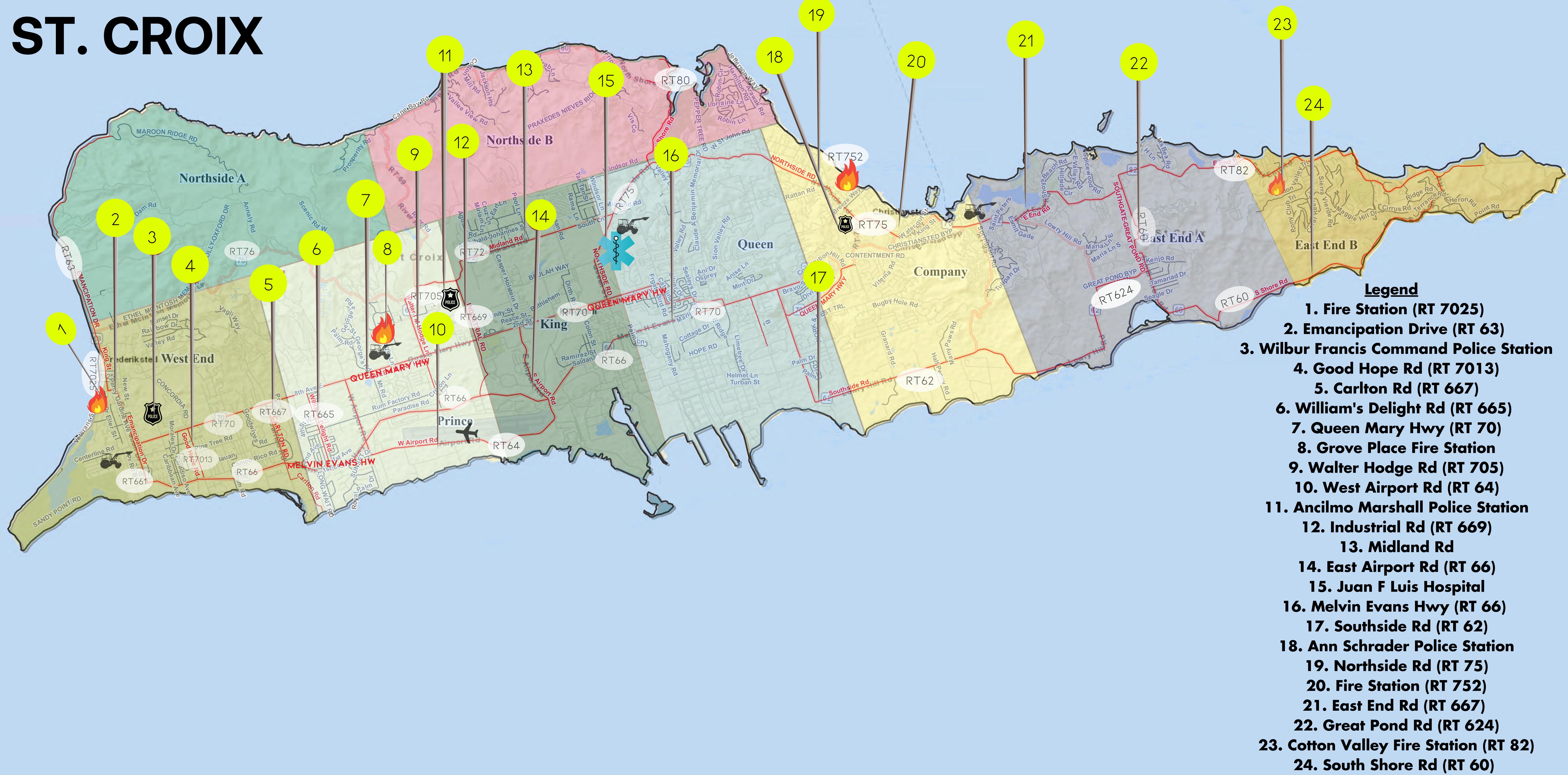
INFRASTRUCTURE RESTORATION

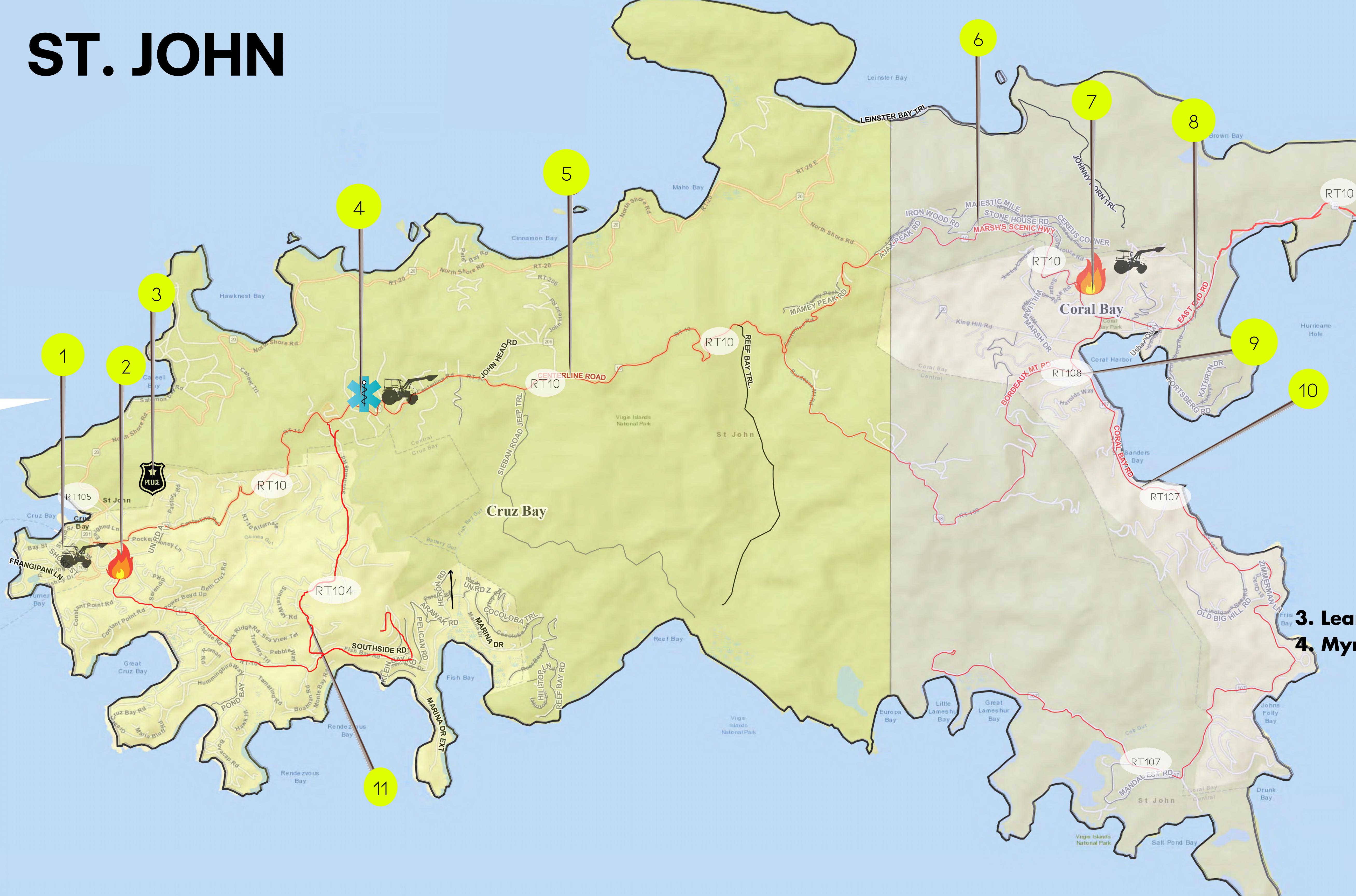
In preparation for the 2023 Hurricane Season, DPW has established the following protocol and preparation measures:

- All DPW Operations personnel, along with all Roadside Contractors, are assigned to specific locations throughout the territory with a mandate to address all emergency agencies/locations first. When possible, we meet seventy-two hours before the impending natural disaster to review all assignments and protocols.
- 2. Once a Presidential Declaration has been made, emergency contractors join the process of roadside clearing and debris removal. They also address all high-priority locations first, which includes: all hospitals, fire departments, and police stations throughout the territory.
- 3. Emergency Contracts DPW has contractors for the following:
 - a. Emergency Roadside Clearance
 - b. Emergency Debris Removal
 - c. Emergency Debris Monitors
 - d. Emergency Roof Repairs
 - e. DPW Emergency Generator Service & Maintenance
- 4. Engineering staff are assigned to inspect public buildings, bridges, and highways (based on priority locations). Based on the level of damage, structural integrity, and priorities, contractors and in-house staff can be engaged to minimize/mitigate further damage and loss of property. Comprehensive reports are developed to be shared with both federal and local partners.



APPENDICES ROUTE CLEARANCE SECTOR MAPS





Haulover Bay St John East End Legend **1. Romeo Company Fire Station** 2. Cruz Bay (Rt 105) 3. Leander Jurgen Command Police Station (Rt 10) 4. Myrah Keating Smith Community Center (Rt 10) 5. Centerline Rd (Rt 10) 6. Gerda Marsh Scenic Drive (Rt 10) 7. Zulu company Fire Station (Rt 10) 8. East End Rd (Rt 10) 9. Bordeaux Mountain Rd (Rt 108) 10. Coral Bay (Rt 107) 11. SouthSide Rd (RT 104)

ST. THOMAS

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Legend 1. Daisy Roberta Mem. Dr. (RT 30) 2. Fortuna Fire Station (RT 30) 3. Fortuna Rd (RT 30) 4. West End Rd (RT 30) 5. Bassanio G. David Station (RT 30) 6. Crown Mountain Rd (RT 33) 7. Julian Jackson Dr Rd (RT 30) 8. Airport Rd (RT 302) 9. WAPA Power Plant Rd (RT 304) 10. DPW Operations Yard (RT 306) 11. Moravian Hwy (RT 308) 12. Veterans Drive Rd (RT 308) 13. Richard Callwood Command 14. Omar Brown, Sr Fire Station 15. Alton Adams Drive (RT 38) 16. Schneider Regional Hospital (RT 310) 17. Weymouth Rhymer Hwy (RT 38) **18. Mariel C. Newton Police Station 19. George C. Scott Fire Station** 20. Emile Francis Memorial Drive (RT 38) 21. Smith Bay Cemetery (RT 38)

