

The Committee on Culture, Youth, Aging, Sports, and Parks

**The Honorable Angel Bolques, Jr.,
Chairman**

36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands
Friday, February 21, 2025



Vincent L. Roberts
Acting Commissioner,
The Department of Sports,
Parks, and Recreation

Good day, Honorable Angel Bolques, Jr., Chairman of the Committee on Culture, Youth, Aging, Sports, and Parks of the 36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands of the United States (USVI), Honorable Senators, Central Staff, and the listening and viewing audience. I am Vincent Roberts, Acting Commissioner of the Department of Sports, Parks, and Recreation (DSPR), here to provide testimony on updates regarding the Department's programs, initiatives, facilities, and challenges on the island of St. John.

Allow me to introduce the members of my leadership team who are present today: Mr. Elroy Hill, Deputy Director—St. John, and Mr. Aseah Thomas, Youth Community Coordinator—St. Thomas/St. John district.

Recovery & Capital Projects

We are thankful that our Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) projects are steadily advancing in the restoration of our storm-damaged facilities. The DSPR Recovery Team is continuously working diligently to bring each of our projects closer to completion.

DSPR has four FEMA projects in St. John, of which two have been completed, and two are in the A & E phase. Hurricane-related repairs at the Cruz Bay Tennis Courts and the Orville Brown Basketball Courts have been completed, as well as resurfacing and restriping of the courts. Pickleball lines were also included in the restriping of the Cruz Bay Tennis Courts. The A&E of the St. John Recreational Center in Cruz Bay is approximately 90% completed, as drawings were submitted to FEMA for approval. Once approved, the renovated facility will be utilized as a community safe room, specifically designed and constructed to resist wind pressures and wind-borne debris impacts to provide life-safety protection. A&E for Winston Wells Park is also at 90%. These designs will only address repairs to the bleachers, concession, and a second-floor press box. The ballfield is still occupied by VI Department of Education (VIDE) modular classrooms; however, when the facility is returned to the Department, we will move forward with our hurricane-related repairs. The department is utilizing insurance proceeds and a sub-award grant of \$1,000,000.00 from the Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration (EDA) Grant Award Number 01-79-15177 to perform repairs at Oppenheimer Beach Facility for Revitalization & Coast Protection. A&E for this project is in progress, a task order for a Geotechnical study was recently signed. This study is needed to assist in designing the proper coastal protection for the beach house.



The Department of Sports, Parks, and Recreation also received sub-awards from EDA for the following: \$1,640,083.00 for the Revitalize/Retrofit Ten Playgrounds Project, which includes Orville Brown Basketball Court. We hope to have the playground equipment on the island before summer. \$500,000.00 for a Coral Bay Recreational Facility; DSPR is in the research stage of the project.

We will continue working diligently to complete these facilities for our community's enjoyment. I would like to publicly thank the Department of Public Works (DPW) and the Office of Disaster Recovery (ODR), who remain the catalysts in ensuring DSPR remains focused and steadfast in our projects' progression and that contractors produce the negotiated deliverables.

Programs & Partnerships

DSPR continues to partner with various community service groups to administer programs for our community. On Mondays and Thursdays, St. Ursula's Senior Fit & Feisty Circle is offered to all seniors at the St. John Community Center. The program aims to keep our senior community active and engaged.

The agreement between the National Park Service and the Department of Sports, Parks, and Recreation allows DSPR to offer more programs on St. John. The Ups & Drops Coed Softball League, which is our most popular program on the island, is currently in the championship series. The league has fielded seven teams and is the first adult softball league on the island in nearly eight years. Little leaguers aged 8 to 12 can also be seen practicing at the field on any given day. DSPR currently has its Rugrats Program for kids ages 3 to 5, featuring Tee Ball Clinics. DSPR's second-largest initiative, the territorial Reviving Baseball in Our Inner Cities (RBI) Program, has successfully facilitated interisland play on St. John for the young ladies who have participated in softball in the territory for the last three years.

As customary, DSPR ensures our fields are maintained and lined for use by outside organizations such as Interscholastic Athletic Association (IAA) and Little League.

DSPR's Recreation Team eagerly anticipates the start of the 2nd annual co-ed kickball League in March and the second installation of our Rugrats program, featuring soccer clinics. We are also finalizing plans for new programs, including a Domino Tournament, a 3v3 junior basketball tournament, and a Family Game Night for the community.

The Department's most sizeable program, our summer camps, will begin in June,



with the fee remaining at \$150 for the entire six-week program. The St. John Outdoor Summer Camp creates a safe space for children to participate in various recreational activities. DSPR will release additional summer camp information in the spring.

At the Department of Sports, Parks and Recreation, we understand that every child does not want to play sports. Recreation goes beyond athletic competition and physical fitness; it is our goal to introduce drama, arts, and non-traditional games to our program catalog.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

One of the strengths that remain throughout this Department, including in St. John, is the department's ability to be flexible, adjust, and committed to our community, the team is excited to introduce new and diverse programs. Being creative despite challenges allows the staff to maintain and prepare facilities for community use.

Our weakness continues to be the need for more resources. The department continues to struggle with the shortage of manpower and supplies. Recent equipment purchases have helped bridge the gap with the time it takes to complete projects. I intend to include a request for additional personnel and equipment in the Department's proposed fiscal year 2026 budget to continue bridging the gap.

DSPR is excited to have the opportunity to offer more programs and recreational spaces for our community's enjoyment, with FEMA repairs completed at the Cruz Bay Tennis Courts, Orville Brown Basketball Court, and National Park Ballpark. This also creates the opportunity for DSPR to perform beautification projects at our facilities, including adding new signage and landscaping.

A major threat to this Department is the inability to attract and retain energetic, qualified, and dependable personnel. Employee shortage threatens our ability to serve the community to our full potential. The current staff on St. John consists of one office staff, three recreational staff, and three grounds and maintenance staff. This threatens programs and facility upkeep. Low salaries continue to be the biggest hurdle.

Finally, I want to thank the men and women of the Department of Sports, Parks, and Recreation who come to work, day in and day out, to make a difference in the lives of the people of the territory and our visitors. The individuals who work long, late hours and who do so with a sense of pride. I genuinely appreciate and thank every employee in this Department.

Thank you, this concludes my testimony. I stand ready to answer any questions you



may have.

