

TESTIMONY OF NOEL HODGE
CHIEF ENGINEER - CAPITAL PROJECT GROUP OF THE
VIRGIN ISLANDS WATER AND POWER AUTHORITY
TO THE COMMITTEE ON DISASTER RECOVERY, INFRASTRUCTURE AND PLANNING
36th LEGISLATURE OF THE U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS ON BILL NO. 36-0206

JANUARY 29, 2026

Good day, Honorable Marise C. James, Chair of the Committee on Disaster Recovery, Infrastructure and Planning, members of the Committee, other Honorable Senators present, and the listening and viewing audience.

I am Noel Hodge, Chief Engineer, Capital Projects Group of the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority (“WAPA” or “the Authority”). Joining me today from the Authority’s team is Don Gregoire, Interim Chief Operating Officer of Water Systems.

We are grateful for the opportunity to provide testimony to you today on Bill No. 36-0206, an act requiring the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority to expand the potable water distribution system, perform necessary upgrades to the existing potable water distribution system, and install fire hydrants in Estate Smith Bay, St. Thomas. I am here today to express WAPA’s general support for the intent of this legislation.

The proposed expansion of potable water service to currently unserved areas of Estate Smith Bay would provide meaningful benefits to residents and businesses. WAPA has also received many requests for potable water service from Smith Bay residents. The primary benefit is to provide a supplemental source of water to the rainwater catchment systems, especially during the annual dry season. Public potable water provides residents with an economical and reliable alternative to bulk water purchases when cisterns are depleted.

Another benefit is that the Smith Bay and Frydendahl communities would be gravity fed by the existing Donoe Water Storage Tank. The Donoe Tank has a capacity of 5.5 million gallons; and it is located 580 feet above sea level. This provides reliable water service and pressure to the East End communities and St. John for approximately 7 to 10 days. Service is maintained to customers during extended power outages caused by windstorm events. The pump station that fills the Donoe Tank is powered by underground electric feeders; and an emergency backup generator is scheduled to be installed in 2026. This operational mode will provide reliable water service during adverse conditions.

The cost to design and install a water distribution system to serve Smith Bay is significant. The cost estimate for the system is \$12,773,103. The Smith Bay and Frydendahl Waterline Extension project calls for the installation of 21,000 linear feet of pipe. Extensive trench excavations in the public roadway and pavement restoration are required. Service lines will be installed to connect approximately 250 customers to the system. For a project of this size, approximately 42 fire hydrants would be installed to meet the International Fire Code.

The overall project schedule is estimated to be approximately 33 months. Significant schedule activities include design and engineering services task order, design and bid documents, competitive bid for construction services, construction and commissioning. We propose extending the proposed one-year turnaround for the project to reflect a more feasible schedule of 33 months.

WAPA continues to face a significant structural financial deficit; as a result, there is currently no internal funding available for this waterline expansion project. WAPA has submitted grant applications for other sources of federal funds including the EPA Drinking Water State Revolving Fund and the FEMA Prudent Replacement Grant. WAPA is following up with federal and local partners; and a decision is expected within the next month.

In summary, WAPA supports the expansion of the water distribution system; and we recognize the benefits to the community. We value the support of the Senate; and we look forward to collaborating with you to build out the drinking water infrastructure.

Thank you for your attention. My colleague and I are available to address any questions you may have at this time.