

Committee on Rules and Judiciary

October 20, 2025

Opening Statement of Mark M. Wiechnik, Esquire - Nominee

Virgin Islands Historic Preservation Commission St. Thomas / St. John District

Good Morning Senator Joseph, members of the Committee, members of the 36th Legislature and those of you in the public audience present here and viewing remotely. Thank you all for the opportunity to speak with you today. I want to thank Governor Bryan for his confidence in nominating me for a position on the Historic Preservation Commission. I will do my best to meet and surpass the expectations set by Governor Bryan with respect to this position.

My wife and I fell in love with the US Virgin Islands after spending our honeymoon on St. John in 2011. In 2016, we, with our son, moved to St. Thomas to own and operate a five room bed and breakfast in a historic property just behind Government House. A year later we, like everyone else in the territory, were devastated by hurricanes Irma and Maria. Despite the hardships, we did not leave the territory. In fact, we worked diligently to help our neighbors and to get our boutique hotel up and running so that we could house people who were traveling to the territory to help us. After the storms we were able to house members of the Department of Energy, Department of Defense, the Salvation Army, Carnival Cruise lines and representatives of Home Depot. We loved the islands before the storms, but we feel like we became full fledged and welcomed members of the community after the storms. Over the last 9+ years, we have made life long friends on St. Thomas and we love living downtown.

My wife and I are members of the St. Thomas Historical Trust and frequent visitors to cultural events and various community functions. I am a member of the Downtown Revitalization Incorporation, which is an effort to unite business owners and residents to bring more life and business opportunities to downtown. My wife has been the Treasurer of the Historic Trust for the last several years, and is a member of the Mungo Niles dance troop. We have always been interested in historic preservation and renovations, having renovated two historic homes in New Jersey.

Last year, we put our money where our mouth was, and we purchased Hotel 1829, an iconic Caribbean property that had been closed for many years. It had no power, no plumbing and no usable guest rooms. We were told by many people that there was no way we would reopen on our schedule, but in only 8 months we were able to open half of the guest rooms and the historic bar to guests. We have done much of the work ourselves to restore this historic gem with help from friends and family and members of the community. We have worked closely with HPC to ensure we were operating within all of the various regulations and asking for advice with respect to colors, windows, doors, and other exterior elements. We have not found the historic regulations or the committee to be a hindrance to progress, but a guardrail that guides our

renovations to ensure that it honors the history of the property and of downtown Charlotte Amalie. It has been our pleasure to welcome back members of the community to the hotel and restaurant, so many of whom have such fond memories of Hotel 1829. We have been honored to welcome Governor Bryan, former Governor DeJongh and members of the Senate to our bar and restaurant as well as the relatives of former owners of the hotel, and many community members who have fond memories of dining or staying with us. We even employ the children of Virgin Islanders that worked at Hotel 1829 in the 1980s and 1990s.

I practiced law in New Jersey for 20 years and much of that work was related to construction defect litigation. As such, I am familiar with building codes, architectural plans and reading and interpreting statutes and regulations. I can effectively communicate and explain complicated legal concepts or regulations and I have an ability to convey those concepts to members of the public and non lawyers. I have a knowledge not only of construction, but historic reconstruction and renovations and maintenance given our extensive work at both of our historic properties.

My goals with respect to my tenure on HPC is to ensure that the upcoming, significant work that is to be undertaken downtown is done properly, efficiently and in a cost effective manner. There are new building technologies that can and should be incorporated into our historic construction, and building techniques that can and should be incorporated into our island construction. Moreover, I would like to change the narrative that HPC is a hindrance to progress, and that compliance with historic regulations always results in higher construction costs and delays. I think our goal should be to work with the members of the public who are actually trying to do the right thing, and trying to fix up some of these damaged and derelict properties, and help them to make the right choices both for historic preservation and for their own budget. I look forward to working with Director Kriger and the other members of the Committee to ensure that we uphold the integrity of the Committee and preserve our unique and vibrant historic architecture.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my nomination.