

Testimony to the 36th Legislature of the US Virgin Islands

Rules and Judiciary Committee

Thursday October 22, 2026

When my godbrother and lifelong friend, Gerville Larsen died suddenly last year, a tremendous void was left in our hearts and in the community. His voluminous contributions to understanding, appreciating and preserving our architectural history was unmatched. I realized that I needed to do my part to continue his work. When Colette Woodson, a member of the HPC invited me to consider joining the Historic Preservation Commission, I accepted. Today, I am here to ask for your support to be nominated to the Historic Preservation Commission.

There have been many people whose labors have brought me here to testify and ask for your support. The first are the enslaved Africans who despite the horrors of slavery produced an architectural legacy that still stands today. Their genius shines not only in the grand manses but in the vernacular cottages dotting our towns – homes where those who managed to free themselves raised families and created opportunities from practically nothing. We see our brilliance when after years of neglect and disrepair, many still stand- testaments to our best selves.

Many others toiled for years, often with no thanks or recognition and even faced with disparagement and disinterest, to steward this legacy so that we have globally recognized historic towns- Christiansted, Frederiksted, Charlotte Amalie and Cruz Bay. There are people who fought to ensure that we did not destroy these towns and face the agony of regret that many of our Caribbean sister islands do- islands that have leveled their architectural legacy only to rebuild towns devoid of character, aesthetic charm and sustainability. We owe a debt of gratitude to those of us that understood and respected what we have made.

Today, thanks to the years of efforts of many, we have organizations like CHANTVI and VI Architectural Center, the St. Croix Foundation and, of course, the Historic Preservation Commission who have taken up the mantle. While the HPC's mission is often construed as an impediment to economic growth and its requirements burdensome, the truth is the complete opposite. The HPC is an incredible resource for property owners in the historic districts. They function as free consultants- offering information on building materials, paint colors, building plans and the like.

I will assist the HPC in fulfilling its core mission principles of preservation, rehabilitation, restoration & reconstruction. These principles have been hard at work within the organizations mentioned above- CHANTVI's restoration and reconstruction of several buildings in Frederiksted, VIAC's mission to restore the former barracks in Christiansted and the St Croix Foundation's years' long improvements to Sunday Market Square, the Scrape and Paint program & their continued work to Alexander Theater and the surrounding environs. These endeavors point to the importance of the HPC's mission and its direct benefit to the community- training young people in the arts and crafts of historic preservation, employing local tradesmen and craftsmen, creating equity for property owners and adding to the tax base for the government. Historic preservation is inspired by the past and builds the future.