



News Release

Virgin Islands Port Authority
Office of the Executive Director
Public Relations Department
P.O. Box 301707
St. Thomas, VI 00803

Tel: (340) 774-1629
Tel: (340) 714-6640 / 714-6639
Fax: (340) 714-1492 / 774-0025
E-mail: info@viport.com
Internet: www.viport.com

For Immediate Release
February 21, 2011

Contact: Monifa A. Marrero
Public Information Officer
Cell: (340) 244-1065

VIPA Forestalls Bourne Field Eviction Date by 60 Days at Special Session

The Governing Board of Directors met 9 a.m. today for a special session to discuss its November 2010 decision to evict the tenants of Bourne Field by March 31st due to increasing safety and health hazards at the housing community. After receiving several reports and concerns from residents as well as housing and government officials that residents were having difficulties finding alternate housing, the board decided to hold a special meeting to reassess its decision and subsequently postponed the eviction date. Residents of Bourne Field will be allowed to stay in their rented apartments for at least another 60 days to allow the board time to review the results of a structural integrity and condemnation report and to receive a completed assessment of household information.

Virgin Islands Port Authority Executive Director Kenn Hobson said that while the eviction date was postponed, the Board is still very concerned with the safety issues and structural stability of the houses in Bourne Field. The board's decision today included a provision that specifically excluded three units in Bourne Field which routinely experience severe flooding during heavy rains. Hobson said the eviction of the residents of those three units would be handled separately from the other residents.

The Bourne Field apartments, which were built in the late 1940's as barracks for navy officers on St. Thomas, have been subject to extreme flooding and roof leaks over the years which have damaged the units. Hobson said that repairing a single unit to meet Virgin Islands building code would cost upwards of \$150,000 per unit and would not be an effective use of VIPA's limited financial resources which are earmarked for the territory's port and facility operation and improvements. Hobson added that the units have been uninsurable since the mid 1990's and are a serious liability risk to the agency. VIPA is a semi-autonomous agency which has unlimited liability unlike other government agencies and authorities which have limited liability of up to \$25,000.

Board Chairman Robert O'Connor urged staff to work closely with the Bourne Field tenants' association, and for staff to produce a report at next month's board meeting regarding how many tenants have complied with VIPA's request to submit household income and size information to qualify for public housing and affordable home-ownership programs. Staff was also directed to assess the possibility of increasing the six-month's rent incentive offered to tenants that vacate their units.

In a separate agenda item, the board voted to form a special committee to address the issue of the VI Port Authority's possible merger with the West Indian Company as proposed by Governor John deJongh in his State of the Territory Address delivered in January. The ad-hoc committee will consist of Tourism Commissioner Beverly Nicholson-Doty, Gordon Finch of St. Croix, Cassan Pancham of St. Thomas and selected VIPA staff members to be determined at a later date.

The board also instructed staff to postpone a scheduled meeting with officials of the Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association (F-CCA) to review the VI Port Authority's rates and charges in lieu of a pending bill proposed by the VI Legislature to implement a head tax to all cruise passengers visiting the territory. Tourism Commissioner Nicholson-Doty said that she felt the meeting between VIPA and senators of the VI Legislature should be held prior to any meetings with the F-CCA to prevent any miscommunication about the fee structure, and to have a unified government presentation of the rates and charges to the constituents that include the territory in their cruise itineraries.

###