

Rules Committee moves 6 bills to full Senate

By ALDETH LEWIN
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ST. THOMAS — The Senate Rules and Judiciary Committee passed six bills on to the full body Wednesday, including a bill to create a feed-in tariff program that would allow people to sell excess renewable energy to the V.I. Water and Power Authority.

One bill, to offer tax breaks for people or businesses that install renewable energy systems, was held in committee because a proposed amendment to the bill was not yet ready.

Feed-in tariff bill

Sen. Craig Barshinger has been working on the feed-in tariff legislation for years. The bill will allow a person or entity to produce renewable or alternative energy and sell the excess to WAPA.

A substantial amendment was added to the bill Wednesday, clarifying definitions and language.

Unlike net-metering, in which energy fed into the system earns a one-to-one credit when power must be pulled from the grid, the feed-in tariff would sell power to WAPA at the utility's avoided cost, which is less than customers would spend to

purchase power from WAPA.

Under the amended bill, a feed-in tariff system must be bigger than 100 kilowatts but less than 500 kilowatts.

Money for hospitals

The committee approved a bill, sponsored by Sen. Tregenza Roach, that will take all revenue generated by captive insurance companies doing business in the territory and, after administrative expenses are deducted, give the money to V.I. hospitals.

The captive insurance program is new, and has not yet attracted much business. Government officials do not know how much money could be funneled to the hospitals if the legislation is enacted.

Captive insurance essentially is an in-house insurance company with a limited purpose and is not available to the general public. It is an alternative form of risk management, through which a company can protect itself financially while having more control over how it is insured.

Under the new law, a captive insurance company must pay the V.I. government a \$5,000 application fee and a licensing fee ranging from \$2,000 to \$10,000, all of which goes into the government's coffers.

Roach's bill would divert that money to help cover the cost of uncompensated care at Luis and Schneider hospitals.

The money would be split evenly between the two facilities.

Sen. Janette Millin Young said the measure is good as a long-term plan, but the dire financial position of the territory's hospitals must be addressed with more immediate action.

Enterprise Zones

Senators approved an amendment in the nature of a substitute plus several other changes to proposed legislation designed to strengthen the enterprise zones and create a commercial zone, offering incentives for investment in some of the territory's most blighted areas.

The bill, sponsored by Sen. Janette Millin Young, originally contained a provision for the government to take blighted properties in the enterprise zones through eminent domain to fix them up and make the areas nicer, but that section of the bill has been removed.

The territory's enterprise zones are Savan and Charlotte Amalie on St. Thomas and Christiansted and Frederiksted. The program provides tax incentives to breathe new life into

neighborhoods that have declined from once being socially and economically vibrant communities.

In the new version, the bill seeks to codify Gov. John deJongh Jr.'s executive order expanding the enterprise zones in the territory.

The measure also would create a commercial zone, which would offer incentives and tax breaks for people who want to invest and develop the town areas.

Parental involvement

A bill to allow parents to spend time in their child's school with pay from their job advanced to the full Senate for consideration.

The legislation is sponsored by Senators Clarence Payne III and Myron Jackson and entitles parents and guardians with students enrolled in private, public or parochial schools to a maximum of two hours off from their jobs each month without loss of pay to visit their children, teachers, counselors or other school related officials.

Bullying and gang prevention

Rules Committee members voted in favor of a bill to create a bullying prevention and gang resistance education and training program within the V.I. Education Department.

The bill, sponsored by Sen. Diane Capehart, appropriates \$10,000 from the V.I. Education Initiative Fund in Fiscal Year 2014 to begin the program.

Education officials had urged the Legislature not to implement the measure because if it is included in local law, it must be funded with local money. While that would not result in the loss of federal funds, the department would not be able to use federal funds for bullying or gang prevention programs, according to previous Senate testimony.

Insurance payments

A bill, sponsored by Barshinger, closes a loophole in the V.I. code relating to health insurance payments. Under the proposed legislation, health insurance payments must be made directly to the provider.

All bills were passed unanimously and forwarded to the full body for further consideration. Committee members at Wednesday's hearing were Senators Donald Cole, Jackson, Samuel Sanes and Young.

Capehart and Senators Kenneth Gittens and Shawn-Michael Malone were absent.

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Port Authority approves Crown Bay dredging, pier expansion

By JENNY KANE
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ST. THOMAS — The V.I. Port Authority board approved two major task orders for improvement projects planned for the Crown Bay area on St. Thomas.

The board approved a \$512,200 order that will enable CDR Maguire, Inc., a national civil engineering firm based in Florida, to proceed with the expansion of the Crown Bay pier, an improvement that the Port Authority believes will further accommodate cruise lines using the port. CDR Maguire will work with the Port Authority to design the expansion, which will fill a large gap at the end of the current pier configuration.

"There's a piece that breaks the symmetry of the whole thing," said Dale Gregory, director of engineering for the authority.

The board also approved a \$449,000 task order to allow CDR Maguire to move forward with the dredging of Crown Bay, which the Port Authority hopes to have complete by November this year, when the territory begins its high season in tourism.

The dredging will take up more than 12,600 cubic yards of material from Crown Bay, all of which is expected to be disposed of at the St.

Croix quarry site. Two part-time monitors, one on St. Thomas and one on St. Croix, will oversee the disposal, according to the order.

CDR Maguire will serve as the design partner for the Port Authority through the pier expansion and the dredging and will prepare the necessary documents and services needed for the projects, according to the orders. The Port Authority expects to receive its Army Corps of Engineers permit for the dredging project in the next two months.

CDR Maguire is expected to provide estimates of the total cost for the dredging project and the pier expansion.

The Port Authority also has been in discussion with Bioimpact, Inc., which will oversee the acoustic monitoring and seagrass mitigation efforts during the projects, according to Bioimpact's proposal.

Solar panels

The Port Authority board also approved an amended request for proposals seeking professional services including the design, furnishing and installation of photovoltaic panels at King Airport on St. Thomas and Rohlsen Airport on St. Croix. The proponents are asked to provide proposals that would generate up to 5 megawatts of solar power at each airport.



Workers dredge the bay near the cruise ship dock in Crown Bay in January 2007. The V.I. Port Authority approved a task order to dredge the bay again this summer.

The Port Authority intends to negotiate an energy performance contract, in which the company that is awarded the request would provide, install and maintain the panels during the term of the contract at no cost to the Port Authority. The costs

and fees are to be recovered by the savings generated by the installation of the panels, according to the RFP.

Fish market

The board also approved the transfer of 8,205 square feet of land

at Enighed Pond in Cruz Bay, St. John, to the V.I. Department of Planning and Natural Resources. The land is expected to be used for a fish market, according to the transfer documents.

The relocation of the market from the Creek Area in Cruz Bay is hoped to stop the "mixed operations" of charter and commercial boats and passenger ferries with local fishermen.

Rescue vehicle

The governing board approved the purchase of a \$17,240 aircraft rescue and firefighting vehicle. The vehicle would replace the existing vehicle, which is more than a decade old and has served its life in accordance with the Federal Aviation Administration regulations.

The new vehicle would be stationed at King Airport on St. Thomas.

Bard members present at Wednesday's meeting were Attorney General Vincent Frazer; Manuel Gutierrez Jr.; Tourism Commissioner Beverly Nicholson-Doty; Robert O'Connor; Public Works Commissioner Darryl Smalls; and Yvonne Thraen. Labor Commissioner Albert Bryan Jr. and Allison Patrus were absent.

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