

VIHA Tenant Debt Climbs to \$1.1 Million as Board Pushes for Stronger Collection Strategy

Even with an 88 percent February collection rate totaling \$442,000, VIHA said unpaid tenant balances rose by \$25,000 to \$1.1 million, with St. Thomas properties carrying the largest share as commissioners pressed for stronger collection action.

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The Oswald Harris Court housing community in St. Thomas, a VIHA property. By. ODR.

The V.I. Housing Authority used its Wednesday board meeting to outline a mixed picture of the agency's current position, with officials reporting progress on hurricane recovery work and national recognition for a top-performing housing program, while also confronting a growing tenant debt burden that commissioners said requires a more aggressive response. The meeting also

included updates on redevelopment efforts, FEMA-funded recovery projects, and a farewell to a departing commissioner.

VIHA Executive Director Dwayne Alexander told commissioners that while the agency recorded an 88 percent rent collection rate in February, representing \$442,000, outstanding tenant payments still increased by \$25,000 during the month. Total tenant debt now stands at \$1.1 million, with the majority tied to VIHA properties on St. Thomas.

Board Commissioner Noreen Michael said a more “actionable strategy” should be developed urgently to address the growing debt balance. In the meantime, the board approved the write-off of \$71,748 in debt owed by tenants who have vacated their units.

According to Alexander, the write-off is a “strictly accounting adjustment” for uncollectible accounts, including cases involving deceased tenants or individuals who have left the territory.

“This action does not forgive the debt,” he said, emphasizing that people with outstanding balances remain ineligible for future housing assistance until those debts are paid in full.

Despite the financial concerns, commissioners were told that VIHA’s Housing Choice Voucher program recently received a “high performance” designation from the federal Housing and Urban Development Department. The program earned 138 out of a possible 140 points for the fiscal year ending in December 2025, marking the second consecutive year it has received that recognition.

Officials said there are more than 4,300 applications currently on the waiting list for the Housing Choice Voucher program. However, VIHA is now concentrating on its “Right to Return” initiative tied to the Estate Donoe redevelopment. The program is focused on identifying and verifying eligible households displaced by Hurricane Marilyn in 1995 and the 2017 hurricanes before the waiting list for units is opened to the general public after March 31.

Chief Operating Officer Lydia Pelle also updated commissioners on the status of several long-running recovery projects. She said demolition is continuing at the Estate Tutu High Rise complex, while debris from the site is being recycled and shipped off-island to avoid placing additional strain on local landfills.

Board Commissioners were also informed that 80 percent of Federal Emergency Management Agency funding allocated for Hurricane Irma recovery has already been spent, while only 13 percent of the money designated for Hurricane Maria recovery has been expended. In all, VIHA received nearly \$238 million from FEMA for hurricane recovery efforts.

As part of that ongoing work, board members approved a \$628,472 contract for Continental Construction and Engineering LLC to repair the hurricane-damaged roof at the Lucinda Millin Home for seniors.

Commissioner George raised concerns about possible project delays, but Pelle told the board that construction contracts include liquidated damages provisions and that the modernization department conducts regular oversight to help keep work on schedule.

The board also received a brief presentation from a representative of HUD’s Office of Public and Indian Housing, who outlined six primary focus areas for the administration this year. Those priorities include directing HUD assistance to United States citizens, encouraging work and economic self-sufficiency among residents, repositioning public housing into sustainable platforms, and promoting deregulation and local control, among other goals.

Before adjourning Wednesday's meeting, commissioners said goodbye to Commissioner Eugene Jones, who announced last month that he was [resigning from the V.I. Housing Finance Authority](#).

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