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Surplus Transformers Puzzle WAPA Board as It Approves \$4 Million Contract for Upgrades

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Transformer and power line on a utility pole. By. GETTY IMAGES

Thursday's meeting of the Governing Board of the Water & Power Authority featured a lengthy discussion on a procurement contract for new transformers meant to service the underground cabling network currently being built out in several key areas, including Hannah's Rest, Frederiksted, the Queen Mary Highway, and customers served by Feeder 9 in St. Thomas.

Two bidders put in for the contract to procure the pad-mounted liquid-filled transformers, with Miami-based PECO International Electric ultimately recommended for the award. Board members were informed that the 117 new transformers, mounted on the ground instead of on poles, would be much more resilient to adverse weather conditions than the ones they would replace.

Even if the transformers do sustain damage in hurricanes, getting them back online would be easier since maintenance crews would not need bucket trucks to access the transformers for service or repair.

The board approved the contract for just over \$4 million. PECO estimates that it will take 18 months to get the transformers to the territory.

WAPA's board also mulled over what to do with the large surplus of transformers it still has on hand that are unable to be used with the territory's electrical grid, deciding to explore ways of liquidating the excess — which do not operate on the same voltages as the USVI's power grid — to facilitate the purchase of additional transformers that the utility can actually use.

The origin of the FEMA-funded purchase of the unusable transformers proved a mystery to the board. "Someone ordered them and we wound up with a large surplus of them," said Ashley Bryan, WAPA's Chief Operating Officer.

The board also approved a no-cost time extension for the Midland Underground Project, pushing back the scheduled completion date from May to December 31, 2023. Manufacturing and shipping issues have delayed the arrival of key components, slowing down progress, the board heard.

A new contract for cabling work was approved for Phase 1 of the Feeder 8B undergrounding project. Haugland VI, which was the only bidder out of eight potential companies, nevertheless scored 95.5 out of 100 on the assessment scale, demonstrating its suitability to carry out the works, said Matthias Clark from WAPA's Project Management Division. The cabling-only project was "low-hanging fruit for the slew of underground projects" in the pipeline, Mr. Clark said.

The board consented to the \$2.2 million contract awarded to Haugland for cabling along Emancipation Drive from the Melvin Evans Highway down to Fisher Street in Frederiksted town.