**U.S. Virgin Islands**

**Governor’s Hurricane & Resiliency Advisory Group**

Proposed guiding principles for recovery & reconstruction efforts.

**Background**

A key goal of reconstruction efforts following the recent hurricane should include the application of best practices in healthy community design to support increased active transportation (walking bicycling, and transit use) throughout the territory. This offers the following benefits:

* The population can engage in more physically active transportation which can help reduce chronic disease risk (e.g. cardiovascular disease, Type II diabetes, obesity, osteoporosis, clinical depression, dementia, cancer), and associated social and economic burdens. At the most basic level improved health offers improved quality of life, but it also costs less.
* Healthy design principles lead to more economically robust and vibrant retail and mixed-use districts, in part by shortening the distance people have to travel for goods, services, work and recreation. For example, more walkable districts generate more revenue per retail square foot than lower density (spread out) “box” stores.
* More mixed and localized economies (e.g. neighborhood retail near housing) also allows for easier access to critical goods and services immediately following a severe weather event. Mixed neighborhood clusters will become natural focal points for recovery efforts and delivery of critical needs and materials, and may be more easily served than a morediffues and low-density population.
* Reduced dependence on motor vehicles can lead to less paved surface areas dedicated to roadways and parking, and commensurate reductions in impervious surfaces and storm water run-off, especially during heavy rain events. More natural surfaces, including the use of Low Impact Development (LID) principles in transportation design (such as natural swales and rain gardens) can aid with natural storm water infiltration and reduce localized flooding.
* From a broader environmental perspective, this can help reduce the territory’s contribution to greenhouse gases emissions; this is a critical global goal given the islands’ vulnerability to the severe weather events and sea level rise accompanying global warming.
* A more mixed transportation system will be less completely dependent on motor vehicles, and may prove more resilience and provide some travel options even if roads become impassable to cars.

Develop the infrastructure in the U.S. Virgin Islands to represent street designs and continuous connectivity for pedestrians and bicycles.

* Institute a reliable public transit system with adequate bus and rest stops to encourage non-vehicular travel.
* Change policies/building codes to require newly built commercial establishments to build closer to streets and input/maintain sidewalks that connect to main roads
* Make streets safe and accessible by adding features that encourage walking/bicycling e.g. lighting, sidewalks, curb extensions, median islands, roundabouts.
* Implement mix land use policies where feasible.
* Educate the community on pedestrian safety and the benefits of walking.
* Ensure the built environment in proximity to schools are pedestrian safe and conducive to walking.