



**Ministry of Planning,
Agriculture, Housing
& Infrastructure**

Cayman Islands Government

**Presentation by
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Minister of Planning, Agriculture, Housing and Infrastructure**

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Honourable Members,

It is my privilege to again address this Honourable House, as I provide an update to the people of these beloved Islands, on the projects and initiatives in the departments and entities under our portfolios and in this case, the Ministry of Planning, Agriculture, Housing and Infrastructure.

Mister Speaker,

I refer to our portfolios because, while each of my colleagues has a ministerial or parliamentary secretarial responsibility under the constitution, in the end, we have a collective responsibility.

We take this collective responsibility seriously because, ultimately, it is not about what each minister or parliamentary secretary can achieve individually, but instead, how, we can effectively work as a team to bring about positive and long-lasting outcomes for the people. After-all, **Mister Speaker**, we are ultimately responsible and accountable to the people.

This commitment to accountability and responsibility are also backed by the PACT government's ongoing transparency, which you, as well as the people of these Islands, will acknowledge from the published Cabinet meeting summaries.

Mister Speaker, I also want to acknowledge Parliamentary Secretaries Dwayne John John Seymour, Isaac Rankine and Kathy Ebanks-Wilks who provide a high level of support on a number of initiatives involving the areas of agriculture, housing as well as technical vocational, education and training.

Mister Speaker, while I am thanking all of the people of the Cayman Islands for the opportunity to represent these Islands, it would be remiss of me not to also say a special thank you to my North Side constituents. They were the people responsible for putting me in this seat. I want to thank them for the level of trust and confidence that they have in me. And because I see our collective roles as a privilege offered to us by the people, I promise to serve them with respect, dignity, dedication.

In addition, Mister **Speaker**, I also want to take the time to state that I owe a debt of gratitude to my wife, my children, family and friends for their understanding and support. Without this support, I would not have been able to work as effectively as I have done with this dynamic, PACT team. Some of my colleagues across the hall can relate to this too because some of you may have also been in positions where they may have had to work long hours away from their families.

So, **Mister Speaker**, I truly thank my family for their support.

Mister Speaker, having described the support I am grateful to have the PACT team's approach to accountability, collective responsibility and transparency, I will now lay out some of the things we have achieved working together, which are aligned with the PACT Government's Broad Strategic Outcomes. We have been focusing on over the past year and a half.

These include:

- **Providing solutions to improve the well-being of Caymanians so they can achieve their full potential –** through strengthening of our agricultural sector to enhance national food security, affordable housing, training our young

people under the Public Works Department Apprenticeship Training Programme, and utilizing technology to streamline processes at our public facing departments for greater efficiency and service delivery.

- **Building a modern infrastructure to ensure a successful future for our Islands-** improving our road network, while acknowledging the processes set out in the National Conservation Council Directive.

Mister Speaker, it is the following of those processes that the people complained about with previous administrations.

Where were the meetings with the public? Where was the consultation with the Department of Environment and the National Trust of the Cayman Islands?

Well, **Mister Speaker**, not only did the National Roads Authority take the initiative to invite the Department of Environment to a meeting and discuss their concerns and requirements for an environmental impact study, the NRA has followed the rules of the NCC to a tee, even explaining on a live on-air show, the initial steps involved in the study. Public meetings will also be held in the future

to explain the steps again and take questions from members of the public.

In addition, **Mister Speaker**, the NRA and members of this Ministry have had several meetings with representatives from the National Trust of the Cayman Islands, hearing their detailed concerns.

Mister Speaker, we have done and are doing all of this as a team because it is always at the forefront of our minds who we ultimately work for and we aim to be an accountable, responsible and transparent government.

We have also taken steps to address the storm water management framework, which, according to documents that I have seen, was supposed to have been addressed many years ago under previous administrations.

Knowing that our job is to work for the people, **Mister Speaker**, the PACT Government is now working on proposals that will result in more accountability from early on in the planning stages when it comes to proper stormwater management solutions. There will be rules and guidelines and consequences for breaches of those rules and guidelines.

And when it comes to stormwater management, **Mister Speaker**, it is not just about all the work we are doing with additional drains, putting them on a periodic cleaning schedule and the NRA publishing the schedule online so members of different communities can see. It is also about options in addition to drains that make the storm water management framework sustainable and in the best interests of our people for the long term.

Again, I thank the Premier, the Minister of Sustainability and his team for their input with respect to this framework- both from an environmental and sustainability perspective.

Now, when it comes to infrastructure, **Mister Speaker**, we have also been taking the time to develop our internet and telecommunications sector.

Regarding this, we are looking at a number of options, we want to see Cayman have a world class infrastructure when it comes to internet and telecommunications.

It is through such investments that the Cayman Islands can stay ahead of the game and be a leader in communications and not a follower.

Internet and telecommunications options will also help us to become more resilient, especially those options that may allow us to remain in communication even immediately following a natural disaster.

This not only keeps us connected to the world, Mister Speaker, but gives businesses comfort about business continuity, disaster recovery and preparedness plans.

Some of the initiatives, led by my Ministry, which will improve the quality of life for all in the Cayman Islands include:

- Supporting the strengthening and modernisation of the agricultural sector;
- Increasing investment in and awareness of technical, vocational education and training;
- Provision of quality affordable housing;

- Increasing the number of parks, civic centres and multi-purpose halls within our communities;
- Providing funding for land acquisition for agricultural purposes; and

Mister Speaker, let me begin my updates with the **Department of Agriculture**, which will contribute to Government's broad outcome to provide solutions to improve the well-being for our people so they can achieve their full potential.

The issues of agriculture and food security are at the forefront in the minds of many Caymanians and the gov. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as ongoing threats to global food supplies caused by the war in Europe and climate change, we are feeling the effects in high food prices and empty supermarket shelves for many commodities.

Mister Speaker, the Ministry and the Department of Agriculture continue to tackle these issues head on.

In doing so, our approach is not to just react to the impacts, but to carefully plan in advance in the event of a range of eventualities,

especially natural disasters, world events and pandemics like I mentioned before.

This approach of carefully planning requires us to work strategically as a team.

Our team has also discussed partnerships with local and international stakeholders.

The aim of all of this, **Mister Speaker**, is to enhance long-term food security, not just for us, Mister Speaker, but for generations to come.

All of our efforts, **Mister Speaker**, will hopefully lead to an expansion and diversity of our food sources, while at the same time strengthening and modernizing our agriculture sector.

And in doing this, we must become both food secure and nutrition secure, **Mister Speaker**.

To achieve diversity and security, **Mister Speaker**, the Ministry has been actively working with international stakeholders, as I say.

In saying this, it is important that we not only work with existing stakeholders but grow with new partners.

Mister Speaker, this is especially important given that over eighty percent of our food supply mainly comes from the United States.

Regarding this, we have already seen the challenges that can arise when we do not have a variety of options and rely mainly on one jurisdiction. People panic and rush the supermarkets because, **Mister Speaker**, their food security seems uncertain.

The exploration of additional food security options, **Mister Speaker**, has therefore been focused on expanding intra-regional trade, critical to our long-term food security and economic stability.

It also reflects the PACT government's acknowledgement of the need for diversity, given the now, very diverse population of the Cayman Islands.

Mister Speaker, in light of this direction, we have been having discussions with neighboring countries Honduras, Jamaica and others with the aim of sourcing affordable, fresh and nutritious food closer to home.

Being close to home may mean a shorter transportation time-frame and avoiding our goods having to sit and wait in several different ports before they get to us.

If we can reduce the transportation lag, **Mister Speaker**, it may mean a longer shelf life for goods in the supermarkets, should the supermarkets agree that this could be beneficial for the people.

As a result, **Mister Speaker**, the Ministry's team had a fruitful scoping mission to Honduras in June, whereas we are now looking to have a direct shipping route between the Cayman Islands and Honduras.

We are working closely with the private sector to ascertain the needs of the Islands and to assist and support the logistics to make the trade bridge as smooth and as possible.

We cannot do this without working together with these partners.

Mister Speaker, our meetings with counterparts in Jamaica have made great progress. In May this year, under a new import export arrangement between our Islands and Jamaica, we broadened the

list of agricultural list of imported produce to include plantain, breadfruit, soursop as well as frozen ackees.

The demand for some of these newly added produce have exceeded what we grow locally. Until sufficient supply is produced locally, Jamaica offers a good alternative as it is closer than other countries that we import similar items.

Let me be clear **Mister Speaker**, we have worked closely with the Agricultural Society, the farmers and importers to ensure that local produce takes priority, and that overseas products will only supplement demand.

In the meantime, **Mister Speaker**, we will continue to provide our farmers with the resources needed to strengthen their resilience to boost the Islands food and nutrition security.

We are very thankful **Mister Speaker** that members of farming community did not suffer any major loss or damage from the effects of Hurricane Ian last week. We have a few reports of loss to vegetable crops such as tomatoes and hot peppers due to flooding but nothing substantial, **Mister Speaker**.

Last year **Mister Speaker**, Tropical Storm Grace badly impacted the Islands causing extensive damage to the agricultural sector, particularly to crops, with an estimated 60 to 90 percent of fruit trees affected.

Our Ministry responded with the Tropical Storm Grace Farmers' Assistance Project to provide relief to commercial farmers who suffered loss of income and livestock, damage to crops and farm infrastructure. A total of **\$3 million dollars** was made available to **one hundred and twenty four** commercial farmers, who were able to get their farms back up and going with minor repairs or to their damaged infrastructure and return to production.

Mister Speaker, what has previous government done for the farmers of these islands? Tell me what they have done? Not withstanding the fact that some of them are farmers themselves.

They prefer to help themselves than the poor suffering farmers, **Mister Speaker**. This is the difference in the PACT Government. Making sure that no farmer is left behind.

Mister Speaker, as I had previously stated in this Honourable House, the Government through the Ministry, is also providing

additional grants to the Cayman Islands Agricultural Society. We have increased our grant funding to the Society for the employment of two more staff members to provide greater assistance to the farming community.

Again **Mister Speaker**, when the previous government has the audacity to say we aren't doing anything to help our farmers they need to stay out of Alice in Wonderland.

Mister Speaker, the Government has also provided funding in the amount of **CI\$350,000.00** for the importation of livestock – primarily cattle and goats to our Islands. This is in keeping with our efforts to improve our quality of livestock for the Cayman Islands.

A total of **ninety-two** cattle have already been imported from the United States with a batch of **forty-seven** scheduled to arrive this month. In addition, approximately **two hundred and forty-seven** goats have been purchased from Bluff Farms in Cayman Brac and have been made available for sale to farmers at a reduced price.

Mister Speaker, to coincide with the importation of cattle from overseas, in May the Ministry rolled out the National Livestock Identification and Tracking System. The system tracks livestock

and include information on identity, ownership and geographic location. All information collected is stored electronically under the control of the Department of Agriculture.

I am pleased to report **Mister Speaker** that **one hundred and seventy three** livestock have been tagged to date (125 cattle/48 goats). Visual ear tags have been affixed to each animal with plans in place for an animal passport containing the same identification number as that on the ear tags to be issued to the owner.

This National Livestock Identification and Livestock System will bring the Cayman Islands in line with international standards in farm to consumer supply chain that is trackability.

Mister Speaker, it is anticipated that in the future when the tracking system is fully implemented, livestock in all three islands will be equipped with electronic identification tags, so that the movement of these animals, whether by sale or disposal by other means will be monitored by the system.

Mister Speaker, another practical step that I have taken in support of our farming sector is the acquisition of an excavator to clear farm lands.

When I held various meetings with the farmers, they informed me that they have been asking for this piece of equipment for over twenty years.

Today, we can tell our farmers that the excavator is finally here, Once again the PACT Government has listened and delivered on their promise to the farmers.

The new excavator valued over CI \$350,000 will provide a well needed service in terms of the land preparation programme delivered through Department of Agriculture. The equipment, which comes with a Class 4 heavy duty hammer and bucket will assist farmers in making their land more usable for farming.

Mister Speaker, I have mentioned in this Honourable House before that credit must also be given to Honourable Minister Juliana O'Connor-Connolly for not kicking the can down the road but getting the business case started for this equipment to be purchased. Ms. Julie, on behalf of the farmers, again I want to say thank you for your efforts.

And there is more to come, **Mister Speaker**. The Ministry and government is now in the process of purchasing a truck to provide delivery services to the farming community for large volume of agricultural supplies purchased at the Department of Agriculture's commercial centre.

I cannot emphasise it enough, we have to provide support and make sure we take care of our farming community.

Mister Speaker, working to ensure that our Islands will have adequate and accessible local food supply for generations to come is an important priority for my Ministry and the PACT Government.

It is with this in mind that we continue to focus on:

- **The National Egg Strategy**- A national certification/licensing standard has been completed to certify all egg farms and farmers. The aim is to enhance market access for our egg producers by improving food safety.

The Ministry has also started the procurement process for equipment to assist farmers so that they can meet the certification requirements.

And we have recruited a well-experienced poultry expert who will be working with the poultry farmers to meet the certification standards.

Mister Speaker,

- **The Cattle Breeding Programme** - The Ministry has acquired the inputs necessary to lead to more animals being bred by artificial insemination. We have also bought three bulls to provide breeding services to local cows. These bulls will serve as an enhancement both for the artificial insemination and embryo transfer technology programme.

Mister Speaker, for the first time in Cayman history that we will be able to do embryo transfer, improving our livestock genetics.

Mister Speaker, I just want to mention that through our bilateral talks with our counterparts in Jamaica, we made an agreement with HI-PRO, a division of Jamaica Broilers Limited and leader in the region on livestock reproduction medicine, for them to undertake a full assessment of the local livestock programme.

The aim is for us to receive recommendations to modernise our livestock sector as well as technical support to benefit our farmers.

An immediate win **Mister Speaker** is that **six** of our Caymanian vets and clinical staff will receive further training before the end of this year in the areas of artificial insemination and embryo transfer technology and practice. Training and upskilling Caymanians to support the Department's livestock genetic improvement programme is an important part of Government's plans, **Mister Speaker**.

- **The Cayman Brac Stud Bull Programme** – We are introducing the programme in the Cayman Brac as a way to assist farmers to improve the genetic quality of their cattle. The Department of Agriculture has been working closely with the Public Works Department to construct a holding and breeding facility for the stud bull, which is expected to arrive in short order. Once on island, farmers will be able to make arrangements to bring their heifers and cows to the facility to be serviced. This strategy is expected to increase herd quality and size by at least fifty percent in the next three years.

- **National School Garden Programme** – For our Islands to have a successful future in agriculture, we have to involve our youth. In light of this, Cabinet has approved CI\$30,000 to support a school garden programme in all our public primary and high schools. Under this programme, it is anticipated that we will expose 200 students to agriculture. It is important that we show our young people that farming can be a rewarding career as well as highlight the important role of agriculture on a local and global scale.
- **The Cayman Islands Agricultural Business Information System** – This includes the development of a platform to collect, store and display key agricultural data to provide real time information on agricultural sector to assist in policy development, budget building, among other things.

Mister Speaker, the system was launched this year and I am pleased to note that data have been collected for approximately **471** farmers on Grand Cayman and **113** in the Sister Islands.

*Progress, **Mister Speaker**. We are making progress in strengthening and modernizing our agricultural sector.*

Mister Speaker, our policy team and legislative drafters are preparing the necessary documents to support the legal and regulatory framework for the development and modernization of the agriculture sector. These include:

- **Agricultural Land Lease Policy** – The first draft of the policy which aims to provide crown land to the farming community at an affordable cost will be ready next month. **Mister Speaker**, do you know we are talking about land that was purchased almost 20 years ago for the same thing we are talking about right now? And the opposition sitting down there saying that we aren't doing anything.
- **Cayman Islands Food and Nutrition Security Policy** – draft policy is complete and consultations meetings have been scheduled for October to November in all the districts across Grand Cayman as well as the Sister Islands.

Mister Speaker, we have reached out to my colleague Members of Parliament with the respective dates for the meetings in their constituencies and we are expecting their full support. Additionally, the schedule of meetings will be widely shared with the general public so we can have their input in this very important document.

It is anticipated that the policy document will be finalised and presented to Cabinet by the first quarter of 2023.

In addition **Mister Speaker**, both the Animals and Plant Protection Laws are being revised while instructions have been given for the drafting of Pesticide Control and the Agricultural Bill which are being prepared. The Ministry's target is to have these bills before Parliament by the end of the Financial Year 2022/2023.

Turning to another area that is a major priority for me and this Government - the provision of quality affordable housing solutions for fellow Caymanians.

Mister Speaker, our Government is committed to empowering the National Housing Development Trust (NHDT) to increase the number of houses across districts. Since my last presentation made to this Honourable House, much progress has been made in this area.

Mister Speaker, the NHDT has completed the **7** houses in East End and 3 in Bodden Town. The Trust is now in the process of

having these houses assigned to homeowners, who have been waiting on this opportunity.

As it relates to the North Side Housing development, **Mister Speaker**, work is progressing well at the 12-acre site where we broke ground for **forty-five** housing lots in December. The subdivision plan was approved earlier this year and the Trust is now concentrating on the installation of the water pipeline and road infrastructure.

Mister Speaker, we know that slowest points of a development is the infrastructure, once that is done building the homes is not the problem

Mister Speaker, I am also pleased to share with the Honourable Members that we will shortly break ground for Phase III of the Lighthouse Garden housing development in West Bay. (The groundbreaking was delayed due to Islands' recent period of national mourning).

Phase III will fully complete the 9.5 acre property that currently has thirty-six affordable houses for our Caymanian people.

Unlike previous administrations Mister Speaker, where affordable homes were built with cheap materials, the team at the NHDT have assured me that the new house models are being built with better quality materials and infrastructure. Some are also slightly bigger than the affordable homes built under previous administrations.

Further, **Mister Speaker**, the plan is to make those affordable homes energy efficient and equip them with amenities that will contribute to their overall value.

We take this approach, Mister Speaker, because we are not just building homes. We are building communities where people can be proud of and thrive in.

Mister Speaker, aligned with the goal to make home ownership more affordable, we are also taking steps with the rest of the PACT team, including my colleague, the Minister of Finance, Chris Saunders, to make these homes more accessible.

On the affordability front, the people-driven PACT government realized that many of our Caymanians are earning less than \$3,000 per month (according to the data from the recent Census and statistics from the Economics & Statistics Office) and cannot qualify

or afford to borrow at the high lending rates at some financial institutions.

To assist with this, the NHDT Board approved an interest rate adjustment (to match prime lending rate) for **seventeen existing tenants** in the lease to own programme. The interest rate adjustment will also be applied retroactively.

This is a measure that will greatly assist the **seventeen tenants** at the East End, Windsor Park and the West Bay Lighthouse Garden locations.

All of these **existing tenants**, who will receive this benefit of the interest rate and retroactive adjustment are over the age of 55 years. In keeping with Government's policy to strengthen support to older persons, the decision was also taken to waive their closing fees including administrative fees and valuation costs.

Mister Speaker, we are doing this because, simply put, Mister Speaker, we have to help alleviate the burden placed on our senior citizens who have worked hard, made contributions to this country and who therefore deserve to live in dignity and not under the constant worry of high fees and the high cost of living.

The question is, **Mister Speaker**, why did previous administrations did not take these steps, which would have been simpler to implement, when the country was in a good financial condition and under their leadership?

Mister Speaker, our PACT Government will continue to focus its attention on providing these opportunities during this term in office. I have instructed my Ministry staff and the NHDT Board to be proactive and review the entity's initiatives with a view to making the programmes even more beneficial to our people.

The Government Guarantee Home Assistance Programme is a priority area that we will provide additional support. The NHDT continues to administer the existing clients under the programme and provide administration for new applicants from the proposed new agreement. This will assist approximately two hundred families based on the headcount from the existing programme. There is ongoing and continued demand for this level of assistance and our plan is to reinstate this programme.

Mister Speaker, concerning Building on Your Own Property Construction, the NHDT continues to assist applicants under this

programme to construct their own houses in collaboration with the local banks. There are currently four applicants waiting to be considered, while two have been pre-approved and are seeking approval from their respective banks for the bridge financing.

While the NHDT continues to concentrate its efforts building on vacant land at the affordable housing sites in North Side, East End and West Bay, it has been tasked to replicate these efforts in George Town by seeking new land to support housing development plans in this area.

Mister Speaker, like my colleague, the Minister for Finance Hon. Chris Saunders always says, it takes cash to care. And the PACT Government has shown they care by making CI\$15 million available through the Cayman Islands Development Bank to Caymanian mortgage seekers at interest rates as low as 3.75% for two years.

Now, **Mister Speaker**, if the previous administration cared so much about the people as they are saying now, why didn't it occur to them during their administration that it was actually necessary to go beyond the talks of how much they care and do what the PACT

Government has done in making available option with the Cayman Islands Development Bank.

These are challenging times, Mister Speaker.

Many Caymanians cannot qualify at the high lending rates at some institutions and, as a result, are losing out on the chance to pursue their dream of home ownership.

Mister Speaker, every Caymanian has the right to home ownership in their country. This is why our government has been working so hard in making home ownership a reality for Caymanians. Not just talking about it **Mister Speaker** like our friends across the hall are doing,

But we are doing something about it.

Mister Speaker, to show you how all of our teams are linking our efforts and focusing on the same big picture, when we decided to build these homes, we got input from our colleagues about how we can not only have strong, well-built structures, but sustainable and efficient as well. We did this, Mister Speaker, because we wanted to remain in line with the spirit of the national energy policy.

Mister Speaker, they forgot about the people from 2007 to 2012 they had over 300 people benefit from the GGHAM programme. For those who don't know what the GGHAM is - it Government guarantee home assistant mortgage.

Mister Speaker, 116 homes from 2010 to 2020 was built. But yet the opposition want to say they have a vision for the people. They cannot lead the country better than the PACT Government. They should be ashamed of themselves. Who they governing? It not us the Caymanians.

Mister Speaker, under their watch they gave away or waived over 14.5 million in planning fees from 2013 to 2019.

Mister Speaker,

1 They could have built 80 more affordable homes

2 They could have gotten the East West Rd to halfway Bodden Town

3 They could have had free lunches for the kids

Where were there priorities?

This brings us to the **Facilities Management Department, Mister Speaker**. One of the major projects that the Department is currently undertaking is the installation of a 100 kW carport mounted solar array, which is ninety percent near completion, at the Government Administration Building.

By doing this, **Mister Speaker**, the PACT government is doing its part to reduce some of our reliance on fossil fuels and harness the clean energy of solar.

Mister Speaker, in saying this, I am reminded of one of the first bills I saw upon taking office. I was blown away by the amount of the electricity bill, which was a substantial amount at the time.

Mister Speaker, it was in that very moment in time I knew something had to be done. And Mister Speaker, my main concern wasn't that the bill was a high government expenditure but that it was ultimately a burden for our taxpayers.

The hurricane-rated solar array therefore features some 276 panels, which will generate savings in energy costs and lessen the burden on tax payers.

Also, this solar initiative is expected to be connected to the Caribbean Utilities Company power grid and participate in the CORE programme.

Again, Mister Speaker, this type of execution requires foresight and the fact this was not done under previous administrations speaks volumes about their lack of foresight.

Mister Speaker, there is a lot more that I could say about this topic, however, I , instead, wish to acknowledge the hard work of the Honourable Premier Panton, along with his Ministry of Sustainability, as they provided input and support for this project.

Mister Speaker, our efforts to implement renewable energy at the Government Administration Building supports the overall objectives of the National Energy Policy and complements ongoing initiatives to enhance the energy efficiency of public sector buildings.

This year, the Department also completed a number of projects at the civic centers across Grand Cayman which will make the buildings more accommodating, while increasing efficiency.

- At the North Side Civic Centre – painting, flooring, ceiling and stage have been completed; the installation of the electric vehicle car charging station has also been completed. The fencing replacement is still in progress.
- At East End Civic Centre – flooring, ceiling, AC unit, stage and ducting have been completed. The installation of the EV car charging station and the painting are both completed. Work continues on bathroom renovations and roof repairs are about to commence.
- At the Gun Bay Civic Center – that facility has been equipped with new appliances, chair and tables with LED lighting upgrade; entry door replacement, the basketball court has been resurfaced and new basketball hoops have been installed.
- At the Constitution Hall, procurement is in progress for the replacement of flooring, stage, upgrades to ceiling, lights,

bathroom and the creation of a small kitchenette. Both the bathrooms and stage will be disabilities compliant.

- At the South Sound Community Centre, works will begin on roof repairs, window replacement, flooring, bathroom upgrades and a general facelift.

When all of these works are completed, Mister Speaker, these centres will be more resilient.

A feat that the PACT Government will have achieved working as a team in less than 3 years in office, when the same was not achieved during the previous administration's 9 years or more in office.

Mister Speaker, for the Financial Year 2022/2023, it is anticipated that all the civic centers will be equipped with video and audio equipment, interior upgrades, automated security lighting and security alarm and camera systems.

This will enhance the safety and usage of these centers by our people.

Moving now to the **Department of Vehicle and Driver's Licensing. Mister Speaker**, I am pleased to inform Members of this Honorable House that DVDL with the support of the Public Works Department have completed the fit out of its new licensing office, located at the Jacques Scott Plaza in West Bay.

It is expected, **Mister Speaker** that the new offices will officially open this month. It will include some 1,300 square feet of accessible space with public restroom facilities and increased seating capacity for customers.

In addition to the improvements in space capacity, the number of licensing officers at that location will be increased from two to four people.

Mister Speaker, we are considering improvements at the Crewe Road location that could lead to increased customer service windows, and again in overall efficiency.

As with DVDL, there is some expansion taking place at the Department of Vehicle and Equipment Services. The priority project for this financial year is the completion of Phase II of the Department's redevelopment project.

Mister Speaker, we are making these expansions not for expansion sake, but to improve the environment where our people are served, including making their experience better when services are being delivered to them. Good service, Mister Speaker, that part is priceless.

Mister Speaker, moving on to the Department of Vehicle and Equipment Services - due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Phase II of the project faced logistical challenges when sourcing materials. This has caused some delays and set the completion date back to the end of 2022.

Phase II of the redevelopment plan involves the construction and upgrade of a state-of-the art nineteen service bay facility, capable of servicing and maintaining the various vehicles and equipment owned by Government. These range from light duty to heavy duty vehicles and equipment.

Upon construction completion, the total floor space at DVES will be 34,025 square feet. It is anticipated that this expansion will lead to better turnabout repair times, increased working stability for large vehicles, and minimized employee exposure to the elements.

Mister Speaker, the new facility will also ensure that this Government is in a position to support innovation of new technology, and the National Energy Policy as we expand our fleet of hybrid and electric vehicles.

Mister Speaker, I will now draw your attention to updates for the **Department of Planning**.

For the first and second quarters of 2022, there were:

- 559 permits issued, estimated valued over \$428,million
- 487 projects approved, valued over \$470,million
- 227 certificates of occupancy issued, valued over \$137,million
- 6,693 inspections and 4,157 plan reviews completed.

I would like to thank all the team members in the Department of Planning for all their hard work in servicing the demands of the development industry. However, we recognise the demand for services and will be diligently working to employ additional staff in all areas.

Mister Speaker, this has been a challenge. We have seen the demand for such expertise worldwide and have therefore developed a two-pronged strategy to enable success. We are looking to work with our overseas counterparts in the United States to source personnel. In addition, we are working with the local schools including the Public Works Department Apprenticeship Training Programme to train our young talent to fill the long term demand.

Mister Speaker, turning to the **Public Works Department**. My Ministry continues to invest in the future of young Caymanians through the successful delivery of Public Works Department Apprenticeship Programme.

A few weeks ago, I was very happy to attend and participate in the grand opening of a simulation lab, located on PWD's compound. The lab will provide the apprentices with relevant training to one day impact the workforce in a positive way.

Mister Speaker, some of workshop simulators that are in the lab include an electrical fabrication learning system, alternate energy learning system, industrial fluid piping system and air conditioning

and heat pump troubleshooting system. These will assist to immerse the trainers in real world scenarios so they can be better prepared for the world of work.

Mister Speaker, I was very impressed by the fact that the building that contains the simulation lab was renovated by the students themselves. This shows the capability of the students enrolled in construction trades programme, and contribution they will make to the development of our Islands.

I want to encourage the twenty-two apprentices who recently enrolled in the Apprenticeship Training Programme - to stay the course, strive for excellence and take up their rightful place in our industries.

Mister Speaker, with few locally qualified job applicants to perform some specialized roles within the public and the private sector, it is important that we develop and mentor our Caymanian workforce to be employable.

Mister Speaker, the Public Works Department continues to oversee a number of ongoing projects including the:

- Bodden Town Church of God Shelter
- Department of Agriculture Feed Storage Extension
- Bodden Town Primary School Multi-Purpose Hall
- Phase II, DVES Redevelopment Project
- Old Man Bay Dock; and
- Various community and sporting facility upgrades.

Mister Speaker, one project that is close to my heart is the Old Man Bay and the community park.

For too long, the North Side community had been promised this community area. The park, which is now in planning permission will offer amenities such as restroom facility, cabanas, basketball and volleyball courts. In addition, we are about to commence the new jetty for the area with ample parking for boaters.

Mister Speaker, the Kaibo public beach in North Side has been eroding away for decades. Did the previous government do anything to fix it? No, again the Pact Government has to come behind and clean up the mess they neglected for years. The Ministry of PAHI is working alongside the DoE and has found the solution to the beach and should be starting works next year.

Mister Speaker, I will now move to another very important agency that I have responsibility for and which I mentioned briefly before, namely the National Roads Authority.

Firstly, I want to thank the NRA team for their diligent work. In the case of hurricane preparedness, the NRA team worked together with various agencies to plan for each tropical storm and hurricane.

This included hurricane preparedness exercises between the NRA and the Public Works Department, along with other government agencies and private partners.

By preparing long before storms, the NRA remains ready on an ongoing basis to act on their immediate priority after the storm, which is clearing all major roads of debris to allow safe passage for emergency vehicles and others who may otherwise have been trapped in the aftermath of the storm..

And because of the NRA's work to clear drains periodically (the schedule for which the NRA publishes on its website) and cleans drains in flood prone areas prior to storms, their work tends to mitigate against flooding, especially in flood prone areas.

As I said though, drains are not the only solution to flooding and we will continue to work on the overall stormwater management framework and explore options in addition to drains.

They were also quick to react to the Savannah gully issue, which they reported to the media to highlight to the public the serious concerns about the flooding, including the fact that it is saltwater that is flooding the roadways and neighborhoods close to the Savannah Gully.

Mister Speaker, moving on from the NRA's hurricane efforts, I would like to give a progress report on ongoing major road projects.

- **Airport Connector Road** - The base fill elevation was completed to an average of +2.5ft above sea level. The culvert installation works is completed ahead of schedule. The remaining base works and finishing layers for segment I of the Road including the construction of the second roundabout by Allie B Drive will also recommence this month.
- **Phase 2, Linford Pierson Highway** – The expansion is well underway with base works, drain wells and water mains and other utility installations. Over the next two months, works will

include formation of the new expanded roundabout as well as the clearing and filling of the route all the way to Outpost Street.

Mister Speaker, Caribbean Utilities Company plans to begin installation of underground electrical services this month.

This project continues to be on track to be completed in January 2023.

- **Godfrey Nixon Extension** - Work on phase one of the Godfrey Nixon extension has recommenced with curb work being installed. The next phase will be final grading in order for the road to be surfaced. Phase one of the project will take the road from North Church Street across Diaz Lane to Gresscott Lane.
- **Crewe Road/Hurley Merren Boulevard** – This project involves full lane capacity upgrade of the highways between Kings Sports Centre and Admiral's Landing Development. This thoroughfare will be fully upgraded to include three lanes westbound including bicycle lanes and road shoulders.

The segment between Grand Harbour and Red Bay roundabouts is now ninety percent complete. NRA's focus is now on widening both sides of the corridor between Grand Harbour and CUC roundabouts. In addition, we are looking to finalise the gazettal of the local access road.

With Grand Harbour being such an important junction, the NRA has also engaged a consultant to complete a traffic study to provide recommendations for improvement of that area.

Regarding this, **Mister Speaker**, the NRA board has recommended that the traffic study be made available to members of the public and discussed to determine what suits the needs and best interests of road users in that area.

Mister Speaker, I think that this is the right and transparent approach.

East West Arterial: As I mentioned, the NRA initiated a meeting with the DoE and agreed with the DoE that an environment impact assessment was required under the NCC Directive.

After reviewed by the Environmental Assessment Board (chaired by the DoE), the EIA consultant has now been chosen and the award of the contract has been approved by the Procurement Committee.

The NRA is committed to following the legal process, Mister Speaker. The EIA consultant's work should take 12 to 16 months. The EIA will be the driving mechanism to mitigate the concerning impacts on the environment, storm water management and construction ability.

As I mentioned, public meetings will be held and members of the public will have an opportunity to submit comments in writing to the DoE at the relevant time as required by the NCC Directive.

In addition, Mister Speaker, some thought is being given to, perhaps, increase the usage of solar panels along our roads, which should help to reduce the approximately \$1 million dollar per year that the government pays in electricity bills for streetlights.

These are exciting times, **Mister Speaker.**

Mister Speaker, before I wrap up this update, just to a highlight that we are making the following improvements in connection with the revitalization of George Town:

Under the supervision of Town Manager, Colin Lumsden, we are enhancing the infrastructure and new landscaping. Mature trees have already been planted throughout the project area to create additional shading, including two 60-year old Silver Thatch palm trees.

Mister Speaker, another project that previous governments only talked about and shook their finger at it. What is the PACT Government doing? Getting it done.

- **Scranton Park** – The first phase of the works which included perimeter fencing, rock reinforcement, site fill and rough grading have been completed. We have agreed with my good friend Hon Kenneth Bryan that the Ministry of Tourism will proceed with the final phase of the development.

Mister Speaker, my Ministry is also collaborating with the Ministry of Sustainability to provide Wi-Fi access charging benches throughout the George Town area.

These benches will be the first of its kind in the community and will further enhance our public spaces, providing free WIFI and phone charging to anyone who connects. By providing these benches, we will offering residents access to information and services to those who may not otherwise have access.

This will also be valuable to the visitors to these Islands who may need to connect conveniently and quickly to get in touch with their loved ones at home.

Mister Speaker, my Ministry and the PACT team have been very intentional in what we want to achieve in the interests of the people and to achieve outcomes. As you can see, we have made steady progress over the past year and a half in that regard.

I want to again thank every single member of staff in the Ministry for all your contribution to the building and development of these Islands and for the people for giving us the opportunity to serve them

Mister Speaker, I want you thank you for the opportunity to provide this update on some the many initiatives of the Ministry.

Mister Speaker, like others who I have met during my time as Minister, I just want to see our people succeed, this will happen Mister Speaker, when we all work together.

Mister Speaker, I have one more topic to touch on this Friday afternoon. The opposition had a press briefing, and the member from Red Bay said that he had talks with me about joining the opposition.

Mister Speaker, this is so far from the truth that it pass the boundaries of reality. Mister Speaker the member from Red Bay has told the people of these islands an untruthful statement.

That I, Jay Ebanks contacted him about joining!! The Member from Red Bay must be getting dementia. Mister Speaker if I wanted to join the opposition it wouldn't be the member from Red Bay I would contact. The member of Red Bay is only a puppet on a string, the shadow of the person that's in charge, we know who the real king maker is.

The Hon Kurt Tibbets is the real king maker of the group, so I don't want the member for Red Bay to think that I would go to him to have any discussions.

Mister Speaker, and the Leader of the Opposition had the nerve to call this Honorable House a kangaroo parliament? Well now that we have gotten rid of the kangaroos let us move on to the Government business.

May God bless us all.