

In September 2017, the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) were hit with two Category 5 Hurricanes – the most destructive kind possible – within 12 days of each other, blasting the islands with 240 mile-per-hour winds that caused catastrophic damage across the U.S.-owned territory. Up to 60 percent of homes and 400 boats were destroyed. St. Thomas and St. Croix took harsh blows, but it was St. John that suffered the most infrastructure damage overall; nearly every home on the island suffered damage and for more than six weeks there was no power at all.

From the time Irma hit, the Secunda Family Foundation and Bloomberg Philanthropies were ready to help.

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## IMMEDIATE ON-THE-GROUND SUPPORT

The Secunda Family Foundation and Bloomberg Philanthropies kept staff on the ground in St. John during Hurricane Maria even as government resources left; for the first four days after Maria, we were the only entity providing on-site support.

They also played a significant role by bringing in critical resources to the USVI – including more than 200 tons of food, fuel, medical supplies, communications gear and tarps. This allowed residents to stabilize their living situation and begin working on cleanup efforts.

Priority patients were evacuated via helicopter and sea-based transport using military and civilian aviation resources, and providers from Johns Hopkins Medical Center set up a functioning clinic in St. John after the only urgent care facility on the island was damaged beyond use. To help with local transportation, we sponsored a free daily shuttle from Cruz Bay to Coral Bay which helped residents conserve fuel, and brought in tractors to help remove debris from roadways.

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## EXPERT RESOURCES

Top disaster experts – many of the same people who helped New York City recover from Hurricane Sandy in 2012 – went to the USVI and became a resource to U.S. Virgin Islands Governor Kenneth Mapp, helping to navigate the massive federal bureaucracies and coordinate the immediate and ongoing implementation of recovery response efforts. The team is also helping develop a centralized process to attract, coordinate and leverage federal and philanthropic funding and volunteer efforts territory-wide. St. John and the Virgin Islands will be a model for innovative rebuilding that incorporates sustainability to be used as a blueprint for other cities around the world facing similar effects from climate change.

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# LESSONS IN RECOVERY AND REBUILDING FOR RESILIENCE AFTER NATURAL DISASTERS

In June 2019, Bloomberg Philanthropies released a [report](#) on its support of recovery work in the U.S. Virgin Islands following Hurricanes Irma and Maria. The report highlights four key ways government, the private sector, and philanthropy can work together more effectively to respond to natural disasters. The Territory's recovery has been faster and more comprehensive than many other Caribbean islands mainly due to cooperation among local and federal agencies, private sector leaders, and technical experts who worked together on clear goals.



Tom Secunda is the co-founder and Vice Chairman of Bloomberg, L.P. Secunda serves as a member of Bloomberg's Management Committee, which is also comprised of Michael R. Bloomberg and Peter Grauer. Previously, Secunda served as the global head of Bloomberg's Financial Products and Services. Secunda has served as the Chairman of the Board of Trustees for the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA), recognized as the nation's leading voice for America's national parks. Secunda also serves as Chair of the Board of Directors of the Jamaica Bay-Rockaway Parks Conservancy, and he serves on the boards of the Intrepid Museum Foundation and The Manhattan Theatre Club. He serves as Chairman of the Board of Love City Strong, a nonprofit founded in the aftermath of Hurricanes Irma and Maria to help the island of St John recover from the storms and build resilience for future emergencies. Secunda holds a BS and MS in mathematics from SUNY Binghamton.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### HOW MICHAEL BLOOMBERG LANDED IN THE CENTER OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS' HURRICANE RECOVERY

[Fredreka Schouten](#) USA TODAY



Mike Bloomberg and Tom Secunda arrived on the ground in the U.S. Virgin Islands just days after the first hurricane.

WASHINGTON — Former New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg, a billionaire known for his activism on climate change and gun safety, said he had no grand scheme to become involved in hurricane recovery in the Caribbean.

But what started off as an effort to provide quick emergency assistance in the U.S. Virgin Islands, where his Bloomberg L.P., co-founder Tom Secunda has a home, has turned into a new kind of project for Bloomberg and his key aides, putting them at Ground Zero of efforts to rebuild the tiny U.S. territory.

And there's a chance it could grow into a Bloomberg specialty as coastal communities and islands like these cope with increasingly extreme weather.

A team of five Bloomberg aides, many with Hurricane Sandy experience, have embedded themselves with Virgin Islands Gov. Kenneth Mapp and other key local officials, providing behind-the-scenes guidance on everything from electricity restoration to negotiating additional money from Federal Emergency Management Agency for housing assistance.

“St. John, St. Thomas and St. Croix were not on my radar until Tom called,” Bloomberg said, referring to his business partner who has property on St. John, the smallest of the three main Virgin Islands. “But you go where the need is and where you think you can do something.”

The territory of about 105,000 residents is reeling from the worst hurricane season in modern history. Two Category 5 storms — Hurricanes Irma and Maria — walloped the islands in September. Irma struck first, pummeling St. Thomas and St. John.

A Bloomberg team that included Secunda and three former FEMA officials who now work as contractors in disaster assistance arrived by private plane two days after Irma and met with Mapp and his team within hours of landing.

Secunda's house “was OK,” Bloomberg said, “but he said everything else wasn't. ‘It was a disaster, and we've got to do something.’” The former mayor himself visited about a week after Irma, with former San Antonio Spurs star and St. Croix native Tim Duncan, to deliver a planeload of relief supplies.

Then, later that month, the territory sustained another blow when Hurricane Maria strafed the southern coast of St. Croix, the largest of the Virgin Islands, before taking aim at Puerto Rico and its 3.4 million residents.

Several of Bloomberg's aides stayed on in the islands, including Cas Holloway, who was New York City's deputy mayor for operations during Hurricanes Irene and Sandy and now serves as global head of technical support at Bloomberg L.P.

As Bloomberg and his aides learned first-hand in Hurricane Sandy in 2012, the Federal Emergency Management Agency can unleash vast federal resources to help governments and individuals recover from a storm, but local officials drive the restoration — structuring contracts, hiring workers and deciding how to rebuild the electrical grid, for example.

That's where Bloomberg team stepped in, helping link V.I. officials with hurricane-experienced consultants and providing guidance on FEMA's regulations. The islands' have had their share of storms, but before this year, had not been hit by a powerful hurricane since 1995 when Hurricane Marilyn slammed into St. Thomas.

"That was 22 years ago," said Clifford Graham, who runs the islands' largest port facility and serves as chairman of a hurricane recovery task force created by Mapp. "Mayor Bloomberg was quite familiar with the new FEMA. It was just timely that they stepped in to help us navigate through the whole process with FEMA and getting utility workers."

Although electrical power has been restored to only about a third of the islands' residents, FEMA, local officials, and the Bloomberg team point to signs of progress. Among them: The hundreds of linesman from the U.S. mainland who have descended in a scramble to restore 90% of power by year's end.

Virgin Islands officials initially weighed bringing in about 50 stateside workers to boost the local Water and Power Authority in the race to restore electricity, Bloomberg said. "We said, 'No. You don't understand. The federal government will pay for everything. You need 600 linesmen.'"



Julio Rhymer, the executive director of the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority, quibbles with that, saying the public utility had long-established plans to bring in hundreds of utility workers after the storms but needed to phase in their arrival on the islands in an orderly fashion.

"You want to make sure you have a process of adding guys," he said. "You don't want to have a situation where they don't have materials and just watch me all day. That's wasting money."

As of mid-November, more than 600 linesmen had arrived through a combination of contracts with mainland utilities and so-called mutual aid agreements, deals among utilities to speed assistance after large-scale disasters.

And the number soon will grow to 760, Rhymer said.

As part of an updated \$7.5 billion request for federal disaster assistance, officials are pushing for an upgraded electrical system that can better withstand disasters. That includes burying more lines underground and establishing small "micro-grids," powered by solar and wind, to keep key facilities, such as the airports and schools, running on stored battery power.

And in an early win for the Virgin Islands, FEMA announced last week that the federal government will provide up to \$75,000 to help restore damaged, uninsured homes in the territory to a "safe and habitable condition."

Typically, FEMA looks for temporary housing for hurricane survivors. But the damage is so widespread, and the cost of transporting and installing other housing options such as trailers so expensive, that the local authorities successfully argued that making permanent repairs to homes was the better way to provide shelter.

It's not yet clear how much Congress will give to the territory for rebuilding.

The White House last week made its third disaster funding request this year, seeking \$44 billion to aid the hurricane recovery in Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. That's far short of what the states and territories are seeking, and the Virgin Islands Rep. Stacey Plaskett called the Trump administration's request "woefully inadequate." Hard-hit Puerto Rico alone is seeking \$94 billion.

Bloomberg's team also is involved in direct philanthropy on the islands.

On St. John, his aides worked with Bloomberg's alma mater Johns Hopkins University — a beneficiary of his largesse over the years — to bring medical supplies, doctors and nurses to the devastated island. Bloomberg Philanthropies helped evacuate 47 patients, helped pay 60 local canvassers to go door-to-door to survey damages and even brought in tractors for debris removal.



Former New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg, center, speaks at the Virgin Islands National Park visitors center in Cruz bay, St. John U.S. National Service employees, members of the military and other relief workers were meeting, as Tom Secunda, co-founder and vice chairman at Bloomberg LP, right of center, looks on  
Handout: Michael Nagle, Bloomberg

They also helped set up a territory-wide donation site, [usvirecovery.org](http://usvirecovery.org), that had raised more than \$7 million through end of last week.

“The USVI is going to be a really good example of how these things ought to work,” Holloway said of the public-private partnership underway in the territory.

In all, Bloomberg officials estimate they have spent about \$5 million on the recovery, free of charge to the territory through Bloomberg’s philanthropic arm.

Bloomberg, with a net worth that Forbes magazine pegs as \$48 billion, built his fortune with his financial information company. But he’s a long-time environmental activist and a big player in national politics who has [clashed with the National Rifle Association](#) over his work to elect politicians who back gun control.

Bloomberg, a UN special envoy on climate change, teamed up this month with California’s Democratic Gov. Jerry Brown to release a plan detailing how a coalition of U.S. businesses, states and cities plan to combat climate change, even as President Trump has pledged to withdraw the United States from the Paris climate accord.

Even without federal involvement, Bloomberg said private companies and localities are working on their

own to reduce the emissions that contribute to global warming and to make their communities more resilient to strong storms.

“The public want to take their future in their own hands, and so do corporations and so do local governments,” he said.

“As the oceans get warmer, you’re going to have more storms,” Bloomberg said. “Ninety percent of big cities are on the coasts, so people are going to get hurt here and are getting hurt.”

Bloomberg said his team likely will start pulling back from the hurricane-ravaged Virgin Islands once power is restored.

Does he foresee providing a similar helping hand to neighboring Puerto Rico? More than half the island of 3.4 million still lacks power and the head of the public utility recently resigned after signing a controversial, and now-cancelled, \$300 million contract with a tiny firm in Whitefish, Mont., to help restore electricity.

“Nobody has asked us to go in,” Bloomberg said of Puerto Rico. “If they did, I would think about it. I’d want to understand what they wanted us to do and whether I thought they would really listen to us.”

# ALL-IN PHILANTHROPY: THE STORY OF BLOOMBERG LP'S REBUILDING TEAM IN THE U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

[Alan Fleischmann](#) Forbes



A damaged vehicle sits on top of debris from the destroyed Chateau Bordeaux restaurant after Hurricane Irma in St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands, on Sept. 12, 2017. *Michael Nagle, Bloomberg News*

After hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria devastated communities in the southern U.S. and the Caribbean, America's CEOs reacted by orchestrating **one of the single largest philanthropic moments in recent memory**. Their contributions were unique both in the scale of their generosity and the method of their execution: many companies went beyond traditional check-writing philanthropy and embraced a more active role. In doing so, they leveraged their companies' expertise and human resources to work alongside government relief efforts in ways that have traditionally been the domain of the public sector.

One of the most dramatic examples of this new model of "all-in philanthropy" is unfolding in the U.S. Virgin Islands, where a well-resourced team from Bloomberg – the financial services information technology firm founded and run by former New York City Mayor Mike Bloomberg and Tom Secunda, who has a residence in St. John– is leading a sustained on-the-ground recovery effort. The depth of Bloomberg team's involvement may well be unprecedented in U.S. history.

Three small islands with a population of approximately 103,000 U.S. citizens, the U.S. Virgin Islands has not received the same level of media attention as Puerto Rico and affected regions in

the southern United States. But after an estimated 60% of the islands' structures suffered significant damage from Irma and Maria, many residents had no access to food, power, or running water without outside help. Making matters worse, the islands' relative isolation from other U.S. territories and dependence on Puerto Rico for shipping made the logistics of delivering aid very difficult.

Surveying the damage and humanitarian need, Bloomberg was able to uniquely leverage its vast corporate resources and talent along with its expertise at large-scale development honed during former Mayor Bloomberg's three terms at City Hall. The fact that several of his top lieutenants at Bloomberg worked alongside him in government created an unusual "institutional memory" that has greatly benefited the relief effort.

Modeled in key ways after Mayor Bloomberg's **PLANYC initiative** – spearheaded by former New York City Deputy Mayor and former Bloomberg LP CEO Dan Doctoroff, now CEO of Sidewalk Labs – Bloomberg's strategy in the U.S. Virgin Islands is to not just rebuild, but to build smarter, better, and with greater resiliency.

I spoke with a senior member of the Bloomberg team who told me, "We want to have an impactful

footprint that's left here for generations to come. We want to build back smarter and in a way that's going to be able to withstand what Mother Nature is going to throw at the world more frequently, and to do it in a way that is both more sustainable and leaves a smaller carbon footprint.”

Among the company's leaders in aiding St. John's recovery is Cas Holloway, Bloomberg's Global Head of Technical Operations and the former Deputy Mayor of New York City for Operations; Jarrod Bernstein, who has served as a senior advisor in the Office of Emergency Management and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security; and Beth DeFalco, who brings emergency communications experience from her time as communications director for the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority. Bloomberg also contracted the disaster relief consulting firm Witt O'Brien's, which played an integral role in the recovery after Sandy.

A member of Bloomberg's on-the-ground team in St. John put it this way: “Bloomberg didn't just cut a check to help the U.S. Virgin Islands – the company sent down some of the smartest disaster recovery experts with hurricane experience who can help navigate government bureaucracy and speed the recovery process. Potentially the most important resource we have down here is brainpower.”

This expertise has helped Bloomberg's team adapt their efforts to the islands' evolving needs. In the immediate aftermath of Maria, the company flew a medical team from Johns Hopkins to help injured storm victims on the smallest island of St. John and evacuated patients who needed more serious attention. The team also knew the importance of restoring the electrical grid and embedded with local authorities to both ramp up the process for restoring power while planning for a more sustainable electric grid that uses things like secure solar panels wherever possible. The team intends to help the island achieve Governor Kenneth Mapp's stated goals of full electricity and hosting tourists again by year's end.

So far, Bloomberg's work has proven to be a powerful example of what public-private partnerships can accomplish when each side prioritizes collaboration and results – something that was a hallmark of Mayor Bloomberg's administration in New York City. Wherever they can, the Bloomberg team is leveraging private sector

innovation and speed to fill in the gaps that can be more challenging to navigate in the public sector bureaucracy.

In the days after the storms hit, that meant deploying their own emergency management teams before the Federal Emergency Management Agency was able to authorize its own team. In the long term, the flexibility of the private sector affords Bloomberg the ability to look beyond strictly humanitarian goals to more proactive measures.

While the full recovery will take years, early efforts appear to be on track to meet the initial goal of restoring the electric grid by the end of 2017. Longer-term goals include repairing and securing the island's beautiful beaches and nature preserves, which are ecological treasures as well as tourist attractions that are vital to the island's economy.

Those working on the ground hope that the end result is a thriving St. John that restores its image to one that has inspired song lyrics from some of America's most popular artists.

“The Virgin Islands are beautiful. There's definitely an emotional response for anyone who's been here to want to preserve this ecological treasure in addition to helping people who have lost everything,” said one person who is working to support Bloomberg's efforts on the ground. “There's a reason songs are written about these islands.”

# CLINTONS TOUR STJ BEFORE OPENING SYMPOSIUM

Amy Roberts St. John Source



@Bloomberg's Tom Secunda was in the USVI with @BillClinton, @GovernorMapp & @ExpediaGroup to announce an initiative to install solar at a family resource center on St. Thomas with support from Bloomberg Philanthropies & the Bloomberg USVI Response Team. <https://bloombg.org/2Mlf3Va>

Before heading off to St. Thomas to convene a symposium at the University of the Virgin Islands, Bill and Hillary Clinton visited two sites on St. John that are emblematic of the island's recovery efforts. They were accompanied by 10 donors to the Clinton Foundation, key members of community organizations that responded to Hurricanes Irma and Maria, and a slew of reporters.

They stopped first at the home of Adele Thomas, whose house on Jacob's Ladder was rebuilt through [the Resilient Housing Initiative](#), a program that grew out of a partnership among the St. John Community Foundation, Love City Strong, the St. John Angel Network, and All Hands and Hearts-Smart Response. Thomas and her family moved back into their home last Friday, almost 20 months after the hurricanes struck.

"With each passing day, the Resilient Housing Initiative makes progress returning vulnerable St. John residents to storm-hardened homes. As of today, we have completed 12 homes across the island, and the teams are hard at work on 12 more,"

according to a statement issued last week by Love City Strong. "With the 2019 Atlantic hurricane season upon us, it is more crucial than ever to get as many homes as possible [secured] with safe roofs."

The program was designed to help the most vulnerable residents on the island rebuild after the storm.

"Although there has been a substantial amount of federal aid and public assistance dispersed to residents throughout the territory, navigating these complicated systems is an arduous and difficult task for the most vulnerable of St. John residents, and qualified contractors on island are limited," said Meaghan Enright, director of Love City Strong, shortly after the program was initiated.

During a discussion with the Clinton Foundation Monday afternoon, Enright spoke of the especially high costs of construction on St. John. President Bill Clinton responded, "It's not just the labor costs. You want to build it back better, and FEMA can only reimburse what was being lost."



Tom Secunda and Jeff Quinlan. (Amy Roberts photo)

The RHI has also helped families on St. John by bundling together small jobs, according to Tom Secunda, a co-founder of Bloomberg News and a supporter of Love City Strong through the Bloomberg Group.

The Bloomberg Group, working with Kenny Chesney's Love for Love City Foundation, Love City Strong, the St. John Community Foundation, and government agencies, were all on hand to escort the Clinton Foundation's entourage to their second stop, a depot for emergency supplies located not far from Cruz Bay.

The depot is one of three that have been situated throughout the island to provide residents with food, water, lumber, and other critical equipment in the event of another storm.

Following Hurricane Irma, St. John was cut off from St. Thomas, even more so from mainland United States. It was two days before helicopters and boats began to arrive with critical supplies from St. Croix and Puerto Rico.

"We're so small, and so isolated. We're a good model for how to respond [to disasters] in isolated communities," Enright said.

"It takes a long time to learn how to do this. It's like a laboratory," agreed Secunda, who owns a home on St. John.

Secunda said that Love City Strong has provided stipends and trained teams who remain on island during hurricane season. These teams have already started canvassing homes to determine residents' needs.

After a storm, they will fan out through the island, going house-to-house to preliminarily assess damage and share information on resources available.

"You need people right after a disaster to walk around and say, 'This isn't safe,' or 'You need a tetanus shot,'" said Secunda.

Jeff Quinlan of the Love for Love City Foundation added that the emergency response models developed on St. John could easily be scaled up and deployed on St. Thomas and St. Croix.

"There are people who could do it there," said Secunda. "They just might need a little leadership."