

logo not found or type unknown

EnVision Tomorrow's Slow Progress: Only 30 Homes Completed in 7 Years

ODR Plans ambitious initiative to have 100 homes under construction by summer 2024; senator expresses skepticism in timeline

Disaster Recovery / **Published On February 29, 2024 05:43 AM /**

Nelcia Charlemagne **February 29, 2024**

Image not found or type unknown



Some 353 homes earmarked for rehabilitation under the [EnVision Tomorrow](#) program have yet to start as deadlines to utilize federal funds draw closer.

In an update before the Committee on Housing, Transportation, and Telecommunications on Wednesday, Office of Disaster Recovery Director Adrienne Williams-Octalien revealed that only “30 homes have been completed” in the 7 years since the program’s launch. To date, 9 homes are under construction, while 227 homes are in “various stages of processing.”

According to Williams-Octalien, “the development and preservation of affordable housing is a critical component of the recovery,” making it “imperative” to make significant inroads in the EnVIsion program. Due to the snail’s pace of progress, Williams-Octalien said ODR spent the past 90 days conducting an “in-depth assessment into the pervasive issues impacting this program.”

Among the many challenges to the timely rehabilitation of hurricane-damaged homes is the rise in construction costs that has “invalidated many solicitations.” Delays associated with scoping and design and environmental reviews, as well as a serious difficulty [retaining qualified contractors](#), have created “significant impediments.” Williams-Octalien told the committee that ODR is working to improve “timelines of decisions and communication with homeowners to accelerate the program.”

Mr. Bolques initiated the discussion on the hurdles of the EnVIsion program by inquiring what steps are currently being taken to ensure these projects are completed on time. Chief among those, explained Ms. William-Octalien, is training. She said ODR will work with national companies contracted by FEMA to provide “construction management training for the team.” Additionally, there are plans to “train the contractors upfront on the things that they need to submit so that we can facilitate timely payment.”

Williams-Octalien explained that when contractors fail to submit documentation correctly, payments necessary to keep projects moving are stalled. Securing “reasonable costs” for the construction of the homes is also a challenge, she explained. “If they are not reasonable then you can't use them,” the director said. Public housing in the territory was characterized as “dismal” by Senate President Novelle Francis. “We're working against time,” he lamented.

In an attempt to remedy the aforementioned challenges within the EnVIsion program, the Office of Disaster Recovery will launch a project dubbed “Mission 100”, Williams-Octalien stated. "It's an initiative to have 100 homes in construction by summer 2024. The solicitation is expected to be released in March 2024.”

That’s a goal that Senator Dwayne DeGraff claimed to be “impossible.” While Williams-Octalien agreed that Mission 100 is an “audacious task,” she said her team must be “forward-facing and solutions-oriented” with a focus on the future. “Whatever happened in the past is the past... We're moving forward to fix the homes,” she declared.

Mr. DeGraff made it clear that he was not mocking the effort, instead, he was urging ODR to “deal with realistic situations.” Meanwhile, Senator Ray Fonseca urged ODR to be mindful of protracted payment periods for contractors as they move forward to get homes built.

If all goes well, ODR anticipates that “we should be able to do at least 450 of those homes territory-wide” by the end of 2025. That would represent a major acceleration in the program that has remained sluggish since its inception.