

ODR Reports Steady Progress on EnVision Tomorrow Program But Blames Ill-Prepared Applicants for New Delays

With 87 homes now under construction and 48 more in the solicitation phase, the EnVision Program shows signs of progress, but new challenges related to relocations and documentation continue to slow efforts

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“It is vital that we make considerable progress in repairing homes for EnVision Tomorrow program applicants,” declared Adrienne Williams-Octalien, director of the Office of Disaster Recovery on Wednesday.

Ms. Williams-Octalien appeared before the Committee on Housing, Transportation and Telecommunications for a second time this year to provide details on housing initiatives, with special emphasis on the beleaguered EnVIsion Program. “This responsibility is one we approach with the utmost seriousness,” she told lawmakers.?

“To date, 35 homes have been completed, and 87 are in the construction phase,” she reported. Of the 87 under construction, “47 are in active construction, and 40 are pending issuance of notice to proceed.” For Mr. Williams-Octalien, these figures equate to a “much brighter outlook, considering only nine homes were under construction in [February of 2024](#).” “The needle is moving,” she declared. Lawmakers learned that 48 more homes are currently in the solicitation process.

In February, ODR blamed delays on invalid solicitations due to rising construction costs and lags related to scoping, design and environmental reviews, as well as a serious difficulty retaining qualified contractors. At the time, 30 homes were completed. Seemingly over that hurdle now, next round of solicitations and is on.”



Adrienne Williams-Octalien, ODR director, greets Sen. Marvin Blyden, right, on Aug. 28 as Sen. Dwayne DeGraff looks on. (Credit: V.I. Legislature)

As lawmakers were informed, ODR is now unfortunately confronted by a new issue. “Challenges persist, particularly regarding the need to relocate or clear personal belongings from the home or impacted areas before construction begins,” noted Ms. Williams-Octalien. ODR provides relocation and storage support but says “the process of determining eligibility under the program and HUD regulations requires significant documentation that many applicants cannot provide or are unable to produce in a timely manner.”

“Folks are saying: ‘I have a lot of things. I have no place to put them,’” Ms. Williams-Octalien told Senator Samuel Carrion. “By the time we get them to that point where we can actually issue the notice to proceed, the question is, are you ready to move?”

ODR says they’re actively working to support applicants. “If they don’t have an advocate, we try to help them find the advocate,” the director explained. Her office has also developed internal processes to streamline applications. Several applicants, she told Senator Angel Bolques, are elderly people who “need to have people who can navigate some of these federal requirements.”

ODR is also working with the Department of Human Services to identify wraparound services for qualifying applicants.

While the Office works on solutions, ODR has also issued interest surveys to 439 EnVision applicants. “This effort is essential for ensuring timely and effective communication and will help the program to prioritize applicants for construction,” the director explained. Of that number, 187 surveys have been returned as of August 28th.

In February, ODR announced Mission 100, an “audacious task” to have 100 homes in construction by summer 2024. Now, “the program projects that 100 homes would have entered construction in September,” the ODR director promised. ODR anticipates issuing 55 more solicitations in September. “I think the team has been making some excellent progress,” said a confident Ms. Williams-Octalien.

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