

EnVIsion Tomorrow Home Repairs Inch Forward Amid Delays and Local Red Tape, With 2027 Deadline Looming

The EnVIsion Tomorrow program has completed just 57 homes nearly eight years after the storms, with permitting delays, rising costs, housing shortages, and community frustration threatening progress as the territory faces a 2027 completion deadline.

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The EnVIsion Tomorrow program has made only modest progress, with 27 additional homes completed since February, bringing the total to 57. However, lawmakers on the Senate Committee on Disaster Recovery, Infrastructure and Planning were told Thursday that a number of ongoing challenges continue to hinder the accelerated rehabilitation of homes damaged nearly eight years ago by Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

“Program staff must still contend with applicants who have difficulty providing the required documentation,” testified Office of Disaster Recovery Director Adrienne Williams-Octalien. “Delays in the permit and environmental review process impede construction and complicate project schedules.” Nevertheless, 107 homes are currently under active construction. There are 50 homes pending mobilization, and 41 pending bid evaluation. The ODR head called it “undeniable progress.”

Overall, according to Ms. Williams-Octalien, “nearly 45% of eligible residential home projects have been either completed, mobilized, awarded or solicited.” It’s “substantial progress” she said. “The goal is to have touched all the remaining applicants by the end of the year,” the director later told Senator Hubert Frederick.

However, “construction costs continue to rise and tariff uncertainties impact material costs, making it difficult to keep projects within budget,” Ms. Williams-Octalien reminded committee members. “Financial, legal and transportation assistance, essential home furnishings, and other needs outside the program scope,” are also hindering progress. The territory’s limited housing stock, too, is creating a challenge for EnVIision applicants. “Applicants in need of temporary housing are unable to find affordable accommodations.”

Senator Kurt Violet advocated for constituents impacted by the bureaucracy of the process. “We still getting a lot of complaints and the complaints are very specific,” he told Ms. Williams-Octalien. He asserted that several applicants have reported receiving letters that indicate the need for “reevaluation.” He quoted one member of the community as saying: “I packed full time to leave and now I don't know when they're going to come again, and I can't get any information.”

“We need to really just get as much done as quickly as possible,” he advised Ms. Williams-Octalien. “This administration that we presently under, they switch like the wind,” he said, referring to the Trump administration. “At any time, they could change direction and say, ‘we’re not going to allow this’.”

“If we don't get those homes rebuilt under the EnVIision program, those individuals will never rebuild those homes because they don't have the financial capital,” he warned. “This is a unique opportunity for a couple hundred local individuals to get the homes rebuilt.” For Mr. Violet, there is a benefit for the government as well. “We’ll get them back and paying good property tax,” he noted.

Responding to ODR’s explanation that the permitting process is also contributing to delays, Mr. Violet encouraged a collaborative fix. “Permits fall under central government. So there needs to be a meeting with the executive branch...We have a deadline to spend this money. So you can't be taking months to issue one permit for a home.”

The Office of Disaster Recovery must complete all of the homes under the EnVIision Tomorrow program by 2027.