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Native Virgin Islander and Deputy HUD Secretary Promises Collaboration for Territory's Rebuild During Visit to USVI

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VIHFA Exec. Director Daryl Griffith and HUD Deputy Secretary Adrienne Todman on the site of the Donoe Redevelopment Project. By. THE VIRGIN ISLANDS HOUSING FINANCE AUTHORITY

The V.I. Finance Authority said in a release early Sunday that it welcomed on Friday native Virgin Islander and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Deputy Secretary Adrienne Todman to the territory.

Ms. Todman and several HUD officials met with Governor Albert Bryan and VIHFA's Executive Director Daryl Griffith, Chief Disaster Recovery Officer, Dayna Clendinen and Director of

Programs, Ann Hanley to discuss accomplishments and challenges of the Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) program. The CDBG-DR oversees projects and manages federal monies allocated to the VI for disaster recovery and mitigation.

Mr. Griffith outlined specificities around the EnVIision Rehabilitation and Reconstruction program and challenges that VIHFA staff encounter, including administrative steps toward getting applicants to their grant agreement—the last step before construction, according to the release.

Ms. Todman made a commitment on behalf of HUD to collaborate with the authority to help the people of Virgin Islands see a path forward.



LtR: HUD's Alan Williams, Adrienne Todman, Efraín Maldonado and VIHFA' Dana Clendinen, Daryl Griffith, Governor Albert Bryan and Chief of Staff Karl Knight. (Credit: VIHFA)

“That’s one of the reasons I’m here today. We want to look at the bottlenecks, and if we think that it’s our rules that are creating those bottlenecks, let’s make sure that you are interpreting those as flexible as possible to get things moving,” she said. “If you’re not doing well, we’re not doing well.”

According to the release, VIHFA top officials lauded project progress of the \$95 million investment into the custom build of generators for the Water and Power Authority, which is expected to provide an additional 40 megawatts of reliable and sustainable energy backup in the territory. This is HUD's first investment in the power system in the Virgin Islands, stated VIHFA. VIHFA said it is developing an action plan for Tranche 5 which will fund the electrical power system enhancements and improvements in the USVI.

"We will be looking for some resiliency planning with those funds, to include green energy," said Ms. Todman. "This is generational money, so find what you can embed in the fabric of the power grid that will outlast all of us here at the table."

Governor Bryan, who according to the release initiated the invitation for this visit during a virtual meeting on September 23, paralleled his prioritization of alternative energy for the territory. The Vision 2040 Plan led by the administration and funded through CDBG-DR sets an aspirational goal of having 75 percent of energy generation by renewable sources in the next forty years. "Our goal is a renewable company," Mr. Bryan said.

The delegation of HUD and VIHFA officials started the afternoon by visiting the Donoe Redevelopment project which is funded by VIHFA's CDBG-DR and Low-Income Housing Tax Credits and managed by the Virgin Islands Housing Authority (VIHA). VIHA Executive Director Robert Graham presented plans for Donoe to house 84 families across 14 buildings. The site will be energy independent and feature the use of solar panels, battery storage and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) turbines.

The group then visited the private residence of Dale and Edita Carty, whose home received over \$150,000 worth of repairs under the VIHFA's EnVIision Program. The couple shared their terrifying experience of Hurricane Irma with the deputy secretary and expressed their gratitude and appreciation for the assistance they received through the program.

Jackson Development Company Executive, former Senator Clifford Graham opened the doors to the recently completed Magen's Junction Apartments Phase 2 residential community, also funded by CDBG-DR and Low-Income Housing Tax Credits. The sustainable living community features a pool, fitness center, modern amenities in each unit all powered by an energy independent microgrid which uses high efficiency, low emission microturbines, solar panels and battery storage.

Mr. Griffith, the VIHFA executive director, said he was encouraged by the visit from a top HUD official. "The VIHFA team was able to clearly communicate our challenges. The Authority went from having just under 40 employees managing \$20 million to over 100 employees and growing and undertaking the management of nearly \$2 billion," he said. "The Deputy Secretary physically being in the territory is an indication of the commitment from HUD to see the territory through to full recovery and resilience. It is a blessing that we have one of our very own who truly understands the plight of disaster recovery here in the Virgin Islands."

Ms. Todman was accompanied by Deputy Assistant Secretary for Intergovernmental Relations Alan Williams; Deputy Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs Michael Burns; Director of the Field Office for Puerto Rico and the USVI Efraín Maldonado; and Puerto Rico Field Office Disaster Recovery Coordinator Laura Rivera.

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