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Progress Reported on Envision Program With 41 Homes Built, 15 Under Construction and 90 Drawings Pending

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Recent policy changes and personnel additions mean that dozens of families affected by the 2017 hurricanes will be able to live comfortably once more, according to the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority (VIHFA).

The authority was granted disaster relief funding four years ago to support residents whose homes were badly damaged following that devastating hurricane season which left many Caribbean islands in ruins and facing the daunting task of rebuilding.

In October 2022, members of the 34th Legislature were left sorely disappointed when VIHFA officials reported that [only 16 homes had been restored](#) since receiving financing from the federal

government.

However, during her testimony before members of the 35th Legislature's Committee on Housing, Transportation, and Telecommunications last week, VIHFA Interim Executive Director Dayna Clendinen told lawmakers that 25 additional homes had been built since the last report. Apart from those that have already been completed, 15 are currently under construction, seven are in solicitation, and 90 are pending drawings.

"These numbers also do not reflect all the improvements the program has made during the last quarter of 2022 and the start of 2023," said Ms. Clendinen, who also serves as VIHFA's chief disaster recovery officer.

The authority has hired a new director of housing, Jamillie Perez, who, in collaboration with Chief Engineer Rupert Pelle, are focused solely on the EnVIsion Program.

"It's not satisfactory to the public, I get it, because the storms happened some time ago, we've had the funding since 2019 but you haven't had this team. Give us the opportunity to get it done. We are coming, we are working, it's still some hoops we have to jump through but we are well on our way," Ms. Clendinen said.

Communication with EnVIsion clients has also improved, the VIHFA head said. "Through our communications team, we have interviewed clients within the program – those whose repairs have been completed and those still awaiting completion – about their experience, concerns, and program shortfalls. We have seen an increase in emails and inquiries and are further streamlining our responses so that updates can be provided proactively," Ms. Clendinen explained.

She added that through their Citizen Complaint Process, VIHFA can quickly identify and respond to emergencies and "unclog bottlenecks" that have been frustrating for homeowners.

According to the interim director, "by the end of June 2023, the program is projected to mobilize 80 homes and should have 200 homes mobilized by the end of the year".

Despite the rapid progress made by the VIHFA team in the past four months, however, the authority still has more than 400 homes left to repair by 2026. Hundreds of families also remain displaced, with fewer than three months to go until the next hurricane season.

Judy-Ann Fredrick, VIHFA's disaster recovery finance director, said that so far, the authority has spent \$9.3 million for construction and environmental services over the life of the program as well as \$8 million on administrative costs. With that, they have built 25 homes. "Currently in our funding for EnVIsion, we currently have available over \$226 million," she said. That includes funds to pay contractors and money for other administrative services.

"When we say administrative costs within the EnVIsion program, we have case management services. Our overall administrative cost for the program is different," she said. According to Ms. Fredrick, it also includes activity delivery and construction management costs.

Meanwhile, Mr. Pelle said the majority of the homes require reconstruction or rehabilitation and generally take 60 to 90 days to complete, depending on the severity of the damage to the home and whether roof repair is necessary. "Total reconstruction will probably be about 10 to 12 months for those," he added.

Part of the challenge, officials say, has been finding sufficient contractors to build these homes.

“Recently, we issued a request for proposals — seven houses under the EnVIision Tomorrow program — and used that as an opportunity to reach out to Housing Finance Authorities on the mainland or within our region with whom we can partner,” Ms. Clendinen said.

VIHFA said it is currently collaborating with sister agencies in Florida, Connecticut, California, and Alabama — all of which have had disaster recovery programs — and understand the specific regulations and needs, and have agreed to make its Requests for Proposals available to their mailing and distribution lists. “We anticipate soliciting proposals for seven additional homes by mid-month,” Ms. Clendinen added.

John Greene, director of planning and construction at VIFHA, said new construction is likely to be completed within 24 months.

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