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Resources and Development Committee meets again with NHA to receive update on housing plans and goals for the next year

LAS VEGAS, Nev. – Last Friday, the Resources and Development Committee held a work session and met with the Navajo Housing Authority to go over the administration and board’s Indian Housing Plan, five-year plan, and upcoming goals for the next year.

RDC chair Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Łichíí, Steamboat) said the work sessions are aimed at reviving the construction of homes on the Navajo Nation, as well as ensuring accountability and amending age-old processes that have hindered housing development in the last 10 years.

“I issued a letter on Nov. 21, and several members asked for several things and we know there is going to be a next step. In a nutshell, we want to know about the short and long term goals, as well as future priorities,” said Delegate Shepherd.

NHA interim chief executive officer Roberta Roberts stated that they have implemented short-term goals that will be completed in the next year, which include reorganization of the NHA by July 2018, begin developing the 2019 Indian Housing Plan, implement reform to gain access to land for new construction, obtain additional resources, and continue to improve the Land Information Management System to identify feasible land areas for housing development.

According to the NHA report, from 2013-2017, approximately 1,010 homes were modernized, 556 housing units were provided, and nearly 111 new homes were constructed in each year. The report states that short-term plans include hiring a CEO, continuing to prioritize housing construction, improve partnerships and agreements with public safety, and improve communication with key stakeholders and the Navajo public.

The report goes on to state that the five-year plan includes decentralizing services, organizational restructuring, policy changes, provide consumer education for homeownership, legislative reform for housing, grazing and land reforms, and completing annual audits and making their financial status public to promote transparency.

Delegate Shepherd expressed his support for the changes and goals that the NHA's administration and board of commissioners are seeking to implement, and recommended that they also focus on economic development.

"I don't know if there have been individualized reports for each Navajo district area, but you have to look at it in terms of economic development—we should be showcasing specific areas for economic development and chapters need to start withdrawing those lands," said Delegate Shepherd.

Delegate Shepherd requested that the NHA provide a report to the Navajo Nation Council that illustrates the housing status in each region, recommend improvements that need to be made, and determine how chapters can be included in economic development planning in terms of housing.

Roberts said that one of the issues that NHA faces is that at times they are left out of important discussions regarding housing and are the last to be informed of proposed initiatives. She added that her department would continue to improve communication despite barriers that have hindered the agencies progression in the last several years.

NHA has made strides to streamline processes such as housing applications, improving the housing process, land withdrawals, consents, maintenance, coordination with chapter master planning, mapping, and other related housing components, said Roberts.

RDC member Council Delegate Davis Filfred (Mexican Water, Aneth, Teecospos, Tólikan, Red Mesa) said although the housing needs for low income families is important, NHA should also focus on developing plans that aid non-low income individuals and families.

"We need to make housing fair for all Navajo citizens so we can bring back our Navajo professionals, such as doctors, nurses, teachers, and young people who want to come home. Too often we hear that younger Navajo people want to come home eventually, but are discouraged because they don't fall into any bracket that aids them in obtaining a home back in their communities," said Delegate Filfred.

In response to Delegate Filfred's recommendation, she informed RDC members that they are currently creating a workforce and mixed income housing for Navajo personnel and individuals who work on the Navajo Nation, and have prioritized filling housing vacancies in the next year.

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