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Resources and Development Committee hears report on Eastern Agency veterans' housing concerns involving NHA

ST. MICHAELS, Ariz. – In the lone report heard by the Resources and Development Committee on Tuesday, concerns drew forth over the Navajo Housing Authority's nonresponsive disposition toward repeated requests by an Eastern Agency delegate for answers as to why a number of veterans in his district have been waiting for as long as ten years to move into homes constructed for them on their home sites.

Aneva J. Yazzie, chief executive officer for NHA, was listed on the agenda to provide an update report on veterans housing funding and related activities. Instead, NHA chief operations officer, Earl Tulley, was present to report in her place.

Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau) informed the committee that since July 12 he has repeatedly left email and phone call messages for Aneva Yazzie to establish a meeting so she could provide answers on the status of three separate veterans housing situations in the Eastern Agency.

"Personally, Madame Chair and committee members, I am pretty upset," said Delegate Yazzie, adding that the only time the housing entity responds to him is when he requests to report on his interactions with NHA to the Resources and Development Committee, the oversight body of NHA.

According to Delegate Yazzie, three veterans have been waiting for years to move into homes that were built for them, but for reasons unknown are not allowed to move in.

These homes are located in communities of Pinedale, Smith Lake, and Mariano lack – all situated on the New Mexico side of the reservation.

Describing the Pinedale veteran's home, Delegate Yazzie stated, "It's done, but it's boarded up now. Gangbangers have already spray painted on this house. For many years, that house has just been sitting there."

In Smith Lake, a husband and wife that both served tour duties in Iraq have been waiting to move into the home that was constructed for them approximately ten years ago.

"For ten years they sit out of their mobile homes, look out upon this house, and just wonder when they're going to move in," said Delegate Yazzie. "They have tried to work with the housing authority but there has been no response."

Before Tulley was given the opportunity to respond to Yazzie's report, Council Delegate Leonard Pete (Chinle) imparted his comments.

“What I would like to see is a good report from out in the field on the different projects,” said Delegate Pete, who has worked on BIA road construction projects for 26 years.

From his experience as a project manager, Delegate Pete said excellent project management will produce informative reports that can explain every point of the project, including where the project is at in its development and why there may be possible delays.

The lack of construction updates did not sit well with Delegate Pete, who suggested that NHA’s policies be examined to improve the timely completion of housing construction projects.

According to Tulley, NHA has spent \$17 Million on veterans’ assistance housing, and works in conjunction with the Department of Navajo Veterans Affairs on housing needs.

RDC members were handed two internal NHA memorandums outlining the number of veterans’ homes that are currently being constructed in parts of the Eastern, Northern, and Ft. Defiance agencies.

Of twenty-two veterans’ houses, eighteen are scheduled for completion as early the first week of September to as late as the last week of October.

Ten of those eighteen homes are scheduled for completion by late October are located in the Eastern Agency, and have been under construction for two years.

While Tulley did not offer specific explanations for the construction delays of two of the three veterans housing situations Delegate Yazzie voiced concern over, he did explain that in the case of the Pinedale home, repairing damages due to vandalism was the cause for delay.

“We’ve had family issues up in that area,” said Tulley, referring to the Eastern Agency where family members have been said to be attacking and vandalizing home construction of other family members.

“When that happens, we have to go in and repair them,” explained Tulley, stating that these repairs cut into their funding and increase project costs.

Council Delegate Katherine Benally (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta) asked Tulley whether NHA had an established appeals process through which community members could utilize to channel their housing related concerns and issues.

Chapters can funnel their concerns to the Grants Management department of NHA, Tulley answered.

As for Delegate Yazzie’s concerns over the specific three veterans housing situations in his region, he prefers to hear answers directly from NHA CEO Aneva Yazzie.

“I want to request to have a follow-up on this, and request for Ms. Yazzie, and not her staff, to be present where she can answer,” Delegate Yazzie concluded. “Our veterans have sacrificed so much to protect our people. We need to ensure that we address their needs.”

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