



25th Navajo Nation Council

25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

MEDIA CONTACT:

nnlb.communications@gmail.com

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Budget and Finance Committee questions progress of Navajo Veterans Administration Housing Program



PHOTO: Members of the Budget and Finance Committee expressed their concerns about issues regarding the Navajo Veterans Housing Program.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – On Tuesday, the 25th Navajo Nation Council’s Budget and Finance Committee received an update report on the Navajo Veterans Housing Program from Navajo Nation Veterans Administration (NNVA) Executive Director Bobbie Baldwin.

Under the 24th Navajo Nation Council, \$50 million from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) was appropriated for the purpose of addressing the housing needs of Navajo veterans.

“Currently, the Navajo Veterans Administration has one contract in place with the Southwest Indian Foundation (SWIF) for the amount of \$4.6 million to construct 20 homes throughout the Navajo Nation,” Baldwin said. “The average cost of these homes ranges from \$170,000 to \$230,000.”

Earlier in the week, the Office of the President and Vice President publicly reported that the contract signed by the President for Southwest Indian Foundation totaled \$6 million.

Baldwin said the homes to be constructed are modular style. Six of the homes will be one bedroom and the 14 remaining homes will be three-bedroom homes. The duration of the

contract with SWIF is 24 months. Aside from the 20 homes being constructed, Baldwin reported that the program currently has an additional 165 approved applications.

Members of the Budget and Finance Committee presented concerns over feasibility assessments, project personnel, and the Request for Qualifications for the housing program.

Regarding the selected contractor, SWIF, Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Beclabito, Cove, Gadi'i'áhi/To'Koi, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooi, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé ałnáoz't'I'i) voiced concerns regarding SWIF's ability to construct homes beyond a 50-mile perimeter outside of Gallup, N.M.

"Will SWIF construct homes in the Northern Navajo Agency?" she asked. "In the past, they had challenges with this."

Baldwin responded that there is not a 50-mile limitation in place in the SWIF contract and that they are able to build homes in all five Navajo agencies.

Council Delegate Seth Damon (Bááháálí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí', Rock Springs, Tsayatoh) expressed concern over the program's eligibility and feasibility assessments pertaining to the 165 approved applicants and their homesite leases. He questioned the extent and timeframe of the assessments, wanting assurance that the homesites had been surveyed for infrastructure, floodplain studies, endangered species zones, and removal of existing structures.

"This listing of 165 names, have you fully completed eligibility and feasibility assessments, so that these applicants are good to go no matter what?" Delegate Damon asked. "Some of these homesite leases were issued in the 90's and some of these things weren't assessed. I don't want the NNVA to come back and say that they've already talked with these families, but now they're not getting a home because of these issues."

Baldwin said that she acts as the point person on behalf of the NNVA and that her assessment of the eligibility of applicants indicates that everyone on the list is shovel ready. However, she said that there is the possibility that the issues that Delegate Damon brought up could hinder some applications.

"Many of these floodplains exist in what are known as 500-year flood zones, meaning that every 500 years there is a major storm that impacts these areas. If we weigh the need against the 500-year flood zone, I'd expect these veterans will want a home, even if it's in one of these zones. Our key goal is to get them out of the elements," she said. "If a homesite exists in a floodplain, we'll have to work with the applicant to find a location outside of the floodplain or we'll have to move them down the list. We do have contingency plans,"

Baldwin added that the NNVA is currently waiting on the results of the two Request for Qualifications (RFQ). One RFQ is to determine design planning and construction of homes, which closes on Nov. 28. The second RFQ is for project and contract management. The second RFQ will establish contract compliance officers, or project managers, to oversee the contractors selected for design planning and construction.

"Once we select these contractors, based on their region, it's our hope that they'll be dispersed

throughout the Navajo Nation," she said.

Budget and Finance Committee Vice Chair Carl Slater (Lukachukai, Rock Point, Round Rock, Tsaile/Wheatfields, Tsé Ch'izhi) questioned the dual responsibility that Baldwin would undertake as a point person for 165 home projects and her duties as the NNVA Executive Director. He said that Navajo veterans have been waiting for far too long to have these homes built.

"I haven't seen the seriousness from this administration or the last in getting these houses built," he said.

Baldwin noted the NNVA would need additional personnel to help staff the program and to conduct assessments.

Delegate Damon urged Baldwin to carefully assess the ARPA deadlines and the ability of the contractors and project managers to assure that there will not be any delays in construction.

"At the end of the day, if you don't get this done, we don't get this done. It will be both of our faults. We don't want that to happen," he said.

The Budget and Finance Committee accepted the NNVA's Housing Program report with a vote of five in favor and zero opposed.

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