



PRESS RELEASE

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Conference on Island Sustainability highlights housing affordability

Gov. Lou Leon Guerrero projected changes in the availability of affordable and sustainable homes as the island pivots out of the pandemic. She was among several private and public sector speakers at an all-day Guam Housing Symposium held Tuesday at the Hyatt Regency Guam as part of the University of Guam's 13th Conference on Island Sustainability.

Ensuring access to adequate, safe, and affordable housing and basic services is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals set forth by the United Nations that the UOG Center for Island Sustainability and the Guam Green Growth initiative are working to implement locally.

The symposium, themed "Bridging Gaps for a Sustainable Tomorrow," brought experts and officials together to discuss fundamental issues regarding housing needs for the people of Guam, including homelessness, housing sustainability, quality of life for elderly and individuals with disabilities, and the future of housing in Guam.

Strategic plan in the works

The symposium was hosted by the graduating candidates in the Master of Public Administration program at UOG in collaboration with the UOG Regional Center for Public Policy and the Guam Housing and Urban Renewal Authority. The MPA cohort is developing a strategic plan to tackle challenges indicated in a housing study conducted by GHURA.

"The current need is the housing availability to the community, most especially ADA-compliant homes and the affordability of these homes," said Melchor S. Castigador, an MPA student and co-chair of the symposium. "What we achieved through this housing

symposium is the knowledge and information needed to help push forth our strategic plan.”

The cohort is working to complete the strategic plan for GHURA this May.

Initiatives to address homelessness

During her opening remarks at the symposium, the governor noted the establishment of the Interagency Council on Homelessness in 2020 and further highlighted various multi-sector initiatives addressing homelessness on Guam, including:

- Guam Housing Corporation’s groundbreaking last month for the renovation of 23 homes in Lada Gardens, expanding its inventory of rental units.
- The establishment of the Office of Homelessness Assistance and Poverty Prevention, which provides families access to housing, transportation, food security, and health care assistance.
- The opening of the Global Dorm homeless shelter in Maite in 2020, which prioritizes admittance of families and children. The shelter reached full capacity with a long waiting list during the pandemic. When the shelter closed, many of the families transitioned into homes through the Emergency Rental Assistance Program.
- The opening of a second homeless shelter in Tamuning in 2021. The shelter is now managed by Catholic Social Service.
- The acquisition of a \$3 million grant from the Department of the Interior to acquire a permanent shelter for Guam’s homeless population. This is currently in procurement.
- The launch of the Emergency Rental Assistance Program. At the height of the pandemic, the government also issued a moratorium on eviction proceedings to protect families facing financial hardship.
- The launch of the Governor’s Education Assistance and Youth Empowerment Group grant program to support students who live in substandard housing and have lost access to educational resources, including reliable internet and hard copy materials.

Leon Guerrero said, “We cannot emerge from this pandemic without addressing sustainability and the future of housing, and we can’t address the future of housing without addressing the needs of our community facing homelessness.”

Regarding making housing more affordable, Vince Arriola, director of the Department of Public Works, said multi-sector partnerships will be key.

“There’s a lot of local land, government land, that we can use to build affordable homes for our people,” he said. “So we just have to find the right partner with the right contractors and the right financing.”

The University of Guam Conference on Island Sustainability made its return to the Hyatt Regency Guam this year, after virtual conferences were held in 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic, with the theme “Harness Wind in Our Sails to a Sustainable 2030.”

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Photo captions:



2022-uog-cis-mpa-housing-symposium

Graduating candidates of the Master of Public Administration program at the University of Guam hosted a Guam Housing Symposium at the UOG Conference on Island Sustainability on Tuesday in collaboration with the UOG Regional Center for Public Policy and the Guam Housing and Urban Renewal Authority. (From left) Jessiree Patao; Adrian Festejo; Millie Lujan; Natasha Suba, symposium co-chair; Manuel Lumbang, active executive director of GHURA; Elizabeth Napoli; UOG Associate Professor John Rivera; Melchor Castigador, symposium co-chair; Meagan McDonald, and Renee Carpela.

2022-uog-cis-housing-sustainability-panel

Bobby Sachdej, general manager of Citi Development & Construction speaks on the Housing Sustainability panel during the Guam Housing Symposium on April 5 at the Hyatt Regency Guam. The symposium was part of the University of Guam’s Conference on Island Sustainability. (From left) Rebecca Respicio, director, Guam Energy Office; Fabrienne Respicio, vice president of sales and marketing, Gigacrete; Sachdev; and Heidi Kujawa, CEO, ByFusion.

2022-uog-cis-homelessness-panel

Therese Arriola, director of the Guam Behavioral Health and Wellness Center speaks on a panel regarding homelessness during the Guam Housing Symposium on April 5 at the Hyatt Regency Guam. The symposium was part of the University of Guam's Conference on Island Sustainability. (From left) Margaret Hattori-Uchima, dean, University of Guam School of Health; Sarah Thomas Nededog, director, Office of Homelessness and Poverty Prevention; and Samantha Taitano, executive director, Mañe'lu.

Photos courtesy of University of Guam