Streamlining project approval processes sought

The Governor's Council of Economic Advisers has emphasized the importance of getting various projects off the ground as soon as possible to help the CNMI get through the COVID-19 pandemic and fast-track the islands' recovery from the crisis.

In response, Gov. Ralph DLG Torres said that government agencies will help facilitate in the processing of key projects.

"Our recovery requires a whole-of-government approach that modernizes our permitting processes to ensure that federal grants are expended efficiently and recovery projects are executed effectively. Lt. Gov. [Arnold I.] Palacios and I have already instructed our departments and agencies to prioritize the execution of these projects by streamlining the permitting process in order to strengthen our infrastructure, rebuild homes, and create job opportunities for our residents," Torres said.

Mike Sablan, who chairs the GCEA's Domestic Policy Recovery Committee, said the immediate expenditure of the $300-plus million in COVID-related grants plus more than $400 million in Yutu and Mangkhut disaster relief funds will have a multiplier impact on the economy, which is crucial in these difficult times.

"Hundreds of millions of dollars for disaster relief projects will soon become available, some as early as November or December this year. They will go toward typhoon repairs and mitigation efforts to harden facilities, homes, and infrastructure. And, just as important as the repairs are, the economic impact of infusing these millions of dollars into our community in the coming months amidst all the challenges we face cannot be overstated, nor ignored," Sablan said.

These projects and the funds that will be spent in completing them will provide the CNMI the needed economic activities, while waiting for the reboot of the tourism industry.

"We know that tourism will return to our beautiful islands, but when? Which means we also don't know when our tourism sector can safely ramp back up and regenerate the jobs and tax revenues we need. And how much longer can our government continue to provide essential services without an economy to speak of?" Sablan said.

With the disaster relief funds and pandemic grants, Sablan said the CNMI will have the means to move forward and must capitalize on these opportunities by getting projects off the ground without unnecessary delays. This can be done by improving efficiencies and streamlining processes in procurement, permitting, and contract management. He added that these improvements can be implemented without compromising the importance of fair procurement practice, protecting the environment and natural resources, and complying with grantor requirements.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
A worker operates the truck drilling machine at the demolition site of the Northern Marianas College where new buildings will be constructed through federal grants.

Under the current system, Sablan said the timeline for projects, beginning from the funding approval all the way up to the issuance of permits to start construction is 29 months, including resolving legal disputes, if there's any. The process will take longer if legal issues are not settled quickly.

Joe Guerrero, a local businessman and member of the GCEA Fiscal Economic Diversification, said a reasonable timeline for permitting would be between four and five months (from the usual eight months) plus 12 months, the most, for procurement (20 months norm). He added that in certain states, there are programs available to aid in the permitting and if the CNMI can replicate that, especially for COVID-19 and Yutu-funded projects, it will make a significant impact to the islands' economy.

Jerry Tan, who co-chairs the GCEA with Torres, calls the improvement in the approval processes a "game changer" not only for the pressing projects today, but also in the future as the upgrade will boost investors' confidence to the CNMI and its efficient system of conducting business with both the private and public sectors, helping bring to the islands' the quality investments its aiming for.

Meanwhile, the GCEA acknowledged the groups and individuals who helped secure these grants and provide immediate assistance to the community. Sablan said it's unimaginable how we could have weathered the storm without the CARES Act funding for COVID-related emergency needs, such as stimulus checks, PPP subsidies, Small Business Administration loans, unemployment assistance, and others.

"The unprecedented impact the pandemic has brought upon our government, economy, and community continues to test our resiliency like never before. I know it was no easy feat for agency staff to navigate complex, uncharted processes to get over $300 million in COVID-related benefits into our community and help keep our economy afloat," Sablan said. ***(PR)***

History Talks: Operation Forager with Don Farrell

Pacific Historic Parks, in partnership with the Northern Marianas Humanities Council, would like to invite the community to join us LIVE on Zoom on Thursday, Oct. 29, 2020, at 9am for *Operation Forager, Northern Attack Force: The Battle for Saipan and Tinian* with Don A. Farrell.

About this Talk

Just as the Battle of Midway was a turning point in the Pacific War by crippling Japan's carrier fleet, so too were the Battles for Saipan and Tinian turning points in the Pacific War in that they cut Japan's line of communications to and from its "southern resource area" and established forward naval and air bases from which American forces could conduct the campaign for the ultimate defeat of Japan. Saipan would be a tough nut to crack, having been under Japanese administration since 1914. Tinian's capture enabled the construction of the largest airbase in the world, supporting the new B-29 Superfortress that would take the war to the Japanese home islands. A maximum effort at interservice cooperation was required from invasion, to base development, to B-29 operations.

About Farrell

Don A. Farrell was born in Redmond, Oregon, and served in the U.S. Air Force from 1965-1971. Farrell has published several books and credits his understanding of Marianas history to 35 years of government service, including chief of staff to the speaker of the Guam Legislature, and chief of staff to the mayor of the Municipality of Tinian and Aguiguan. He has also served as chairman of the CNMI Board of Education and a member of both the Northern Marianas Humanities Council and the CNMI Historic Preservation Review board.

Registration is free, at https://bit.ly/PHP_HTSregistration_DonFarrellOperationForager.

This project was made possible by support from the Northern Marianas Humanities Council, a non-profit, private corporation with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the federal CARES Act.

For more information on this event, contact Jovanalyn Mafnas at email address: jmafnas@pacifichistoricparks.org. ***(PHP)***

MD: **History Talks: Op-**

SAIPAN HIGHER EDUCATION FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE
Office of the Mayor
Municipality of Saipan

NOTICE OF REGULAR SHEFA BOARD MEETING

In accordance with 1 CMC § 9901 et seq., as amended, the Saipan Higher Education Financial Assistance October 29th, 2020 at 9:30 am at the SHEFA Conference Room, 2nd Floor, CTC Building, Oleai, Beach Road, Saipan.

AGENDA

I. Preliminary Matters
1. Roll Call
2. Adoption of Agenda
3. Adoption of Minutes from October 1st, 2020

II. Public Comment

III. Reports
1. Administrator
2. Chair
3. Committee
   a. Committee on Awards
   b. Committee on Appeal/Deferments/ Forbearance
   c. Committee on Policy and Procedures
   d. Committee on Program and Development
   e. Committee of Fiscal, Legislative and Community Affairs

IV. Old Business
1. Start Smart at the Northern Marianas College
2. Service Obligation of Active Military Personnel / Reservist

V. New Business
1. Fall 2020 Application Status

VI. Executive Session

VII. Misc.

VIII. Next Meeting

IX. Adjournment

Note: Meeting may continue the following day should the need arise.

Commonwealth Utilities Corporation
Office of the Executive Director

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS
CUC-RFP-21-003

A&E DESIGN SERVICES FOR WEST SAN JOSE HOMESTEAD (TINIAN) WATERLINE PROJECT

The Office of the Executive Director, Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC) is soliciting competitive sealed proposals from qualified firms for A&E Design Services for West San Jose Homestead (Tinian) Waterline Project.

The RFP package may be obtained from the CUC Procurement and Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, Saipan, between 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on government observed holidays upon completion of registration and presentation of a receipt evidencing a non-refundable payment to the CUC Treasury Section, by cash, check or credit card in the amount of $100.00 for one RFP package set.

One (1) original and five (5) hard copies of the Proposal & One (1) original and five (5) hard copies of the Cost Proposal must be submitted in separate sealed envelopes marked *"CUC-RFP-21-003, A&E Design Services for West San Jose Homestead (Tinian) Waterline Project"*, to the CUC Procurement & Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, P.O. Box 501220, Saipan, MP 96950, **no later than November 25, 2020 at 10:00 a.m. (ChST)**. Late submissions and conditional offers will not be considered.

Discussions may be conducted with responsible proposers who submit proposal determined to be reasonably susceptible of being selected for award for the purpose of clarification and to ensure full understanding of and responsiveness to solicitation requirements. All proposers shall be accorded fair and equal treatment with respect to any opportunity for discussion. During discussions, there will be no disclosure of any information derived from the proposal submitted by competing proposers.

All proposers are advised that CUC assumes no responsibility in any act of omission on the part of the proposer due to lack of information or understanding of the RFP requirements in the course of proposer's preparation of the RFP under the contract. The RFP does not commit CUC to award a contract, to pay any cost incurred in the preparation of the RFP under this request, or to procure or contract for services. Proposers are required to comply with all CNMI and applicable Federal Laws. This RFP and the ensuing contract shall be executed as per the CUC Procurement Regulations.

Questions or requests for clarification will be entertained only from pre-registered prospective proposers and must be submitted in writing no later than **10:00 AM (ChST) on November 9, 2020** to **Manny B. Sablan**, CUC Purchasing Administrator, via email address manny.sablan@cucgov.org with a copy to Larry Manacop, CUC Acting Water/Wastewater Chief Engineer via email address larry.manacop@cucgov.org and Marcela Tenorio, Administrative Technician Senior, via email marcela.tenorio@cucgov.org.

CUC reserves the right to reject any or all proposals for any reason and to waive any defects in said RFP, if in its sole opinion, to do so would be in the best interest of CUC. All proposals shall become the property of CUC.

GARY P. CAMACHO
Executive Director

MANNY BOYER SABLAN
Purchasing Administrator