

Restoration 35 Report

COQUILLE INDIAN HOUSING AUTHORITY

The dream of reestablishing a Tribal homeland began to take shape in 1992 with the purchase of approximately 1,000 acres of land in the Empire and Barview areas of Coos Bay, Oregon. Funded by HUD grants, the Tribe began development of a low-income housing project in the mid-1990s named Kilkich, in tribute to a village that once stood nearby. Use of an experimental building method called structural insulated panels (SIPs) made quick work of constructing an office, a maintenance building, and 70 housing units.

When CIHA was established, Indian Housing Authorities were governed by the same law as Public Housing Authorities—the 1937 Housing Act. In 1996, Congress enacted the Native American Housing and Self-Determination Act (NAHASDA), which allowed tribes greater flexibility in designing their housing programs. This was a major step in honoring tribal sovereignty.

NAHASDA combined all of the housing programs previously available to tribes into one program, the Indian Housing Block Grant (IHBG), and began to distribute grant funds based on a formula factoring in tribal enrollment, census data, and other variables. The first IHBG grants were awarded in 1999 and soon CIHA began revising its programs to better fit Tribal needs.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, CIHA constructed a community playground and added ten manufactured homes to its inventory. Administration of the Tribe's 19 Section 8 vouchers moved from the local Public Housing Authority to CIHA, creating the rental assistance program known as the Monthly Housing Assistance Program (MHAP).

It became clear in 2002 that the SIPs used to construct the units were unable to withstand the maritime climate and were failing quickly. Over the next 10 years, at a total cost of \$2.5 million, each of the SIP housing units was carefully reconstructed using conventional framing techniques, moisture barriers, and durable siding materials. The 15-year roofing used in the original construction was replaced with a 150-mph rated roofing material with a longer life expectancy.

Also, during that period, the transformation of Kilkich from a conventional HUD housing project to a welcoming, desirable place to live began in earnest. Green spaces and landscaping were introduced in common areas throughout the community, new philosophies and practices were put in place to help remove the barriers to success faced by low-income families, and a new focus on resource conservation helped to create a more sustainable, inviting environment.

A structural evaluation of CIHA's maintenance building, also constructed with SIPs, was conducted in 2012. Analysis determined the structure too costly to rehabilitate and the building was demolished due to safety concerns in 2015. CIHA financed construction of a new facility on the footprint of the old through a bond process (another exercise of Tribal sovereignty) and a loan from the Tribe's Economic Development Revolving Loan Fund. An open house marked completion of the new facility at the 2018 Tribal Restoration Celebration.

Meanwhile, funding concerns were becoming more pressing. IHBG funding levels had not changed significantly in 20 years. The Tribe's 2019 funding amount was slightly less than its funding in 1999.

Over the course of the 20-year period, the value of the U.S. dollar had declined 35%. Other grant funds had been found for various projects, and cost-saving measures had been implemented, but CIHA would need additional funds to expand services.

A new IHBG-Competitive Grant program was introduced by HUD in 2018. CIHA applied for and was awarded a grant in December 2019 to rehabilitate three units and construct three new units at Kilkich. In March 2020, CIHA's work shifted abruptly as COVID-19 changed our lives. The next few years were dedicated almost entirely to emergency assistance programs.

As the surge of need for COVID relief programs subsided, CIHA reengaged with plans for the Kilkich Accessible Housing Project. Contracts for the rehabilitation portion of the project were executed in 2023 and work on those units is currently in progress. Preliminary activities for the new units will be completed soon with construction scheduled for 2025. Plans have grown to five new units with the addition of other grant funds.

Thanks to Tribal contributions, CIHA assistance has expanded from those first 89 units, available primarily in Coos Bay, to a current base level of 121—a third of which are available nationwide. Including COVID programs, CIHA has administered more than 350 units of housing assistance for Tribal families in the last three years. We look forward in the near future to expanding existing services and developing new programs to help the Tribal membership achieve housing stability and success.

Learn more at www.coquilleiha.org.