



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Navajo Nation Council members commend approval of amendments to the land acquisition process



PHOTO: Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (far right) and Council Delegate Tuchoney Slim, Jr. (far left) at the signing ceremony for the passage of land acquisition process amendments at the Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President in Window Rock, Arizona on August 10, 2016.

WINDOW ROCK – On Wednesday, Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichíí, Steamboat) and Council Delegate Tuchoney Slim, Jr. (Bodaway/Gap, Coppermine, K'ai'Bii'To, LeChee, Tonalea/Red Lake) were in attendance as President Russell Begaye signed into law a resolution passed by the Navajo Nation Council on Aug. 2, amending the Navajo land acquisition process and enacting the Navajo Nation Land Acquisition Act.

Delegate Shepherd, who sponsored the legislation, stated that the amendments to the land acquisition process will allow the Navajo Nation to acquire more industrial and commercial properties and will create flexibility for the Nation to acquire and dispose of real property.

Under the previous land acquisition process created in 1954, the Resources and Development Committee was authorized to consider and investigate land purchase proposals and to issue recommendations to the Council. The Council and the Bureau of Indian Affairs then considered all appraisals and proposals for approval, which were then considered by the president.

Among the new amendments includes giving limited authority to the executive director of the Navajo Nation Division of Natural Resources, to grant final approval for the purchase or disposal of land not to exceed \$5 million per calendar year. Acquisitions between the sums of \$5 million and \$20 million require final approval by the RDC, and amounts exceeding \$20 million require final approval by the Naabik'iyátí' Committee.

Delegate Shepherd and Navajo Land Department manager Mike Halona, have previously stated that the Navajo Nation has lost potential land purchases in the past due to the lengthy and complicated process, which can take two years or longer to gain final approval in some cases.

“This would allow simplicity and clarity to the policies and procedures of acquiring and disposing lands. A lot of opportunities to buy land have passed because the current laws prolong the process. The Nation needs to become competitive in the real estate market because we need to invest in land. The amendments will allow our Nation to grow in the real estate market,” stated Delegate Shepherd.

The resolution also requires the Navajo Land Department to bring forth additional rules and regulations to guide land acquisitions, which will require final approval by the Resources and Development Committee.

“This new law will create many economic development opportunities for the Nation. Also, this will allow our educated and professional young Navajo leaders to come home and develop successful businesses. This will open new doors of opportunities for the Nation,” stated Council Delegate Tuchoney Slim, Jr. (Bodaway/Gap, Coppermine, K'ai'Bii'To, LeChee, Tonalea/Red Lake).

Funds for land purchases are generated through the Navajo Nation's Land Acquisition Trust Fund. Each year, the Nation invests two-percent of its annual revenues to the trust fund to acquire properties to expand the Nation's land base.

Council members approved the legislation with a vote of 18-2, during a special session held on Aug. 2.

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