



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Navajo Nation Council approves the Síhasin Fund Twin Arrows Travel Center Development Expenditure Plan

WINDOW ROCK – On the third day of the 2016 Summer Council Session, the Navajo Nation Council approved Legislation No. 0214-16, adopting the Síhasin Fund Twin Arrows Travel Center Development Expenditure Plan.

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake), explained that the funding would be used to promote economic development by constructing a convenience store, gas station, and trucker service station at the Interstate-40 interchange near the Twin Arrows Navajo Casino Resort – located approximately 24-miles east of Flagstaff, Ariz.

Navajo Nation Gaming Enterprise CEO Derrick Watchman outlined how the project would benefit the Navajo Nation’s gaming industry and overall economy by attracting more visitors to the gaming facility, job creation, tax revenues from retail sales and construction, business site lease fee revenues, and by establishing utilities infrastructure necessary to support future development in the area.

Watchman also noted that the NNGE has contributed over \$2 million for development costs including electricity and water infrastructure, land costs, and telecommunications.

The funding for the project is provided through the \$554 million trust mismanagement settlement funds that the Navajo Nation received in 2014 from the federal government, which is held in an account known as the Síhasin Fund that was established in 2014.

The establishment of the Síhasin Fund mandated that any expenditure plans should also be supplemented by leveraged funds, such as matching funds, joint funding, cost-sharing, loan agreements, or bond financing.

Delegate Tsosie, who serves as the chair of the Síhasin Fund Subcommittee, said the funding for the NNGE would meet the leveraging criteria based on the \$2 million contribution from NNGE thus far and because a portion of the funding would be part of a loan agreement.

According to the legislation, the NNGE would receive \$2.5 million for the planning, development and construction of infrastructure and an additional \$3.5 million for the planning, development, and construction of the travel center. An additional \$4 million would be loaned to the NNGE for overall construction purposes, which would be paid back to the Nation with interest.

The legislation also includes a provision that requires the funds to be audited on an annual basis with the audit report submitted to the Council's Naabik'iyátí' Committee, the Office of the Controller, and the Office of the President and Vice President.

At the conclusion of Wednesday's discussion, Council members voted 16-2 to approve the legislation. The Navajo Nation Council serves as the final authority for the bill.

Construction of the travel center is expected to begin this summer and is tentatively scheduled to open in late spring of 2017.

Following the approval of Legislation No. 0214-16, the Council also considered two separate bills related to proposed amendments to the Navajo Land Policy on the acquisition of land, and amendments to Title 3 of the Navajo Nation Code pertaining to compensation for district grazing committee members across the Navajo Nation.

Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichíí, Steamboat) sponsored Legislation No. 0101-16, seeking to amend the land acquisition process by delegating the authority to acquire land for the Nation to the executive director of the Navajo Nation Division of Natural Resources.

Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon (Black Mesa, Forest Lake, Hardrock, Pinon, Whippoorwill) sponsored Legislation No. 0118-16, which sought to amend Title 3 to provide funds in the Nation's annual budget for compensation for district grazing committee members for attending meetings.

Both legislations garnered lengthy discussions on Wednesday and each of the legislations was eventually referred back to the Resources and Development Committee for further review and discussion. The Council will reconsider the bills at a later date.

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