



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Budget and Finance Committee issues ‘do not pass’ recommendation for Grand Canyon Escalade Project legislation

BODAWAY/GAP, Ariz. – On Tuesday, the Budget and Finance Committee met in the community of Bodaway/Gap and considered Legislation No. 0293-17, which seeks the approval of a master agreement for the development of the proposed Grand Canyon Escalade Project and a funding application for approximately \$65 million for the development of infrastructure for the project.

According to the legislation, the bill would also authorize the Navajo Nation Hospitality Enterprise to enter into a development and operating agreement, accepting the approval of the withdrawal of land in the Bodaway/Gap Chapter, approving a covenant not to compete, and waiving certain provisions in the Navajo Nation Code Title 7.

BFC vice chair Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon (Black Mesa, Forest Lake, Hardrock, Pinon, Whippoorwill) said it is important to answer several critical questions regarding the proposed development project to ensure the community is safeguarded, as well as their water resources.

“I do not see specific citations in your report that support the figures you are providing in the presentation, so I believe that would be important to provide to this committee and second, where is the water going to come from to support this project? It is going to take substantial water resources for this project,” said Delegate Witherspoon.

Representatives from the Confluence Partners, L.L.C. responded saying that they would provide Council members with citations for their data and calculations of the projected revenues. They added that the Navajo Nation Department of Water Resources indicated that a water pipeline that runs near the Gap community is sufficient enough to support the project.

According to Albert Hale, a partner with the Confluence Partners, L.L.C., stated that the project could create nearly 3,500 jobs with employee compensation at about \$39,000 per year in salary, and could generate revenues of over \$50 billion in the span of 50 years.

The Escalade Project would be comprised of a Navajoland Discovery Center that includes an Escalade Gondola Tramway that would be 1.6 miles long and approximately 3,200 feet from the rim of the canyon to the Riverwalk. The Escalade Riverwalk stops more than 300 feet from the Confluence and the preservation area, said Hale.

BFC member Council Delegate Leonard Tsoie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake) said if the project is to move forward, the Confluence Partners, L.L.C. must be committed to the project and sign an agreement to see the project through in its entirety.

Delegate Tsoie also raised concerns regarding a “non-competing clause” in the legislation and said that Navajo-owned businesses and entrepreneurs should also be allowed to profit from the project, if it should be approved. He added that local communities should be a part of the discussion and have a say in the development of their chapter area.

During the discussion, BFC chair Council Delegate Seth Damon (Bááháálí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí, Rock Springs, Tsayatoh) allowed time for 18 members of the public seated in the audience to speak openly to share their views and concerns regarding the project. Of the 18 who spoke, seven opposed and six supported the legislation, the remaining three had questions regarding the proposed project.

BFC member Council Delegate Tuchoney Sim, Jr. (Bodaway/Gap, Coppermine, K'ai'Bii'To, LeChee, Tonalea/Red Lake) encouraged the community to complete its own due diligence of the proposed Escalade Project and the impacts it would have on the community, despite the supporting resolution of the Escalade Project by the former Bodaway/Gap Chapter administration.

“Don’t let someone else propose it, do the development on your own. Your chapter needs to do its own due diligence on these entities proposing this project. I would support this initiative if the chapter can show me they are trying to be a part of the process,” said Delegate Slim, who voted in opposition of the legislation.

BFC members voted 1-3 to issue a “do not pass” recommendation for Legislation No. 0293-17. The bill now moves forward to the Naabik’iyati’ Committee and the Navajo Nation Council for consideration, which would also require the consideration of the President of the Navajo Nation.

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