



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Budget and Finance Committee members receive updates on Permanent Trust Fund Income Five-Year Expenditure Plan projects

WINDOW ROCK – On Wednesday, members of the Budget and Finance Committee received updates on the progress of projects that were funded by the Navajo Nation Council in 2016, through the \$150 million Permanent Trust Fund Income Five-Year Expenditure Plan for economic development projects, agricultural development projects, and water infrastructure development.

BFC chair Council Delegate Seth Damon (Bááháálí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí', Rock Springs, Tsayatoh) has requested periodic updates from the various entities that received funding to ensure that the projects are making progress and to offer assistance when needed.

BFC members commended the progress made on two projects that will be developed in the Crownpoint community. The expenditure plan provided approximately \$6.9 million for economic development projects in the Eastern Navajo Agency, which included \$3.75 million for a hotel and conference center and \$3.1 million for a convenience store, gas station, and laundromat.

CSB Enterprizes, LLC, a partially Navajo-owned company, which is overseeing the 50-room hotel and conference center reported that the project is nearly construction ready and that the group intends to break ground in June if they are able to secure the approval of permits for water and sewer lines from NTUA and the BIA. The group said they have been waiting on the approval from NTUA and requested the BFC members to assist in expediting the process.

Navajo-owned Thompson's Acquisitions, LLC, has completed preliminary requirements including the land withdrawal, land clearances, and business site lease for the convenience store, gas station, and laundromat development in Crownpoint. The owners said they are hopeful that the project will break ground in August of this year with a grand opening in August 2019. The group added that they have encountered challenges in obtaining road access to New Mexico Highway 371 for the business site.

BFC members thanked the groups for their persistency and offered their assistance in meeting with NTUA and the New Mexico Department of Transportation to help resolve the delay in permit approvals and road access in order to move the two projects forward immediately.

Committee members also received an update on the Wheatfields Agriculture Project presented by the Tsaile Wheatfields Blackrock Dineh Water Users Association, regarding the progress of

revitalizing farmlands in the local communities with the assistance of funding provided through the Permanent Trust Fund Income Five-Year Expenditure Plan for agricultural development.

They stated that since January, the group has partnered with Diné College Land Grant staff to conduct seven workshops for 35 farmers and ranchers on subjects related to planting, rangeland management, farm financing, and other topics. They are currently seeking more farmers to participate in upcoming workshops. To date, the project has created a total of six jobs.

BFC member Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake) encouraged the group to expand their efforts by creating farmers markets in local communities to draw customers so that farmers may earn revenue from their hard work while providing healthy food for communities.

Officials with the group said that the community has 127 individuals that are permitted to farm on existing fields, however, only 15-percent of the fields are farmed because the majority of permit holders are elderly people who do not have farming equipment or the manpower to farm. They added that many of the permits are in probate partially due to the reluctance of current holders to pass them on to young individuals who may be more capable of farming.

Despite the challenges, Tsaille Wheatfields Blackrock Dineh Water Users Association said they are looking to increase the use of the lands for farming to as much as 58-percent by next year, with the ultimate goal of revitalizing the land and creating more jobs and revenue.

The Budget and Finance Committee members also received updates on two projects that encountered challenges such as the development of a hotel and restaurant in Shiprock. The expenditure plan provided \$2.8 million, however it was reported on Wednesday that the area near the site would have to undergo an environmental assessment due to the possible leakage of underground storage tanks. The BIA has committed \$200,000 for the assessment, but another \$400,000 is needed for the full assessment to be completed.

In regards to the proposed Shonto hotel, which was funded \$5 million through the expenditure plan and would be located next to the new Shonto Marketplace, the Division of Economic Development informed BFC members that the total cost of the project would be \$14 million.

Delegate Damon urged DED and the Shonto Chapter to begin seeking other funds through loans or other sources, and to determine if the cost of the 70-room hotel may be reduced. He added that when the project was first proposed three years ago, the Budget and Finance Committee received assurances from Vice President Jonathan Nez that the additional funding would be secured to complete the hotel.

The Budget and Finance Committee will schedule another meeting to continue addressing issues and concerns in order to move the projects closer to completion.

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