



Naabik'iyáti' Committee receives Division of Community Development CARES Act report at work session

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council met via teleconference Jun. 4 for the eighth Naabik'iyáti' Committee work session discussing a possible Navajo Nation CARES Fund Act expenditure plan. Navajo Nation Division of Community Development (DCD) Executive Director Dr. Pearl Yellowman presented on current projects, impacts due to the unforeseen impacts of coronavirus (COVID-19), DCD's unmet needs and those of the Navajo Nation chapters it supports and information regarding the return of Navajo Nation employees after COVID-19.

Dr. Yellowman's verbally reported that, before 2018, DCD authorized over \$9 million to 40 capital outlay projects. As part of Navajo Nation Council Resolution No. CAP 35-18, 149 Sihásin Fund capital outlay projects were allocated roughly \$100 million.

For 2018-2019, Tribal Infrastructure Funds from New Mexico were allocated \$5.8 million and Utah Navajo Trust Fund projects were allocated approximately \$7.1 million. The Navajo Nation matched \$5.7 million through general matching funds for the related projects.

Dr. Yellowman stated that at the onset of the COVID-19 outbreak, the State of New Mexico did not fund 60 projects planned for Navajo Nation communities. The economic downturn essentially froze all project spending in the state.

DCD is now advocating to New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham to review these projects for 2020, since they are directly related to COVID-19 prevention, safety, and precautionary measures. The projects include power lines, water lines, heavy equipment and vertical build.

Dr. Yellowman also emphasized that Navajo Nation chapter house facilities need to be assessed before reopening, with special consideration to bathrooms and sinks. Reopening would require additional safety regulations and safety officers to assess each chapter. Visible markers, thermometers, gloves, masks, and bleach would all need to be provided to chapters. Additionally, Dr. Yellowman stated that chapters have a role in providing personal protective equipment (PPE) to chapter officials who would be returning to work, as well as to elders.

Dr. Yellowman asked the 24th Navajo Nation Council for support in implementing Health Command Operations Center's (HCOC) objectives formulated through the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines. She said proper decontamination of chapter facilities will cost roughly \$5,000 for "a certain square footage" or about \$500,000 for all 110. She emphasized the need for training, certification, standardized practices, codes, and precautionary measures at the chapter level to successfully mitigate chapter exposure risk.

DCD acknowledged the difficulty local communities were having in terms of exercising their local governance authority. All non-Local Governance Act certified chapter staff have been put on administrative leave by the division, which effectively shut chapters down with limited remote work arrangements. Dr. Yellowman commended chapters for accommodating to the circumstances as best as possible.

DCD is also hoping to address the Navajo Nation solid waste management plan. She stated that there used to be a sanitation plan, but that was ended by the former DCD director. Dr. Yellowman suggested hiring additional staff for this issue and expressed the need for a plan and support from the Council.

After Dr. Yellowman's official presentation, Speaker Seth Damon (Baahaali, Chilchiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tsayatoh) made a request for the written form of DCD's report to incorporate specific budget items in a future expenditure plan. Dr. Yellowman stated that she will follow the meeting with the written report.

Council delegates expressed their gratitude for Dr. Yellowman and DCD's work on COVID-19 relief related projects. In particular, DCD has been involved in providing PPE to chapter officials. They emphasized the need for cooperation and communication at the chapter level and between departments.

Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Cove, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Red Valley Tse'alnaozt'i'i, Sheepsprings, Beclabito, Gadiiahi/To'Koi) stated, "We would need to empower all 110 chapters to not only have an emergency plan, but also have the appropriate tools to implement the plan," including training, planning, coordination, and practice simulations. She also expressed concern for overlapping rural addressing issues affecting elders and the sick in rural areas.

Dr. Yellowman responded, stating that she was aware of this issue and she has reached out to a Navajo-owned mobile phone software development company in hopes of finding solutions to communicate better with those in rural places. It may enable the Navajo Nation to track real time data related to COVID-19. "We can and should use technology," stated Dr. Yellowman, though she was aware that it might not be entirely accessible to those in dead zones.

There were also concerns regarding long-term solutions to pre-COVID-19 existing issues. Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta) stated that food boxes are not long-term solutions and suggested distributing seeds, fruit trees and sheep to community members, like organizations in San Juan County, Utah, and amending the Junk Food Tax. Dr. Yellowman has been in conversation with project managers in Utah and supports amendments to the Junk Food tax.

Delegate Brown also strongly recommended not immediately reopening the Chilchinbeto Chapter because it is one of the communities hardest hit by COVID-19. He also expressed his wishes, along with others, for part of the expenditure plan to include funds for disinfecting homes.

Other issues brought up by council delegates were the need for backhoes for funerals, waiving costs of potable water to avoid cash issues and using Navajo-owned businesses in moving forward with an expenditure plan. Dr. Yellowman affirmed these concerns and stated that DCD was working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority (NTUA) to see if waived water fees could be recouped since those costs are now allocated to DCD.

While there was no official deadline stated for when these projects could be implemented, Dr. Yellowman said DCD is doing more than their best. The meeting closed with Speaker Damon thanking Dr. Yellowman for her time and expressed a sense of urgency in receiving written reports to accompany the executive director's teleconference presentation.

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