



Division of General Services gives Admin Building 1 and current Navajo Nation government facilities planning efforts updates

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — The Health, Education, and Human Services Committee (HEHSC) of the Navajo Nation Council received a report on Mar. 17 from the Navajo Nation Division of General Services (DGS) on the reopening of Administration Building #1 located in Window Rock.

Council Delegate Edison J. Wauneka (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) requested the report after several Navajo Nation employees expressed their concerns with air quality in the facility that existed before the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

The DGS oversees the management and maintenance of Navajo Nation properties as part of its ten programs under the Navajo Nation Executive Branch. The HEHSC provides oversight authority to the DGS and its programs.

DGS Acting Executive Director Tom Platero introduced six previous reports on the building to the committee from separate companies outlining the air quality within the facility. Those reports provided the DGS with assessments that supported its continued usage of the building by Navajo Nation government employees.

Platero indicated the separate Navajo Nation Office of Management and Budget (OMB), which is housed in the same building, has begun seeking out its own facility out of concern for employee safety. Upon consulting with the OMB, the DGS determined an overall budget of \$7,342,449.29 was available for related facilities work. Platero also indicated OMB was concerned with the \$8,000 per month charges at its current.

Stating the DGS will carry out the process of procuring industrial testing for Administration Building 1, Platero went on to note additional developments since becoming the acting executive director approximately four weeks earlier.

Platero said the DGS hopes to begin working with the oversight committee to develop building occupancy policies for Navajo Nation facilities based on consideration of providing reasonable accommodations for employees.

Noting the example of an instance where an employee may require accommodation after their coworker lights a candle nearby, Platero explained no policies exist to prevent issues from arising.

“This building has an occupancy over 200 people. Are you going to then redesign the building around one individual,” stated Platero. “We think there should be policies in place where you can’t do stuff like that-which could cause other people that have certain medical conditions to get those kinds of reactions.”

Platero also reported that information from the Navajo Nation Risk Management Program shows an overall 2,090 Navajo Nation structures and 430 chapter structures for a total 2,530 Navajo Nation government facilities across the Nation.

Under the annual recurring funding for the DGS, each facility would be allocated \$2,179.04, Platero added.

That data was given to the committee as a preliminary detail relating to a separate request by Council Delegate Otto Tso (Tó Nanees Dizi) for an overall survey of government facilities across the Navajo Nation at the Permanent Trust Fund and Sihásin Fund Projects task force meeting. That forthcoming report may lay the foundation for a comprehensive approach to addressing Navajo Nation employee workplace facilities.

Wauneka expressed his appreciation for Platero's decision to begin industrial testing, saying the testing will provide employees returning to the building with a level of assurance. "It will put staff at ease if they find the tests show that there's no problem with the building now," said Wauneka. "Based on that, we'll see how it goes."

Platero said he hopes to return a larger report to the committee in about a month and a half.

The HEHSC voted to accept Platero's report with a vote of five in favor, none opposed and the committee chair not voting.

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