



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Resources and Development Committee hear follow-up report from Navajo Housing Authority



Delegate Otto Tso raised concerns about the NHA Board of Commissioners not making quorum due to vacancies.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – On Nov. 3, Navajo Housing Authority (NHA) Interim Chief Executive Officer Levon Henry and Chief Operating Officer Ernest Franklin presented an update to the Resources and Development Committee (RDC) addressing housing development, board vacancies, expenditure plans, and contractor issues.

RDC Chair Brenda Jesus emphasized the need for transparency and accountability in NHA's report.

"With the current work, there is much to be done," Chair Jesus said. "Much of the needed work deals with title conveyance. It's good to hear you're addressing master leases. We have individuals who paid off their homes ten years ago and still haven't received full title conveyance."

RDC members discussed concerns involving Indigenous Design Studio + Architects (IDSA), title conveyance, veterans housing, board vacancies, and ARPA-funded projects.

Council Delegate Rickie Nez asked for clarification on NHA's agreement with IDSA. Delegate Shawna Ann Claw questioned NHA's policy regarding "shell companies" and potential liability.

Henry responded that NHA's contract with IDSA follows federal procurement procedures and poses no liability risk. "We make sure the companies we work with are approved by the federal government," he said.

Chair Jesus reiterated that concerns over IDSA require procurement policy reform. “We can’t sweep them under the rug,” she said.

Delegate Claw also raised concern over reports of veterans receiving eviction notices due to defaulted payments by Native Community Capital (NCC), which has an MOU with NHA to administer the application and approval process for the ARPA mortgage assistance program. She asked how much ARPA funding remains with the program.

“Veterans have reported that Native Community Capital defaulted on payments, causing eviction notices,” Claw said. “NCC has not reported to Council, but it looks like they still have 70% of their funding remaining from ARPA.”

Henry clarified that NCC has not defaulted and that confusion arose from its mortgage assistance process. Of 400 applicants, NCC approved eight.

“Many applications didn’t qualify under ARPA’s COVID impact criteria,” Henry said. “We try to work with applicants to get them caught up and avoid evictions.”

Henry added that NHA has submitted 71 veteran applications to the Homeowner Assistance Fund program, requiring about \$15 million in ARPA funding.

Regarding title conveyance, Henry said homeowners in subdivisions under master leases cannot receive individual homesite leases until all master lease homes are paid off.

“The homesite office can’t issue leases until the entire area is cleared,” Henry said. “We’ve tried to work with the Navajo Land Department to resolve this.”

Franklin added that NHA met with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to address overlapping leases. “We’ve developed a system to terminate certain master leases and renew others for public rentals. About 50% have been terminated,” he said.

Delegate Otto Tso raised concerns about NHA Board vacancies impacting quorum.

“You have a board barely making quorum and making decisions on millions of dollars,” Tso said.

Franklin noted that the Board has three members and two vacancies, which are being advertised. Henry added that professional qualification requirements adopted in 2018 have been difficult to meet.

“I hope these concerns don’t go in one ear and out the other,” Chair Jesus said. “It’s been almost three years and we still haven’t seen changes. We’re here if you need our help, but you have to tell us how we can assist you.”

The Resources and Development Committee voted four in favor and none opposed to accept the report from NHA.

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