



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Navajo-Hopi Land Commission addresses relocation transition, housing and infrastructure needs



Navajo-Hopi Land Commission Chair Otto Tso (left) and Commissioner Casey Allen Johnson (right), emphasized the importance of maintaining federal accountability within the terms of the Settlement Act.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — On Thursday, the Navajo-Hopi Land Commission received an update from the Navajo-Hopi Land Commission Office (NHLCO) on ongoing efforts to address housing, infrastructure, grazing management and unresolved relocation matters affecting Navajo families impacted by the Navajo-Hopi Land Settlement Act.

Commission Chair Otto Tso emphasized the importance of maintaining federal accountability as discussions continue regarding the future of the federal relocation program and the memorandum of understanding governing the transition. Tso said communication with federal officials and the Navajo Nation Washington Office will be important as the Nation seeks clarity on outstanding responsibilities.

"From our side, we have to make sure that the federal government completes its responsibilities that are laid out within the terms of the Settlement Act. We look forward to continuing those discussions and getting an update from the Navajo Nation Washington Office," said Chair Tso.

NHLCO Executive Director Sarah Slim reported that the office continues to serve communities throughout the Former Bennett Freeze Area, Navajo Partitioned Lands, Hopi Partitioned Lands, New Lands and other areas affected by relocation. The office is also coordinating with federal and Navajo Nation entities as responsibilities associated with the relocation program undergo transition. Slim said the office continues to advocate for stronger accountability, coordination

and long-term planning to address infrastructure, housing, land management and governmental service needs.

Tso said federal officials continue to discuss the transition and indicated that further dialogue with the Navajo Nation is anticipated regarding the memorandum of understanding and the future of the relocation program.

The Commission also reviewed the ARPA-funded modular housing initiative. Slim reported that the Navajo-Hopi Land Commission Office received approximately \$15.5 million for housing-related efforts, including \$14 million designated for housing in the Former Bennett Freeze Area and Navajo Partitioned Lands. More than 90 homes have been delivered in those areas, with additional homes pending as the project moves toward closeout.

Commission Vice Chair Casey Allen Johnson raised concerns about ensuring fairness in the selection of housing recipients and requested detailed information regarding the homes, beneficiaries and delivery dates. Johnson said greater transparency is necessary as the Commission evaluates how housing resources are distributed among families affected by relocation.

Slim responded that the housing program followed eligibility criteria established under the legislation and said the Commission Office maintains records regarding the families served. She also acknowledged the continuing demand for housing.

The update also addressed deteriorating water infrastructure and windmills within New Lands, long-term grazing and range management, homesite lease processing and coordination among Navajo Nation departments and federal agencies. Slim recommended developing a comprehensive management strategy that establishes clearer responsibilities among the Navajo-Hopi Land Commission Office, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Navajo Nation Department of Agriculture, Navajo Nation Water Resources, chapters, grazing permit holders and other appropriate agencies.

The Navajo-Hopi Land Commission voted to accept the Navajo-Hopi Land Commission Office report with seven in favor and none opposed.

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