



The 21st Navajo Nation Council

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Judiciary Committee receives report on status of Navajo Supreme Court Building

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – The Judiciary Committee of the 21st Navajo Nation Council received and accepted a status report from Navajo Nation Chief Justice Herb Yazzie on plans for a Navajo Supreme Court Building.

Chief Justice Yazzie explained \$1.5 million is needed for preliminary planning for the first phase of the project. The total project will cost approximately \$14 million according to projected figures released by the Budget and Finance Committee of the Navajo Nation Council.

“We have \$1.5 million from the capital account. The intent is to use this money to get the project construction ready,” Yazzie said. “I was told \$1.5 million is sufficient to do preliminary planning. That’s what we need. We need all the preliminary work -- the ground studies, boundaries and all that stuff, plus using that money to do the design.”

Yazzie also informed the committee to be open when planning and designing the project.

“In court rooms where trials are held, make sure you don’t make structures or fixtures permanent where you are chosen to model the American system of justice,” Yazzie added. “Make these rooms more like a multipurpose facility. We have to open ourselves to the community and public. Those rooms should be available for other use other than trials -- everybody has a need.”

Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Pueblo Pintado/Torreón/Whitehorse Lake) offered his advice on the project by keeping the public in mind and suggested the creation of a Legislative and Judicial Commission to plan the project.

“We have to keep the Navajo people in mind and make it easier for them to be in contact with the government, since we have ownership in that project, we should look at creating a Legislative and Judicial Commission to plan this,” Tsosie explained. “One alternative idea is that we need a lot of administrative hearing rooms.”

Council Delegate Harold Wauneka (Fort Defiance) said he supports the construction of this project and recommended the committee look at other areas for additional funding such as through Apache County.

“With the time I have with Council, I will help on this effort. I have ties with Design and Engineering and Community Development,” Wauneka said. “I am sure Apache County would like to do road inventory of the proposed project.”

A request for proposal for interested firms will be released and published in local newspapers in the upcoming weeks and the selection of a construction firm is expected by mid-March.

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Caleb Roanhorse, legislative advisor for the Judiciary Committee, reported on the importance of the \$60 million Key Bank loan, which is to be used only for priority listing sites for proposed facilities in Tuba City, Ariz., and Crownpoint, N.M. Roanhorse reported this information after suggestions surfaced to use some of the Key Bank money to help construct the Supreme Court Building.

“I think we need to have a judiciary work session with the judicial committee and the judicial branch to collaborate,” Roanhorse said. “There is some flexibility and the meeting tomorrow is crucial.”

A joint meeting between the Judiciary and Public Safety Committees is scheduled for Friday, Feb. 19, to discuss the allocation of funds for the public safety and judicial complexes to be financed by the Key Bank loan.

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