



The Navajo Nation Council - Office of the Speaker

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Speaker Morgan commends Shonto Chapter for obtaining business site leasing authority

First Native American community in the U.S. to obtain such authority

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — The Honorable Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan congratulated the Economic Development Committee of the 21st Navajo Nation Council for helping the Shonto Chapter become the first Navajo Nation chapter and the first Native American community in the United States to obtain its own business site leasing authority on July 9.

The Economic Development Committee and the Shonto Chapter's tenacious leadership is responsible for years of negotiations with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which has resulted in the chapter obtaining its own authority of managing its own business site leasing process to streamline its own local economic development and financial progress.

In 2006, Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley Jr. and BIA officials signed an historic agreement to remove the BIA from the Navajo business site leasing process with the guidance of the Economic Development Committee. This released the BIA's grip on the Navajo Nation in matters related to business site leasing, allowing the Nation to reclaim its authority to self-determination and self-sufficiency.

For years, Navajo Nation officials have envisioned taking control of this process for local empowerment to give communities the tools it needs to build local self-sufficiency to create economic opportunities for its future.

On July 9, the Economic Development Committee of the 21st Navajo Nation Council met at the Shonto chapter house to consider the Business Site Leasing Administrative Management Plan for Shonto Chapter.

Shonto Council Delegate Jonathan Nez stated that "with approval of the business site leasing authority, the Shonto Chapter will take the next step toward economic and community empowerment."

Tom LaPahe, who represents the chapters of Tachee/Blue Gap/Whippoorwill, explained that the document that the Economic Development Committee approved is something that the chapter has worked on for some time. This is what we want for the chapters and it is time that we approve it."



The Shonto Chapter became the first Navajo Nation chapter and the first Native American community in the United States to obtain its own business site leasing authority on July 9. Pictured is Lawrence R. Platero presenting documents to Jonathan Nez on behalf of the Shonto Chapter. (Courtesy photo)

Roy Dempsey, Oak Springs/St. Michaels, said that the leasing authority is a way to address disparity and to help the local governments earn income. We can stop going to Washington for money and help."

The Economic Development Committee unanimously approved to accept the Shonto Chapter's plan for business-site leasing, which was a vote for local control, autonomy and a way to strengthen local economies.

Lawrence R. Platero (Tohajiilee), chairman of the Economic Development Committee, explained that "the Shonto Chapter now has the responsibility to put the new authority to work and not let it be idle."

Platero pledged to keep looking for ways to streamline the process to facilitate business on the Navajo Nation, a system that will make the process faster and

easier for committees and chapters.

Nez said that he was very excited that the hard work of the Economic Development Committee and the Shonto Chapter finally paid off to make the Shonto Chapter the first Native American community in the U.S. to have its own business site leasing delegation. Shonto Chapter now has the ability to determine its own leasing authority, making existing business sites and planned developments move forward more efficiently.

Nez explained that Shonto can now concentrate on its immediate projects that includes the Sháá'tóhí Artist and Travel Plaza on a ten-acre site at the junction of highways 160 and 98. Other immediate projects include the Sháá'tóhí Public Service and Housing Complex that will be situated on an 18-acre site adjacent to the existing Shonto School. The Shonto Chapter will now begin developing business proposals and financial strategies for these key sites.

Since obtaining its Local Governance Act (LGA) certification in 1999, the Shonto Chapter reclaimed its governance rights.

Speaker Morgan explained that the Local Governance Act is a Navajo Nation law that was approved by the Navajo Nation Council in 1998. The LGA's purpose is to define the legislative and executive functions of chapter officials and staff, to improve community decision-making, to recognize governance at the local level by granting local authority over local matters to the governance of certified chapters — all while requiring chapters to govern responsibly and accountably.



Jonathan Nez thanks Speaker Morgan for his support in Shonto's attempt to gain their business site leasing authority.
(Photo by Joshua Lavar Butler)