



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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MEDIA CONTACTS

Jared Touchin (928) 221-9253

Jolene Holgate (928) 380-4174

Crystalyne Curley (928) 286-7918

nnlb.communications@gmail.com

Amendments to the Navajo Land Policy on Acquisition of Land and Trust Fund considered by the Resources and Development Committee

TSE BONITO, N.M. – On Tuesday, the Resources and Development Committee considered Legislation No. 0101-16, which seeks to amend the Navajo Land Policy on Acquisition of Land and the Land Acquisition Trust Fund and to enact the Navajo Nation Land Acquisition Act.

According to the legislation sponsor RDC chair Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichí, Steamboat) the amendment would allow the Navajo Nation to acquire more industrial and commercial properties rather than only acquiring lands for grazing and consolidating checkerboard areas. It would allow flexibility for the Nation to acquire and dispose of real property.

“This would allow simplicity and clarity to the policies and procedures of acquiring lands. A lot of opportunities to buy land have passed because the current laws prolong the process. The average time to acquire lands takes two years. The Nation needs to become competitive in the real estate market because we need to invest in land,” stated Delegate Shepherd.

According to the legislation, Navajo Nation Code Title 16 will be amended to enact the Navajo Nation Acquisition of Lands Acts. The Act will establish the authority for the Nation to acquire and dispose of real property.

The Division of Natural Resource Executive Director will be delegated to grant final approval for any acquisition or disposition of real property. They will report to RDC and the President in March of each year on all activities. The amendment to the Land Acquisition Trust Fund, which has an estimated balance of \$150 million, will allow the Navajo Land Department to administer and manage the funds once the DNR Director approves it.

Legal counsel for the Office of the President and Vice President Karis Begaye, emphasized the importance of amending the policies to accommodate today’s real estate market. Real estate is a major investment opportunity and it’s competitive, especially for commercial use. To be competitive in the real estate industry, the Nation must have the ability to negotiate and acquire property on a streamline basis.

“Value of land changes over time. The Nation takes two years to buy commercial and industrial lands but land owners want to sell in 30 days. We end up with lands that no one wants because of time,” stated Begaye.

“The amendments will allow the nation to be competitive. The Nation has the ability to invest in real property. We will continue to lose opportunities to acquire property that can bring revenue to the Nation,” added Delegate Shepherd.

RDC member Council Delegate Davis Filfred (Mexican Water, Aneth, Teecnospos, Tólikan, Red Mesa) requested additional information regarding the trust fund balance and the amount of land purchased from the Nation.

“What lands has the Nation purchased and has these lands benefited the Nation? How much money have we spent purchasing these lands? Which lands are we considering to purchase in the future?” questioned Delegate Filfred.

The Resources and Development Committee approved Legislation No. 0101-16 with a 3-0 vote. Delegate Filfred’s directive will be addressed during the next Naa’bik’iyati’ Committee meeting scheduled for June 9. Navajo Nation Council serves as a final authority for the legislation.

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