



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

Resources and Development Committee urges Rock Springs Chapter and Navajo Land Department to resolve homesite lease issues

ROCK SPRINGS, N.M. – On Wednesday, the Resources and Development Committee received reports from Rock Springs Chapter administrators and staff members, community members, and Navajo Land Department director Michael Halona, regarding homesite lease issues and policies within the community of Rock Springs, which is located approximately 10-miles northwest of Gallup, N.M.

Council Delegate Seth Damon (Bááháálí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí', Rock Springs, Tsayatoh), who represents the community of Rock Springs on the Navajo Nation Council, reported on a moratorium that placed a freeze on the approval of homesite leases within the community and the overlapping of existing homesite leases approved by the Navajo Land Department.

“The land status in Rock Springs Chapter is very unique. The community has trust, fee, allotment, and private lands. Due to the unique status of the land, many Navajo members sought lands in the community. They rushed into the community and many homesite leases were approved without the proper acknowledgment and permission from the chapter, therefore, a freeze was implemented to put a stop to the land rush,” said Delegate Damon.

He noted that the chapter wants to lift the moratorium to allow homesite leases to be issued.

“Many of our children and family members are returning home and they need land to begin building their homes,” Delegate Damon added.

RDC member Council Delegate Walter Phelps (Cameron, Coalmine Canyon, Leupp, Tolani Lake, Tsidi To ii) questioned whether or not the approval of homesite leases would only be for Rock Springs community members and if the chapter has a community based land use plan that addresses the concerns.

“If the homesite leases are only for the families and community members, it would create friction and division. The homesite lease policy states that Navajo members are eligible for homesite leases and they do not have to be a member of the chapter to get a lease. Does Rock Springs Chapter refer to this issue in their community based land use plan?” asked Delegate Phelps.

According to the Homesite Lease Regulations approved by the RDC in October 2016, all enrolled members of the Navajo Nation, and non-members who are legally married to an enrolled member, are eligible to apply for one homesite lease limited to one-acre of tribal trust or fee land.

Rock Springs Chapter president Eleanor Jones said the chapter is currently developing a community based land use plan. She also said the chapter has submitted chapter resolutions requesting the Navajo Land Department to work with the chapter to address the homesite lease concerns, however, the chapter has not received feedback or support.

Navajo Land Department director Mike Halona stated that the moratorium was implemented at the request of the chapter and could be lifted by a chapter resolution. The department complied with the chapter's request to stop issuing homesite leases. Currently there are 83 homesite leases on tribal trust land and 110 leases on tribal fee lands within the community, added Halona.

RDC member Council Delegate Leonard H. Pete (Chinle) recommended that the chapter and the Navajo Land Department meet and try to resolve the homesite lease issues.

The Resources and Development Committee approved the report with a 4-0 vote with a follow-up meeting to discuss fee land homesite lease regulations, fee land property taxes, and grazing permits within the community.

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