



THE NAVAJO NATION DIVISION OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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Division of Economic Development and Hopi delegation initiate partnership talks

SAINT MICHAELS – The Division of Economic Development and representatives from the Hopi communities of the First Mesa Consolidated Village met Tuesday in Window Rock to begin discussing an economic development partnership between the two tribes.

Division of Economic Development Executive Director JT Willie and Small Business Development Department Manager Elaine Young were joined by Former Chairman Ivan Sidney, Wallace Youvella Jr. (Projects), Meredith Qotswisiwma (Administration), and Brannen Sidney (Accounts) from the First Mesa Consolidated Village on the Hopi Nation.

Both groups identified the impending reductions in major sources of tribal royalty revenues as a shared challenge. Historically, each tribe's economic development projects have not been openly communicated between each other. This meeting was the first step in communicating directly between the new leadership of the Navajo and Hopi tribes.



PHOTO: Meredith Qotswisiwma., Brannen Sidney, Elaine Young, Ivan Sidney, JT Willie, and Wallace Youvella Jr. at the Division of Economic Development on Tuesday, June 18, 2019.

Chairman Sidney, who reports to the Hopi traditional council, expressed gratitude for the meeting in the Hopi language. He reflected on a similar drive he made to Window Rock to meet then-Chairman Zah at a time when both leaders were faced with challenges in partnering and collaborating with each other.

The tribes share a complex history of land leasing and management challenges. The group acknowledged the key issues with tribal and federal land titles, the length of finalizing new leases, and attracting economic

development projects on tribal trust lands.

Along with issues echoed by Director Willie, the tribes possess a common vision of utilizing and building their sovereignty and economic diversity.

“The Hopi constitution states that we are a collection of independent villages,” said Chairman Sidney. The Hopi delegation shared that, through their constitution and tribal structure, ownership of certain lands may be a benefit to the economic development projects for both tribes.

The Navajo and Hopi Nations share a census tract area that has been designated an Opportunity Zone by the Federal government, which is a program designed to attract investments through tax incentives.

Plans for tourism and projects on lands within the Opportunity Zone should include input from those that surround Hopi, said Youvella. The Hopi community of First Mesa has been a central location for the tribe and for traffic that comes from all around.

The Nez-Lizer administration has looked to renewable energy development as a priority in addressing the shutdown of the Navajo Generating Station and the Kayenta Coal Mine. The two groups discussed the possibility of creating partnerships to develop renewable-based projects, especially along borders.

“We want to move forward together,” Director Willie said. “Our economic prosperity in the region is connected if we want to accomplish the plans and visions that our grandmothers and grandfathers laid out for us.”

The next meeting has been tentatively scheduled for the end of July. Both groups agreed to invite leadership from their respective communities and administrations.

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