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Law and Order Committee considers move to amend Nation's construction fund priority list of judicial and public safety facilities

Ramah Navajo Chapter seeks to be added to list citing special circumstances

WINDOW ROCK – The Law and Order Committee continued dialogue on Monday with officials from the Navajo Judicial Branch and the Navajo Division of Public Safety to discuss a possible amendment to the Judicial/Public Safety Facilities Fund Priority List, which could add additional projects to the list.

This discussion stems from a recent request by the Ramah Navajo Chapter asking the Navajo Nation to place their funding request of \$600,000 on the Fund Priority List to help cover a funding shortfall and move its estimated \$5.6 million detention center project forward to construction phase.

The Funding Priority List identifies and prioritizes five Judicial Branch, Public Safety, or combined Judicial/Public Safety facilities at specified locations on the Navajo Nation that may receive funding from the Judicial/Public Safety Facilities Fund.

The Fund was established in 2007 by the Navajo Nation Council as a special tax revenue source to fund the construction of judicial and public safety facilities on the Nation.

In 2009, Ramah Chapter secured \$3.8 million in grant funding from the U.S. Department of Justice through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act for construction of the community's detention center facility on 15 acres of property near the chapter house.

A funding shortfall occurred when unexpected expenses surfaced, which required the chapter to figure out how it would pay for an environmental assessment, mitigation work at a historical site, and most presently, how the chapter will transport water to the detention facility, said Ramah Navajo Police Chief Emil Radosevich.

The Ramah Chapter risks having to return the \$3.8 million ARRA grant they received if they do not secure the \$600,000 they are requesting by June 1, Chief Radosevich told the committee.

The requested amount will primarily be used to pay for the costs of drilling a water well, hiring a construction manager, an electrical line extension, and utilities.

"We have secured outside funding from other grant sources, but we didn't anticipate this situation with the water and the drilling of our own well," said Chief Radosevich.

Offering a suggestion, Council Delegate Russell Begaye (Shiprock) encouraged Ramah Chapter to examine the Indian Health Service as a potential funding source to help with water well drilling expenses.

“Ramah has done their work. They’re not asking for mega-dollars,” said Delegate Yazzie, advocating for the chapter’s project to be added to the Fund Priority List. “They have secured the land, and completed the necessary surveys. They just need a little help from the Nation to proceed to construction.”

Last week, Council Delegates Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau) and Alton Joe Shepherd (Cornfields, Ganado, Jeddito, Kin Dah Łichíí', Steamboat) requested from the Judicial Branch a current listing of priority projects under the Fund Priority List.

According to the FY2011 and FY2012 Fund Priority List initially recommended by the Judicial Branch and the Division of Public Safety to the Law and Order Committee, and approved by Budget and Finance Committee in December 2011, the five prioritized projects are located in Chinle, Shiprock, Ft. Defiance, Pinon, and Dilkon.

“We need to take a look at all these projects, and where they are at with everything as far as land status and punch list,” said LOC Vice Chair Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd before proceeding with an amendment to the priority list.

Delegate Shepherd, however, supported an amendment to the Fund Priority List to add Ramah’s project, which would expand the list to six priority projects instead of the current five.

Chief Justice Herb Yazzie and Navajo DPS Director John Billison both told LOC members that it was the call of the committee if they wished to expand the Fund Priority List to add additional projects.

Every two years, a Fund Priority List which covers a two-year fiscal year period is approved by the Law and Order Committee.

The committee is currently considering drafting legislation that is intended to amend the Fund Priority List.

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