



Navajo Nation Council approves acquisition of 11 D Street, S.E. in Washington

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — The purchase of property located at 11 D Street, S.E. in Washington was approved by the Navajo Nation Council on Friday through Legislation No. 0220-20, sponsored by Council Delegate Wilson Stewart, Jr. (Fort Defiance, Crystal, Red Lake, Sawmill) and co-sponsored by Council Delegate Rickie Nez (T'iistsoh Sikaad, Nenahnezad, Upper Fruitland, Tsé Daa K'aan, Newcomb, San Juan). The property is located approximately 500 yards from the United States Capitol and will be utilized as the permanent location of the Navajo Nation Washington Office (NNWO).

In total, the purchase price and closing fees approved from the principal of the Navajo Nation Land Acquisition Trust Fund (LATF) was \$4,890,281.50. In addition to the property's potential as an investment for the Navajo Nation, Stewart said the property will save the Nation money. "In the future, we will have savings that we can use now for infrastructure."

Stewart was accompanied by NNWO Executive Director Santee Lewis in presenting the legislation. Lewis explained the Navajo Nation currently pays \$25,033.63 per month, or \$300,000 annually, to rent the current office suite at 750 First Street, NE. The Navajo Nation will no longer pay rent once it owns the property.

Lewis added the NNWO, founded in 1984, lobbies for federal legislation favoring the Navajo Nation. More recently, that advocacy included infrastructure measures like the Navajo Utah Water Rights Settlement Act.

On the question of expenses associated with operating the program out of the new property, Lewis estimated an annual operating budget of approximately \$32,000, including an estimated \$4,476 in utility payments, \$6,000 in cleaning services, \$1,440 in landscaping fees, \$2,500 for insurance and other contributions to a suggested deferred maintenance fund.

During discussion, Council delegates voiced issue with using trust funds to acquire property beyond the traditional Navajo homeland and for repair and renovation costs disallowed under the Navajo Nation Land Acquisition Act of 2016 (NNLAA).

Delegates pointed to critical infrastructure and housing needs at home that still need to be addressed.

"How can the president assist me in responding to constituents living in tents, shacks and cardboard boxes?" asked Council Delegate Vince James (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kinłichii', Steamboat).

The Office of the President and Vice President provided assurances those issues are being addressed through temporary structures and other initiatives under development.

By request of the Council, the Office of the Controller provided a cost-benefit analysis for the property purchase. Investment Section financial analyst Brent Wauneka indicated: “Longtermwise, yes, it would make sense if we’re going to hold this for 20 years. Short-term, might as well stick with the lease.”

Council Delegate Amber Kanzbah Crotty (Cove, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Red Valley, Tsé’ahnáoozt’íí, Sheepsprings, Beclabito, Gad’ii’áhí/Tó Ko’í) requested information on possible liens or tax liabilities. As the primary administrator of the LATF, the Navajo Land Department said the property had no tax liens and that estimated tax liabilities were set at \$16,000 based on last year’s taxes paid by previous owners of \$15,569. The department was tasked with performing due diligence on the property on behalf of the Navajo Nation.

Navajo Land Department Manager Mike Halona added the department will discuss tax exemptions with D.C. authorities once the property is held by the Navajo Nation.

Council Delegate Pernell Halona (Coyote Canyon, Mexican Springs, Naschitti, Tohatchi, Bahastl’a’a’) pointed to the elimination of rental fees in his support of the legislation: “That money will never come back to the Navajo Nation. We need to look past it and see this is an investment.”

Council Delegate Carl Slater (Round Rock, Rock Point, Tséch’izí, Lukachugai, Tsaile-Wheatfields) asked how soon the property could be used. Lewis said, once purchased, the building was suited for immediate move-in.

Expanding on the opportunity the property posed for generating revenues, Lewis said: “There is a detached carriage house that sits at the rear of the building. In the past, that building has been rented out to different organizations for a rental fee of \$5,000 per month.” She added the front lawn area could similarly be rented for events due to its proximity to the US Capitol.

Multiple concerns were raised by Council Delegate Eugenia Charles-Newton (Shiprock) about the acquisition of the property, particularly the claim the purchase would fit the economic development intent of the NNLA. “I just cannot justify how purchasing land in Washington, D.C. achieves any of the goals or purposes that were listed in CAU-44-16,” stated Charles-Newton.

Council Delegate Paul Begay Jr. (Coppermine, K’ai’bii’tó, LeChee, Tonalea/Red Lake, Bodaway/Gap) expressed his approval of the purchase because it would help the NNWO’s purpose in promoting the Navajo Nation’s initiatives. He indicated the program provided an invaluable service in helping navigate delivering testimony at the Capitol as a new delegate.

Speaking in Navajo, Council Delegate Herman M. Daniels, Jr. (Ts’ah Bii’ Kin, Navajo Mountain, Shonto, Oljato) shared that, when the land and building purchase has been completed, it would be a home of the Navajo People from which planning and prayers will emanate. “We have had leaders throughout our past that have worked on these issues. Now, it is our work, the 24th Navajo Nation Council, to make a stand for them and to bring these issues to pass.”

In Lewis’ closing statements, she noted the Navajo Nation would be the only tribal nation with this type of property on Capitol Hill. “It is important that this acquisition is recognized as a home for the Navajo People in Washington, D.C.,” said Lewis. The Navajo Nation would be making way for other tribal nations and Indian Country to move advocacy efforts forward in Washington.

After debate and discussion on the legislation, the Navajo Nation Council voted to cease debate and proceed to a roll-call vote. The legislation met the two-thirds vote requirement for approval with 16 votes in favor and 7 opposed. It was assigned Resolution No. CJA-07-20.

Following final review and certification, the legislation will be sent to the Office of the President and Vice President for final action within 10 days.

As of Dec. 31, 2020, the Controller reported the principal balance of the Land Acquisition Trust Fund was \$206,377,663.21. Additionally, the interest income balance was \$4,271,861.93, as calculated using the fund's audited figures from the 2018 fiscal year.

After its introduction on Sept. 8, 2020, Legislation No. 0220-20 was considered by the:

1. Budget & Finance Committee, Sept. 15, 2020 (3-0-1 refer to RDC with DO PASS);
2. Resources & Development Committee, Sept. 16, 2020 (3-0-1 refer to NABI with DO PASS);
3. Naabik'iyáti' Committee, Sept. 17, 2020 (Exceeded meeting time limit);
4. Naabik'iyáti' Committee, Sept. 24, 2020 (Exceeded meeting time limit);
5. Naabik'iyáti' Committee, Oct. 8, 2020 (12-11-0 refer to RDC with 1 amendment);
6. Resources & Development Committee, Dec. 9, 2020 (5-0-1 reported and refer to NABI);
7. Naabik'iyáti' Committee on Dec. 10, 2020 (12-11-0 tabled and refer to the NNC);
8. Navajo Nation Council on Jan. 27, 2021 (15-5-1 tabled with 1 pending amendment);
9. Navajo Nation Council on Jan. 29, 2021 (Approved 16-7-1 with 1 amendment).

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