



Resources and Development Committee Continues Oversight Budget Hearings

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — The Resources and Development Committee of the 24th Navajo Nation Council concluded the second day of oversight budget hearings with the Navajo Nation’s Water Rights Commission (WRC), Division of Economic Development (DED), Division of Transportation (NNDOT), and the Navajo Gaming Regulatory Commission (NGRC).

On the first day of budget hearings, WRC reported their overall budgets for FY 2022 in executive session.

DED’s Director, JT Willie, provided an overview of the plans for the division’s plan of operations, performance, status, external, audit reports as well as the administrative and internal fund type summaries.

Willie emphasized the division’s approach to include three employment positions to DED’s proposed budget. The positions will work with all levels of Navajo leadership, make adjustments for the Navajo Business Opportunity Act to address small Navajo business needs.

DED’s budget proposal also included a Chief Financial Officer within the administrative sector to assist in support services. The recruitment and hiring timeline for the positions is based on the review time of the Attorney General and oversight committee approvals.

The performance forms for DED did not reflect the use of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding. DED is working through preliminary data that will change based on the projects approved through the ARPA.

After hearing the reports from DED, Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Tachee/Blue Gap, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tselani/Cottonwood, Low Mountain) questioned how DED was addressing the housing issue for the Navajo Nation, “What is DED doing about housing for our people who want to move here on the nation? How is DED working to help them and make sure they are accounted for in this process of project planning?”

DED responded stating they are currently working on five to six existing projects within each agency that range from convenience stores, hotels, to retail.

On the second day, NNDOT’s director, Garrett Silversmith, requested \$157,562,042 to cover the upcoming FY 2022 budget costs. The priority for the request will be applied for road access for bus and commuter routes for community members across the Navajo Nation.

NNDOT also reported that 3.1 billion dollars from the U.S. Department of Transportation for FY 2022-2026 will be devoted to tribal transportation programs across the country. The money will allow the Navajo Nation to build on infrastructure and opportunity of advancement for new roads and improvements.

In order to carry out the projects, NNDOT will need to fill vacant positions to assist in the overall capacity issue. Although a budget for these positions is available, candidates are told they do not qualify and applications are rejected.

In response, Delegate Begay urged NNDOT to provide more job opportunities and to develop a working relationship with Navajo Nation's Department of Personnel Management to change the Position Classification Questionnaires and provide trainings to those who do not qualify.

Furthermore, Council Delegate Wilson C. Stewart, Jr. (Fort Defiance, Crystal, Red Lake, Sawmill) commented that Chapters with unspent emergency funds from 2020 should be reallocated to NNDOT to be utilized for roads and improvements as priorities for the communities.

The Resources and Development Committee will have a regular meeting on Wednesday, August 18, 2021 to vote on all budgets that will move forward to the Budget and Finance Committee.

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