

Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

In historic first joint meeting with city government, Pawnee Nation discusses broadband, utilities, infrastructure, community, and surviving COVID

Pawnee, Okla.- March 28, 2022 --Thursday evening, Pawnee Nation government welcomed a new era of community support with local city government. The historic meeting was the first of many and was hosted by Pawnee Nation and included formal meeting rules, a quorum for three councils, opening prayer, and a catered traditional meal. The three councils represented included, the Pawnee Nation Business Council (PBC), Rêsarû'karu (Chiefs) Council, and the City of Pawnee.

“We want to provide jobs, we want to create businesses, we want to generate revenues that can support our services out here and diversify our economy and we can’t do it on our own. I think it’s a community wide effort,” said PBC President Walter EchoHawk.

The meeting started with a prayer and food and some vital background information. “We have about eight treaties between the Pawnee Nation and the United States government. According to the US Supreme Court we came into the Union under the protection of the US government,” Echohawk began, and followed with brief updates on tribal member enrollment, landbase expansion, properties, food sovereignty initiatives, and developing more enterprises.

How it started

Addressing mutually beneficial areas between the city and Pawnee Nation became a priority for the PBC when pandemic related issues exposed vulnerabilities in their tribal economy. “I’m very proud of this Pawnee Business Council...we aren’t happy with our status quo and we are wanting to work as hard as we can to lift up the Pawnee Nation in all aspects so that we can survive the pandemic,” said EchoHawk.

He added, “In our history we have gone through pandemics before...that have decimated our nation and reduced us by half or more....We’re hoping to navigate through this pandemic and

come out of it a stronger nation than we were before.”

The PBC provided a 2020 feasibility study at the joint meeting, The Pawnee Nation Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, that focuses on five major areas of development; agriculture economy, broadband access, cultural promotion, operating a behavioral health facility, and leadership development. The plan also includes an initiative by Pawnee Nation to establish routine joint meetings with the city and the county. Currently, the Nation is planning to seek funding to develop an economic district and invited the City of Pawnee to be a partner in this effort.

The Chiefs Council

Head Rêshârû' (Chief) Pat LeadingFox said, “I dreamed of us coming together like this. It can only end in good for our community. That’s what really matters. I feel good about this. This is a historic event. I’ve never heard of a meeting like this before. I want to commend all of you...it really shows you care.”

“I’d like to remind you or ask that if you have any naming that goes on for those projects that you keep in mind the tribe has a deep connection to that area, that prior to the lake existing, there were two land allotments there that I believe were both members of the Skidi Band,” said Matt Reed, first Rêshârû' for the Cawi Band. “So if there is any opportunity to name something and connect our culture and history to those projects I’d really like to see that.”

Tim Jim, second Rêshârû for the Pitiharitat Band, asked about the potable water source and improvements to water quality for city residents.

The Rêshârû'karu Council is the traditional government of the Pawnee Nation and according to the Pawnee Constitution, “all acts regarding Membership or Claims or Treaty Rights of the Pawnee Business Council shall be subject to review by the Nasharo Council.”

Getting Connected & Housing & Utilities

PBC Vice President Jordan Kanuho provided an update on a \$25 million rural broadband grant application for the Pawnee Nation he is heading. Kanuho said, “if awarded the full amount the Pawnee Nation will be able to develop broadband in rural Pawnee County, and the design actually goes into Noble County, as well, and what we will be able to do is begin to initiate and get our foot in the door to provide reliable affordable services.”

The PBC also shared goals for improved utility services for the community. Solar gardens are one of the options being considered for another grant opportunity that supports community and economic development.

“This is something that (Pawnee Nation) Housing has been looking at,” said PBC Secretary

George Gardipe. “We want to go green as much as we can because we are as environmentally conscious as we can be.”

City of Pawnee

“We have a very good collaboration with our Pawnee Chamber of Commerce to help us with our economic development,” said Alice Cottle, City of Pawnee Mayor. The Chamber provides event support and business development and planning for the city. This year, the city is focusing on the beautification of the city’s business district.

Cottle said the city may use a portion of their American Rescue Plan (ARPA) funds for local businesses to update store fronts or address more urgent expenses, “to give back to the economic development of the city.”

The Mayor provided information on properties the city has for sale, plans for a local job hub at the city’s library, an urgent care facility, a new downtown park, a community resource center, beautification of the city’s lake and recreation areas, and development of an industrial park for new businesses.

The city is also seeking, “to become a Film-Friendly certified community through the state Commerce Film and Music Industry,” said Cottle who invited the Pawnee Nation to join the city in this effort to identify locations for film production.

A partnership begins

The PBC, Chiefs Council and the City of Pawnee will be meeting regularly with dates posted to the Pawnee Nation website and social platforms and will be live streamed by Pawnee Nation Communications.

For more information, contact the Pawnee Nation Communications at 918.762.3621 or communications@pawneenation.org.