



Pawnee Nation  
PO Box 470  
Pawnee, OK 74058  
918.762.3621

[communications@pawneenation.org](mailto:communications@pawneenation.org)

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

## **Pawnee Nation goes beyond being the largest county employer to educational and infrastructure good neighbor**

***PAWNEE NATION - September 28, 2022*** — The Pawnee Nation Business Council (PBC) works to strengthen the Pawnee Nation and better serve Tribal citizens and communities where they reside. That goal includes a good neighbor policy to build healthy working relationships with local governments--such as the City of Pawnee and Pawnee County--on projects that benefit all residents.

The PBC proudly announces two initiatives that advance the Nation's good neighbor policy. First, an Intergovernmental Agreement between the Pawnee Nation and Pawnee County was signed on August 8, 2022. This agreement establishes a policy to collaborate and cooperate on a government-to-government basis for planning, building, and maintaining Pawnee Nation streets and roadways within the boundaries of the Pawnee Nation and Pawnee County; and sharing staff and equipment for those purposes.

Chris McCray, the Pawnee Nation Transportation Manager, stated, "This cooperative agreement will better serve everyone and strengthen the community."

Councilwoman Dawna Hare, Chair of the Nation's Intergovernmental Affairs Committee, added, "It is good to see our Nation partnering with Pawnee County in ways that will benefit Tribal citizens and the entire community."

The second initiative includes our support for the Pawnee School District. We are pleased to announce that on September 22, 2022, the Nation donated \$15,000 to the Pawnee High School to support the football team. Over the years, the Pawnee Nation has provided financial support for native and non-native students in diverse ways. We are proud of the Black Bears and wish the players well. On this occasion, Superintendent Stacy Womack stated, "Thank you, Pawnee Nation, for your continued support for Pawnee Schools. Your assistance has been instrumental in helping our students succeed both in and out of the classroom. Go Bears."

As the region's largest employer, the Pawnee Nation continues to have a significant impact on the

local economy by providing hundreds of jobs, services, and revenues to the local economy. The Nation owns more than 30 buildings on the Pawnee Reservation and in downtown Pawnee, Oklahoma. As the City Utility Authority's biggest customer, the Nation pays about \$300,000 in annual electricity bills. The Pawnee Nation College provides higher education opportunity for all community students; and the Pawnee Nation Museum located downtown strengthens tourism. The Nation not only supports public schools, local nursing home elders, but provides fire protection, emergency services, and road and bridge construction. For example, in the last five years, the Nation provided over \$13,000,000 in transportation and safety projects to the City of Pawnee.

Building better intergovernmental relations with the City of Pawnee remains a work in progress. Last Spring, the Pawnee government hosted a joint meeting with the Pawnee City Council to explore ways to collaborate and lay the foundation for a more vibrant community. Unfortunately, that vision faltered in recent days over misunderstandings about the way the City Council handled the sale of one of its office buildings in a transaction involving the Pawnee Nation.

Earlier this summer, the City Council decided to sell the building. The asking price was \$270,000.00. Since the Nation needed office space for its Division of Health & Community Services (DHCS) and to expand the DHCS Wellness Program, the Nation wanted to purchase the building. We thought this would be an ordinary business transaction. But we were wrong.

By way of background, the DHCS renders a variety of community activities and services, including physical training classes, health food cooking demonstrations, and other youth and senior citizen activities. In response to the city's offer to sell the building, the Nation made a cash offer in June to purchase it at the full asking price. The same night, Tribal government representatives met with the City Council to explain how DHCS would use the building. A few days later the City Council accepted the Nation's offer--but afterward changed course and decided not to sign the agreement, unless the Nation agreed to three new restrictions on the building's use:

1. No Gaming
2. No marijuana manufacturing or distribution
3. No Adult Entertainment

Surprised and perplexed about these new restrictions and why they were suddenly added to the agreement late in the signing stage--the Nation reached out to city representatives to discuss the unwarranted, unnecessary, and possibly discriminatory restrictions and explain why such encumbrances on the title would preclude the Nation from placing the property into Federal Indian trust status. Vice President Jordan Kanuho and Executive Director Jenifer Gover LittleSun voiced disapproval of the offensive restrictions, explained why they were unnecessary, and raised business ethics concerns over the way the city was handling the transaction. Vice-President Kanuho recounted, "[W]e made it clear to the city how the Pawnee Nation felt about its restrictions and the offense that was taken by them. After expressing how these restrictions would be an encumbrance on placing the property into federal trust status, we asked them to remove their restrictions from the transaction. We had hoped the city would take this opportunity to rectify the situation and decide

on our offer that evening, but it was unfortunate to see that they would not.”

Not content with receiving the full asking price in cash from the Pawnee Nation, the city started taking new bids. During that process, the Nation submitted a second offer at the full asking price, but without offensive restrictions. This cloudy process drug on until August 15, when the city rejected the Nation’s offer in favor of a new bid made by a third party. The Pawnee Chief reported that City Councilwoman Williams, “...wanted on record in the minutes that she felt the tribe was not treated right because of the restrictions.”

The way the sales were handled by the city presents a challenging situation for the Pawnee Nation. As stated by President Echo-Hawk, “[T]his transaction left our government perplexed. From all appearances, for reasons of its own, the city went to great lengths not to sell the building to the Nation. That raises Pawnee Nation questions about what kind of government partner the city might be. Since the PBC must place the interests of the Pawnee Nation first, we may have to consider going in a different direction. Productive relationships among governments must be built on a foundation of goodwill, equality, mutual respect, and trust--and that is the challenge at hand.”

The Pawnee Nation is hopeful that someday a more solid relationship with the city can be built, with a foundation that rests on firm ground. In the meantime, the Nation’s door remains open for an arm’s length relationship with the City of Pawnee on a case-by-case basis to collaborate on joint projects that benefit the community.

***For more information contact: Jenifer Gover LittleSun, Executive Director, Pawnee Nation at [jlittesun@pawneenation.org](mailto:jlittesun@pawneenation.org); or 918/762-3621.***



**About the Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma** - The Pawnee Nation has a long and proud history spanning more than 700 years. Early in the 18th century, more than 60,000 members of the Pawnee Tribe inhabited the area along the North Platt River in Nebraska. The Tribe then, as it is now, was composed of four distinct bands: the Chaui “Grand,” the Kitkehahki “Republican,” the Pitahawirata “Tappage” and the Skidi “Wolf.”

Today, the number of Tribal enrolled members is over 3,200 and Pawnees can be found in all areas of the United States as well as foreign countries within many walks of life. Pawnees take much pride in their ancestral heritage. They are noted in history for their tribal religion rich in myth, symbolism and elaborate rites.