

Council votes to oppose nuclear waste transport through Gallup

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
Friday, 28 September 2018 09:08



The Gallup City Council discussed Resolution No. R2018-27, which opposes the rail transportation of nuclear waste through Gallup, at its Sept. 25 regular meeting.

City Attorney Curtis Hayes said energy industry supplier Holtec International has applied with the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission for a license to store radioactive waste in a temporary underground storage facility in Lea County.

This facility would hold waste for up to 40 years, and would do so until a permanent storage location is identified and built.

Public hearings were held by the NRC on the matter, including one in Gallup on May 21. The public comment period closed July 31.

Hayes said five New Mexico cities and counties — Albuquerque, Jal, Lake Arthur, Las Cruces and Bernalillo County — have voted to oppose the transportation of nuclear waste through their jurisdictions.

“They’re opposing the transport because of safety [concerns] during transport,” he said.

Hayes said questions brought up in the resolution included where the waste was produced and

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whether it could be safely held until a permanent facility is built, perhaps decades in the future.

Dist. 4 Councilor Fran Palochak spoke about safety concerns for Gallup residents.

“We can’t just think about this being something coming [through Gallup],” she said. “We have to look at possibility of derailment, contamination.”

Palochak said this transport could affect future generations as well.

“We have to make a stand for the people in this area. There will still be people here [in the future] and we have to stand against this,” she said.

Dist. 2 Councilor Allan Landavazo questioned whether the resolution would carry any weight at this juncture.

Hayes said since the official comment period has closed, the resolution could be ignored by the federal government.

“Everything is within our power to do it,” Landavazo said about opposing the transportation anyway.

The motion was approved with a 4-0-0 vote, and was met with applause from the room.

After the agenda items were concluded, local activist Mervyn Tilden thanked the council for voting to oppose the transport. He said this decision would be a catalyst taken to the upcoming Navajo Nation council session.

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“[Let’s] keep the state of New Mexico as the Land of Enchantment,” Tilden said.

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