

Newtok Planning Group*

Meeting Notes for Monday, September 24, 2007

In attendance: Michael Black (Alaska Dept. of Commerce, Community & Economic Development (DCCED)); Sally Russell Cox, Taunnie Boothby, Ruth St. Amour (DCCED Division of Community & Regional Affairs); Greg Magee, Jon Menough (Alaska Dept. of Environmental Conservation, Village Safe Water Program); Brenda Kerr, Bruce Sexauer, Steve Unfreid, Guy McConnell, Melanie Harrop (Alaska District U.S. Army Corps of Engineers); Mitzi Barker (RurAL CAP); John MacKinnon, Don Fancher, Michael Lukshin, Rich Sewell (Alaska Dept. of Transportation & Public Facilities); Jamilia George (Denali Commission); Robin Bronen (UAF Resilience and Adaptation Program); Bob Walsh (Office of Sen. Murkowski); Crystal Leonetti (USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service); Shirley Kelly (U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Economic Development Administration); Steve Brady (True Nature 3D, Inc.); Mark Roberts (Alaska Division of Homeland Security & Emergency Management).

Via teleconference: Stanley Tom (Newtok Traditional Council); Gabriel Mahns, Federal Aviation Administration); Mark Charlie (AVCP Regional Housing Authority); Nick Tom (Newtok Relocation Fund); Tom John, (Newtok Native Corporation)

Sally Russell Cox facilitated the meeting.

Mertarvik Airport 3-D Visualization Project

Steve Brady of True Nature provided a demonstration of three-dimensional images of Mertarvik showing the proposed site for the runway. The images can be viewed at www.truenature3d.com/page151.htm. This computer modeling can help move projects forward by allowing stakeholders to see the effect of projects on the environment, and is capable of producing both still images and animations.

Alaska Baseline Erosion Assessment

Bruce Sexauer from Alaska District Corps of Engineers discussed the project currently underway to evaluate erosion in more than 150 communities.

- The data gathering phase of the project will be complete in early spring 2008, and has included site visits in the lower Kuskokwim region as well as telephone interviews.
- Each community will be provided a 2-3 page paper detailing their erosion assessment, including a timeline of the rate of erosion and inventory of structures at risk. The Corps will also provide information on erosion control measures.
- The assessment will provide information for decision-makers on the degree of risk in each community.
- The last comprehensive assessment of erosion was conducted in 1986.
- Mike Black suggested that tribal IGAP workers could assist with data-gathering.

- The Corps is seeking to convene a group of agency representatives to meet every 4-6 months to review the classification of priorities. Those interested should contact Sally Russell Cox, DCRA at 907.269.4588 or sally.cox@alaska.gov.

Immediate Action Work Group of the Alaska Climate Change Sub-Cabinet

Michael Black summarized the Palin administration's recent actions to address the effects of climate change, and provided copies of Administrative Order 238.

(www.gov.state.ak.us/admin-orders/238.html)

- Mike Black and Trish Opheen of the Corps of Engineers are co-chairing the Immediate Action Workgroup (www.climatechange.alaska.gov), which will deal with the early assessment and development of an action plan addressing climate change impacts on coastal and other vulnerable communities in Alaska.
- The Climate Change Sub-Cabinet plans to visit communities and hold public meetings.
- The Workgroup's efforts will guide State policy on responses to affected communities.

Update on 2007 Field Activities at Mertarvik

- Brenda Kerr reported that Denali Drilling Inc. was awarded a contract to perform the drilling geotechnical investigations at Mertarvik by the Alaska District Corps of Engineers. They completed 24 test borings approximately September 14. The Corps geotechnical engineer was on-site during drilling. Results of geotechnical analysis are being analyzed. Stanley Tom shared that the Newtok Traditional Council sheltered the crew at Mertarvik in the houses being constructed because the wall tent they planned to stay wasn't enough for the fall storm conditions.
 - Jon Menough reported that Village Safe Water had contracted with Denali Drilling Inc. to drill a 150' test well at the new site. The compressor needed for drilling the well is expected to arrive on site within the next two weeks. Testing will then be conducted on water quality and quantity.
- Don Fancher of ADOT&PF shared a number of activities related to geotechnical testing of the proposed airport alternatives and a potential materials site. This information is included at Sub-Committee Reports below.

Stanley Tom noted that the barge delivering the drilling equipment to Mertarvik hit a rock. This was noted as a serious concern by Brenda Kerr. The Newtok Planning Group was queried as to whether any agency could perform hydrosurveys to identify rocks very quickly. (There were no responders at the meeting but Colonel Unfreid of the USACE reported later to Sally Russell Cox that he was investigating the availability of a catamaran-type based hydrosurvey equipment through the one of the Corps' technical expertise centers ERDC. He noted the short season left for such work.)

Sub-Committee Reports and Agency Updates

- Don Fancher reported that DOT/PF's application to FAA for funding for geotech work for the runway was approved, and they will be working with a consultant to study three preferred alternatives for the site. DOT is also requesting funding from the State

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general fund for site control work, and hopes to receive title to 100-120 acres as an in-kind donation from the community. He noted that Newtok Village Corporation and Calista Corporation were very quick to provide a right to entry for the site, and have been very cooperative. Mr. Fancher requested that the milestones on all these ADOT/PF activities be added to the Newtok Planning Group's Relocation Planning Schedule GANNT Chart.

- Sally Russell Cox reported that HDR Inc. has been hired under the tribe's mini-grant to prepare the community layout plan. A pre-scoping meeting has been held and HDR will be submitting a fee proposal soon. After work begins, HDR will be holding work sessions with agencies. The project will be completed in March 2008.
- Sally also noted that an RFP has been drafted for the barge landing project.
- Stanley Tom reported that the three houses at Mertarvik are nearly complete. He also noted that he had been contacted by Alaska Energy Authority about permitting for the energy project that would provide a pipeline into the existing community of Newtok for fuel deliveries during the interim period while the community is relocating. Newtok received \$80,000 from the Legislature for equipment purchases. Stanley stated that the Newtok Traditional Council may be considering a resolution to release information from a health assessment of Newtok prepared by the Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corporation. Stanley Tom stated that the information in this report is "...really alarming".

NEPA Requirements

- Sally Russell Cox spoke to the need for a subcommittee to address NEPA requirements. Mitzi Barker stressed that this be addressed before NEPA creates an obstacle to projects at Mertarvik.
- John McKinnon of ADOT/PF recommended that one agency be the lead on NEPA requirements. It was noted by Sally Russell Cox that the Newtok Traditional Council had already made a formal request for agency experts to convene to address NEPA requirements at Mertarvik.
- Bob Walsh will provide Sally with a list of the appropriate NEPA experts for each federal agency.
- Don Fancher raised the possibility of obtaining a general permit that would cover all projects.
- Mark Charlie reported that that AVCP has the ability to perform environmental reviews for HUD funded projects. He also mentioned that there was a proposed amendment in the NAHASDA reauthorization for environmental reviews. AVCP would act as a clearinghouse for the environmental requirements on these projects. (Mark has since reviewed the current bill recently passed by the House and did not see this proposed language, so he suspects the proposal will not be part of the reauthorization. He is looking into the issue and will keep you posted.)
- Shirley Kelley, EDA, shared information on the tribe's roles in NEPA as per training recently sponsored by EPA.
- Guy McConnell, Environmental Resources Section Chief for Alaska District Corps of Engineers, said he would like to participate in these discussions.
- The Denali Commission Planning Work Group could help convene a group of State and Federal agencies to work out the NEPA requirements. It was suggested that

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Tami Fordham at EPA might also help guide this process. Sally was asked to address the NEPA issue at the next Denali Commission Planning Work Group meeting and ask the Planning Work Group to help coordinate an agency NEPA discussion.

- Guy McConnell noted that information-gathering can get underway without making the announcement of the NEPA process that would put projects on hold.
- Jamilia George said that the Denali Commission could not be a lead for the coordination of relocation efforts or NEPA requirements without an amendment to the Denali Commission Charter. She did suggest that the issue be raised at the Denali Commission Work Group.
- Greg Magee noted that the discussion of a lead agency for NEPA was really a subset of the larger issue of a lack of a strategic plan for accomplishing village relocation.
- Brenda Kerr suggested that the Immediate Action Workgroup might want to consider being a proponent of developing and implementing the critical path that the Newtok Planning Group developed at the scheduling session held in January 2007, or on a more limited basis, develop a project management plan for a strategy to relocate the community of Newtok as means of focusing on needs and the timeline for erosion.
- Mark Roberts suggested that as the response to AO 238 is developed the Immediate Action Workgroup should keep in mind that there are existing policies and regulations in place for responding to emergencies through the DHS&EM. He also wanted to remind the Newtok Planning Group that even though he understood their heart was in addressing the needs of the community of Newtok that there were other communities also in immediate need of attention. He gave Kivalina as an obvious example and shared that he was in Kivalina during the recent emergency evacuations precipitated by the threat of erosion.
- There is a need for top-level authority to push this effort. AO 238 represents such a push from the State.
- Members of the Newtok Planning Group could convey to their respective commissioners what they've learned from this process that is relevant to the Alaska Climate Change Sub-Cabinet.
- Robin Bronen stressed the need to identify the critical issues.
- Bob Walsh highlighted the need to get village relocation on the radar of the administration and the legislature, but also to recognize public opposition and to focus on the issue of disaster mitigation.

* http://www.commerce.state.ak.us/dca/planning/Newtok_Planning_Group_Webpage.htm