

# Newtok Planning Group\*

Meeting Notes for  
Thursday, January 10, 2008

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**In attendance:** Sally Russell Cox (Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development, Division of Community Advocacy); Greg Magee, Jon Menough (Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, Village Safe Water Program); Michael L. Bird (Coastal Villages Region Fund); Jamilia George (Denali Commission); Laurie Cummings (HDR, Alaska); Andrea Elconin, Brenda Kerr, Guy McConnell, Larry Bartlett (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alaska District); David Vought (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Native American Programs); Jennifer Curtis, (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) NEPA Review/Compliance); Tami Fordham (EPA Tribal Program); Tracy DeGering, (EPA Aquatic Resources Unit); Patti Sullivan (U.S. Federal Aviation Administration, Environmental Program Manager, Airports).

Via teleconference: Stanley Tom (Newtok Traditional Council); Timothy Krug (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Development).

Sally Russell Cox chaired the meeting.

## Mertarvik Community Layout Plan Update

Laurie Cummings of HDR, Alaska provided an overview of the community planning workshops that were held in the village of Newtok on December 10-11, 2007. Laurie was accompanied on the trip by Rosetta Alcantra of HDR, Sally Russell Cox of DCRA, and Robin Bronen, a graduate student in the Resilience and Adaptation Program at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

At the community meeting held on the evening of December 10, 2007, community residents expressed their ideas and concerns for the new village site. Residents expressed concerns about wind and dust at the new site. They were also concerned about the possibility of fog at the proposed airport locations. Residents liked grouping most of the community facilities together in the center of town. They would like the power plant to be located a little ways away from the village. They would like to see wind energy used in the new village. They preferred having single family housing and they did not want the housing too close together. Recreational areas for ice skating, swimming and basketball would be nice. There was not a definitive preference for road materials (boardwalk, gravel, etc) but they would like roads to be wide enough for two snowmachines to pass each other. The community would also like to have piped water and sewer.

Laurie also discussed the main concern expressed by the agencies interviewed as part of the Community Layout Plan process. The primary concern was financing. Agency representatives were concerned about the cost of the capital investment in the new village and the village's ability to fund on-going operations and maintenance. Some

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agencies were concerned about the potential for only some villagers moving to the new site resulting in two permanent settlements that would require community facilities at both sites. The agencies also wanted the layout plan to consider the future expansion of the village.

Greg Magee of VSW explained that the location of Airport Alternative No. 1 (primary and crosswind runways) encroaches on the location of Mertarvik's community layout. This was discovered by HDR while working on the Community Layout Plan. Apparently, when VSW designed the layout, they moved the runway further to the west so the community could be placed on a flat area. Greg presented three revised layouts to facilitate resolving the conflict. Revised Layout No. 1 moves the community towards closer to the barge landing and does not move the primary runway. Revised Layout No. 2 inverts the community layout and moves it back close to its original location and moves the runway slightly to the west but keeping the same bearing. This places the community near the approach. Revised Layout No. 3 puts the community layout back to its original location and moves the airport further west but keeping the same bearing.

Patti Sullivan of FAA noted that there are many considerations in siting a runway and that more study would be required to move Airport Alternative 1 from its current location.

**Report on November 27, 2007 NEPA Meeting**

Sally coordinated a meeting on November 27 with NEPA experts from the Environmental Protection Agency, the Alaska District Corps of Engineers, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Department of Agriculture - Rural Development, Federal Aviation Administration, and the Economic Development Administration. The purpose of the meeting was to develop a strategy (or strategies) for expeditiously meeting NEPA requirements at the new village site. One of the issues agencies have been grappling with in addressing NEPA at Mertarvik is how and when NEPA will be addressed. Until a federal action is identified, no agency can initiate the development of a NEPA document. In addition, the fulfillment of NEPA depends on who the lead federal agency is, and what funding program is utilized. Because of this, it would be very difficult to develop a single strategy to fulfill NEPA for all federal actions at the new village site.

Guy McConnell addressed the Corps of Engineers' strategy for addressing NEPA for Corps-led proposals at Mertarvik. The Corps is preparing an environmental assessment (EA) for a Newtok emergency evacuation center that could be constructed at Mertarvik. Before the evacuation center could be constructed, the Corps would have to get approval of the EA, approval of a planning report that is being reviewed now, and Federal funding to build the center. Guy explained that the EA proposes a set of project features for the center, but another plan could be based on the EA if changes were needed. The proposed plan covers a road from a state-constructed barge landing site to the Mertarvik community location, sewage treatment and landfill facilities, a well and pipeline, a building pad for the center, a quarry to manufacture rock for the road and pad, fuel storage tanks, and the evacuation center building itself. The building proposed

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is about 7,700 square feet, would house about 100 people for a longer emergency period and could be basic shelter for more people for a shorter time. The Corps expects to release the EA for public review in the late spring or early summer if the planning report is approved.

**Mertarvik Evacuation Center Planning**

Andrea Elconin discussed the plan for an evacuation center at Mertarvik which the Corps of Engineers is working on under the Alaska Coastal Erosion program. This program is 100% federally funded, which is unusual for Corps of Engineers programs.

Andrea explained that the Corps has funds for planning and design, but no funds for construction. The Corps received \$4.9 million in the FY08 appropriation bill for Alaska Coastal Erosion, but all of those funds are going towards Kivalina.

The decision document is still in preparation, but the Corps anticipates it will be approved by Pacific Ocean Division, the regional headquarters, in February. Once the report is approved, the Corps will enter into a Project Cooperation Agreement with the Newtok Traditional Council (NTC) for construction of the project. NTC's main obligation in this project is that they will be responsible for operation and maintenance of the evacuation center and road from the barge landing to the center.

The Corps will also start acquiring the real estate rights needed to construct the project. The project will be broken into two parts for design and construction. The road and evacuation center pad will be designed by Corps in-house staff, and the goal is to have the contract package ready to advertise at the end of summer 2008 if funds become available. Construction of the road and pad would be in summer 2009.

The evacuation center building and associated utilities will probably be designed by an engineering contractor. The schedule has not been defined, but it will be ready for construction in summer 2009 or 2010 if funds are provided. The overall cost estimate for the project is \$17-20 million.

**Mertarvik Water Drilling Report**

Jon Menough reported on VSW's test well drilling and installation at Mertarvik. Denali Drilling was contracted to conduct well drilling and installation between October 11 and October 26, 2007. Drilling progress and well installation was delayed by unexpected subsurface conditions and inclement weather.

The first deep borehole drilled to 110 feet below ground surface encountered unexpected thickness and frequency of unconsolidated sediments between relatively thin rock layers. Groundwater was encountered in a slightly confined basalt aquifer approximately at the elevation of the spring, at 30 feet above mean sea level.

A two-hour pump test was conducted rather than the planned twenty four-hour test because gasoline for the generator was limited, and weather and ice conditions in Baird Inlet hampered the delivery of additional supplies. The two-hour pump test resulted in

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no measurable drawdown in the well when pumped at a rate of 15 gallons per minute. This result suggests that the well can produce additional flow; however the pump test was of short duration. The well's ability to sustain 15 gallons per minute or greater flow over a longer period can't be evaluated based on the current data. A long-term pump test will be required to evaluate if the well can sustain a suitable yield.

A groundwater sample was collected at the end of the pump test on October 26, 2007. Analysis of the sample indicates that the groundwater quality meets the primary and secondary drinking water quality standards, with the exception that iron is slightly above the secondary standard. There is no evidence to suggest this water quality may change with long-term use of the well, but if another pump test of longer duration is conducted in the future, additional water quality analysis has been recommended.

Jon will be sending copies of the well drilling report to Sally to maintain for the NPG.

**Sub-Committee Reports and Agency Updates**

Greg Magee reported that VSW has \$220,000 in planning money for Newtok.

Sally reported on a meeting of the Immediate Action Workgroup (IAW) held on January 8. The IAW has enlisted the help of a facilitator to guide the group in accomplishing several goals: to identify priority projects to address the immediate needs of the communities (Newtok, Shishmaref, Kivalina, Unalakleet and Shaktoolik) who face imminent threats of loss of life, loss of infrastructure, loss of public and private property, or health epidemics due in-part to a changing climate; to identify the tasks the IAW needs to complete the projects, and to determine how the IAW will accomplish these tasks, including the development of a schedule and target deadlines to meet the March 4, 2008 date in which the IAW will make recommendations to the Alaska Climate Change Sub-Cabinet on the execution of a coordinated State, federal and local effort to assist the five communities.

Sally was contacted by Vivian Korthuis from AVCP. AVCP President Myron Nanaeng is developing a position paper on the impacts of climate change related erosion and flooding on communities in the AVCP service area that will be presented to AFN. Sally was asked for assistance in gathering information and photos of communities in area.

\* [http://www.commerce.state.ak.us/dca/planning/Newtok\\_Planning\\_Group\\_Webpage.htm](http://www.commerce.state.ak.us/dca/planning/Newtok_Planning_Group_Webpage.htm)