

AVCP BETHEL MEET CREATIVE

Village Chiefs Form Legal Corporation For Development Base

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(Special to the Tundra Times)

A decision to become a corporation under the laws of the state of Alaska and adoption of proposals for development from consultant Paul Dixon are among the most significant actions taken by the Association of Village Council Presidents. The group concluded its three-day session in Bethel last Friday.

Council chiefs from village of the lower Kuskokwim and Yukon River area, also known as the Bethel region, met Sept. 18, 19 and 20 at the National Guard Armory in Bethel.

Led by AVCP chairman Moses Paukan of St. Mary's, nearly all of the leaders of the

48 communities in the 55,000-square-mile area considered a wide assortment of matters of concern to both individual villages and to the region at large.

Representatives from the U.S. Public Health Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Office of Economic Opportunity, Alaska State Troopers and Fish and Game agencies appeared at the group's invitation to tell of programs affecting the people and answer specific questions concerning their respective agency programs.

Topics discussed in depth by the presidents ranged over commercial fishing regulations and boundaries in the various districts; means and advantages of villages incorporating as second

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(or other) class cities; performance of Community Health Aides and payment as proposed by the USPHS; communication needs; village electrification and community cold storage plants; the plight of village children without permanent homes; a better diet under the food stamp program; and needs for safe water supplies and sanitary waste disposal systems.

The universal problem of financing such an organization brought proposals for increasing village contributions. Chairman Paukan acknowledged receipt of a \$50 check from the city of Bethel.

The assembly devoted much time to discussion of AVCP incorporation and what it would mean to all concerned. By the group's action, AVCP becomes the legal body with which RurAlCap or any other agency would deal.

At the same time each village council and its president becomes part of the organization. People living in the area covered will have only one organization to deal with rather than several and they will always know where to go with problems and proposals.

These points were outlined by Paul Dixon, management and development consultant for St. Mary's and a group of other villages and now also designated by AVCP for the same role.

He also suggested that when the land claims settlement comes, a legal organization would already exist in this corporation with the money portion of any settlement.

In accepting Dixon, the group informs RurAlCap of its wishes and that agency pays salary and travel for the consultant. Funds at present are available through December 31.

Powers and privileges of profit, non-profit and municipal corporations under Alaska Statutes were outlined by Dixon, followed by a long discussion on the various possibilities.

Final decision as to type of incorporation was stymied at this session because of lack of a quorum at the final meeting Friday night. Chairman Paukan deplored this situation saying he "felt embarrassed" when all the members did not return to complete the final business. The matter will be taken up again at the January meeting.

Also left unfinished because of the quorum lack was action

on several resolutions including one tabled from the afternoon session. This was a request from Emmonak by its representative Martin Moore for release by AVCP of village area land now included in the Association's protest acreage.

This step is required before the community and Bureau of Land Management can work out title for Emmonak's incorporation as a fourth class city and villagers have title to their lots.

Moore said the incorporation was a first step also for his town's plan to furnish electricity to neighboring Alakanuk. The 300 KW plant is expected to be in operation by summer and two Emmonak boys are now in training to operate it.

Townpeople also wait for deeds to their individual lots which will be 150 x 300 feet.

Some residents are ready to use their land for business purposes and several houses have already been moved to their new locations. The inability to take action on this land release will delay the whole town's planning, Moore said.

Alakanuk, whose president Elias Joseph (also AVCP vice president) achieved good-natured ribbing because of his constant championing of his town and its potential, also wishes to incorporate and to get a town freezer.

The theme of incorporation in order to take more definite steps in running village affairs and to improve status ran through almost every president's remarks.

Nearly everyone also had strong interest in enlarging or improving airfields because of growth of town business since the initial strip was built; finding a way to handle local police needs including strong need for support from State troopers for local enforcement problems; and the perennial desire to improve post office situations.

This included the reiterated position of dividing the village's limited job opportunities so that the post master's job would not be held by someone already established with income from other sources.

William Tyson, the extremely able and perceptive interpreter from St. Mary's, defined a slightly different point of view on postal problems.

From his own experience he pointed out the post master's responsibility for property and moving the mail on plane sched-

ules and the government's need to have a suitable building to house a post office in the first place.

Various suggestions for individual village solutions to their problems were made with the group concluding that local communities could work out many of these things on their home ground.

A new way was described for people to receive general assistance through the BIA. Now in operation at Mountain Village where Andrew Brown is president, the method works through a contract between the BIA social services and the council.

The majority of the decision on which people need help will be made in the village by the council which has closer knowledge of a family's special needs.

The new method is not only more efficient, state BIA representative Reynolds, but gives service more quickly and does away with the old declaration system which required statements of "how many snow machines or dried fish are owned."

The old four-page request is now reduced to two, Reynolds said. The village council, which will have a booklet of forms on hand and thus save one step, will administer the assistance money and write the check right in the village.

Paukan called on the presidents to state their village problems so that the group could establish a priority list for the new consultant to consider in giving professional guidance. High on the list was Mekoryuk's desire to escape from its reservation status.

President Henry Shavings voiced the fear that the community would eventually be forced to move away from the island and he felt it would be better to find ways to make it more desirable to stay.

Other village problems included repairing "rotting" bridges in Mountain Village; a system to transport school kids in wide-spread Alakanuk; heavy equipment to move houses in St. Mary's and Nunapitchuk Number Two; and means of getting electricity and freezer plants.

Some 20 resolutions were considered and passed by the group before the quorum impasse halted official business. Those involving the whole area included request for fire-fighting equipment in all villages; and a commercial radio station in Bethel.

Preface to this resolution points out that some 48 villages with more than 12,000 total population would benefit from both employment in establishing and managing such a station and from its good effects through supplement to education and enhancement to "open-minded understanding of local thinking."

The Association is to appoint a committee to investigate licensing and possibility of establishing the venture as a cooperative enterprise. A report is due at the January meeting.

Other resolutions asked the appropriate agencies for help to get equipment; a tramway for Chevak; health stations or centers for several communities; release of land to the Kuskokwim Cooperative to permit taking timber; electricity soon at Goodnews Bay so town can then get freezer plant to take advantage of recently-opened commercial fishing and also to operate its new water system being installed with PHS; redirection by BIA of Mt. Edgecumbe school construction money to Bethel for dormitory needs; new or enlarged community halls for Nunapitchuk,