

A first for Alaska —

King Cove, Sand Point hire Manager

By JEFFREY R. RICHARDSON

For the first time in Alaska, two municipal governments have decided to share the services of one city manager.

The first class city of King Cove and the second class city of Sand Point will share the knowledge and experience of David Jensen, and split the cost.

Jensen said although communities in the Lower 48, especially, in Washington and Kentucky, had successfully shared the services of one city manager, this is the first time it has ever been done in Alaska. He added that the idea is "increasingly more acceptable because of the high costs of a town hiring its own city manager. There are many other places in Alaska that could do it."

Jensen will leave a position with the Department of Community and Regional Affairs

to work with the city councils of the two fishing towns. Jensen said he will remain in Anchorage for the first six months on a trial basis to determine if it is more efficient to manage city affairs there, and travel to the communities periodically, or more effectively establish himself closer to town.

King Cove, population 450, is located on the Pacific side of the Alaska Peninsula; Sand Point, population 650 is in the Shumagin Islands group, lying off the peninsula south of Kodiak.

The key to Jensen's residence will be communication with the city councils. Good communication is absolutely essential, Jensen said, in order for the towns to get the most from a city manager.

When does a town need a city manager?

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Jensen ...

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When it grows beyond the ability of a part-time mayor and city council to make sure the city government is providing the services it should be to local residents, according to Jensen. He explained that a manager's job is not to set policy, but to carry out the wishes of the council.

"The city manager should represent the interests of the community bearing in mind the policies the council has set," he said.

Jensen said when a community begins to grow in size, its management needs increase. There is a lot of legwork involved in writing grants for public works projects, or seeking funds from the legislature, or buying bulk fuel shortage tanks, or electrifying a village. It is the city manager's job to do much of this time-consuming legwork, seeking ways to improve city services to local people.

"What constitutes improvements should rest with the council and the people. It could mean new equipment, it could mean increasing the frequency of some service or maintenance of accounts receivable," Jensen said.

Jensen will also serve as purchasing agent for King Cove and Sand Point, which should vastly improve the ability of the towns to obtain essential supplies and equipment.

"Many times a vendor can just ship anything he wants out there with the idea that they'll take whatever they can get. Now, I can sit down with a vendor and make sure they get exactly what they want," Jensen explained.

He acknowledged that both Sand Point and King Cove will eventually outgrow a joint managership.

Both towns are tied to the crab and salmon industries and will soon see increased growth when American fishermen begin catching and processing pollock, sole, and other bottom fish.

"Both cities have a lot of potential for growth. Both of these cities are going to be in the thick of it and that's what makes it exciting," Jensen said.

Before beginning his three-year stint with the State of Alaska, Jensen was the city manager of Barrow. He earned a degree in Geography and Regional Planning from the University of Iowa.

As a "circuit rider" for the Department of Community and Regional Affairs Jensen was one of the several local government experts who travel to Alaska's rural municipalities to assist in meetings, bookkeeping, grant writing, and drafting ordinances.