

5-Man Coordination Panel Set Up for Barrow Development

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A mechanism designed to coordinate federal, state, and local projects in the Barrow area was set up at a two-day conference in Barrow last week.

As approved by the approximately 20 agencies represented at the meeting, the mechanism is to be known as the Barrow Intergovernmental Co-ordinating Committee.

Its major component will be a five-man panel comprised of one representative each from the Navy, the Federal Field Committee, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the State of Alaska, and the City of Barrow.

Its smaller, but essential components, will be each of the agencies represented by the panel such as the Public Health Service, the Federal Aviation Administration, the Alaska State Housing Authority, the State Department of Health and Welfare, the State Department of Fish and Game and the U.S. Weather Bureau.

Its fuel? Voluntary cooperation from each of the agencies and a desire on the part of each to make the panel work.

At stake is the orderly development of the Barrow area.

As explained by Commander J.B. Pitman of the Seventeenth Naval District and moderator for the meeting, "The panel won't work without a spirit of cooperation. It won't work if we don't want it to work."

And Capt. Emory Smith, director of the Naval Petroleum and Oil Shale Reserves: "It is up to each agency to gear up to make this thing work and to make it a viable body."

The meeting was called by the Navy and held at modern facilities at the Naval Arctic Research Lab several miles out of town.

Barrow city council members interviewed during the conference generally reacted with enthusiasm to the idea of a coordinating panel.

Lester Suvlu, mayor and president of the Barrow City Council, explained that up until now the city of Barrow has been left out of meetings discussing the development of the area.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs held an interagency conference concerning Barrow in Albuquerque, N.M. in 1966 with no Barrow Native representation. Two years later, the Navy held an interagency conference in Seattle with no Native representation.

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Then in February of 1970 the city of Barrow called an interagency conference, but the emphasis seemed to be more on interagency coordination than on intergovernmental coordination as at the meeting last week.

Suvlu expressed hopes that the panel will build bridges between the city, state, and federal governments in Barrow.

"At least the agencies will no longer be working behind our backs," he said, explaining that in the past the city council has not been informed, much less consulted, about what the various agencies planned to do in Barrow.

All of the city council was invited to the conference and most of the seven-member body attended.

Another council member, Warren Matumeak reacted to the panel idea with cautious optimism.

"I think that the idea is a good one," he said, "but it will good one," he said, but it will require a lot of pushing on the part of the Barrow people to make sure that the plans for coordination are implemented.

"I don't expect immediate action."

He added that he thought Barrow had not been brought into the conference as much as it should have. Barrow Utilities, Inc. and the Arctic Slope Native Association should have been sitting in so that they will be aware of what is being planned, he explained.

Joe Upicksoun, president of the Arctic Slope Native Association and a manager for Barrow Utilities, said that neither groups were invited to the meeting and that he felt both should have been.

The only Barrow representative to speak at the conference was John Chenoweth, city manager. He endorsed the idea of a regional coordinating committee. Barrow needs such a committee, he said, to act as a clearing house or a source of information to prevent federal, state, and local bodies from working at cross purposes. If it can also act on behalf of the agencies, so much the better, he added.

In Barrow, Chenoweth explained, "we work largely from rumor and bits and pieces of information. We are more worried about what we are not told

than what we are."

As adopted by the group, the responsibilities of the panel are: 1. to coordinate the preparation of a Barrow Regional Development plan 2. to recommend the funding and continuing management responsibilities for joint use projects. 3. to monitor implementation of jointly approved development plans 4. to coordinate the flow of information relative to the physical development of the region 5. to collect information concerning all pending or planned government capital improvement projects and distribute the same to all cooperating agencies.

Only advisory in nature, the committee is to be concerned with coordination between and among federal, state, and local agencies. It is to concentrate on projects concerning physical development and is to limit itself to an area within a 10-mile radius of Barrow.

The panel will represent each of the individual agencies on an on-going basis and will call in specific ones when their specific area is involved.

A quick look at the current situation in the Barrow area will point out some of the topics discussed at the conference and why a coordinated effort was felt to be essential.

A fourth class city of about 2,200 people, 90 per cent of whom are native, Barrow is contained in the Naval Petroleum Reserve, which encompasses some 23 million acres on the North Slope.

From this area, the Navy supplies natural gas to Barrow, the Arctic Research Lab and other governmental agencies in the area. The gas is used for heating, cooking, and generating electricity.

The gas lines to the Navy camp and the town are not interconnected and thus one system cannot be used as a backup for the other in case of an emergency. The need to improve this situation was all too evident, when, during the conference, a fire at one of the gas wells left both the Navy and the town temporarily without gas.

The major source of employment in the area is the government—the Navy base camp, plus the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Public Health Service, the Weather Bureau, and the Post

Office.

The Bureau operates a school system for about 700 children from kindergarten through the ninth grade, owns the utilities plant in Barrow, and administers a social services program.

There were some objections to the agency having a member on the panel because some felt that the Bureau should be represented by the Federal Field Committee as were the other federal agencies.

However, as explained to the delegates at the conference, Barrow desired the inclusion of the BIA on the panel because it felt any physical projects constructed would have social implications and that, thus, a people-oriented agency should be on the panel. Also, it was felt by others supporting the position that the BIA's large involvement in Barrow places it in a special situation.

The Public Health Service operates a two-doctor, 14-bed hospital in Barrow.

Running water is found only in the federal compounds and part of the Naval Research Lab. Barrow residents obtain their supply either from a lake in summer or by melting blocks of ice in the winter, or by buying distilled water when it is available at the BIA distillation plant.

Sewage disposal is handled with chemical toilets or "honey buckets" except at the federal compounds and the newest addition at the Research Lab, which have their own sewage disposal systems.

Power is supplied by the BIA-owned utilities plant. Barrow Utilities, Inc., a co-op, in effect buys power from the BIA plant and sells it to the residents in Barrow.

The area has no incinerator so discarded equipment, empty oil barrels, and other junk have been scattered across the tundra by the government agencies and by the town.

The drums are used by the Naval Camp and the City of Barrow to remove fecal and garbage matter. Not only is the junk unsightly, but it poses a threat to the city's fresh water supply.

At the meeting, the Navy proposed a plan to clean up and dispose of these drums through the construction of an incinerator.