

Akiachak plans for dissolution of government November election

by Steve Pilkington

Tundra Times reporter

If next November's election goes as voters in Akiachak plan, their city government will dissolve after a five-year power struggle with the state, leaving the welfare and safety of Akiachak entirely up to its tribal members.

And according to state officials, the outcome of Akiachak's election could provoke five other Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta communities, which are seriously considering dissolving their own city governments, to follow suit.

Moses Peter, a former mayor of Akiachak, said it is too difficult to run a traditional Native government together with the state government.

"We tried to put both governments together, but it didn't work," Peter said.

"One of them has to go. We have to go by what people want," he said.

Willie Kasayulie, chairman of the Akiachak Indian Reorganization Act Council, said the main reason

• Akiachak faces vote in November

(Continued from Page One)

residents want to dissolve the city government is to avoid state and tribal conflicts.

"What we wanted to achieve was to have one responsible village government instead of two," Kasayulie said.

But the process of getting the state to allow the election has been long and difficult.

It began in 1985 when the Akiachak City Council members jointly resigned.

The village IRA council tried to abolish the city government once before by a popular vote from the residents, he said, but state law and the Local Boundary Commission only allowed that in rare circumstances.

Before the 1988 session of the Legislature, cities could dissolve only if they had become ghost towns. If a city grew out of the exploitation of a resource which had dried up, the state and boundary commission would allow it to dissolve.

But last year, legislators passed a dissolution statute which says a city can be dissolved if:

- A petition is signed by at least 50 percent of the residents who voted in the last election.

- The city owes no debts.

The commissioner of the Department of Community and Regional Affairs must also believe that residents will be better off before the city can be dissolved.

Marty Rutherford, director of the department's Municipal and Regional

Assistance Division, said the state supports the dissolution. The department is assisting the village, she said.

Akiachak has also met the first two parts of the statute, and the Local Boundary Commission recently set the date for the election for Nov. 7.

"I had hoped that the vote would take place in March or April," Kasayulie said.

One of the conflicts which arises between the two forms of government is criminal procedures, Kasayulie said.

"One of our concerns was that whenever one of our tribal members or community residents broke a law, they were taken out of the village without the council or anyone hearing about it," he said.

Bart Garber, an attorney with the Native American Rights Fund, said the November election will definitely dissolve the city government.

"Not a problem," he said.

The petition for an election was signed by 99 residents. This equals 72.8 percent of the number of votes cast in the last general election in the city — well over the statutory 50 percent needed for the city to be dissolved.

According to the state's schedule, the Department of Community and Regional Affairs will release its decision about the dissolution June 5. The boundary commission will conduct a hearing in Akiachak June 26.

Dan Bockhorst, supervisor of the boundary commission under the community affairs department, said

'What we wanted to achieve was to have one responsible village government instead of two.'

—Willie Kasayulie

Akiachak's election may affect other villages on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta.

"There are other communities that are potentially interested in dissolu-

tion," he said.

The five other communities seeking dissolution, according to the boundary commission, are Atmautluak, Chefor-nak, Kasigluk, Tununak and Newtok.