

Akiachak denied election

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for the Tundra Times

The Kuskokwim River village of Akiachak may not hold an election to dissolve its municipal government. That was the decision of the Local Boundary Commission May 18th. Village leaders have been trying to dismantle the second class city structure since September, 1983. They want the IRA council to be the sole governmental authority in the village. Willie Kasayulie, who has led the dissolution move, said they will ask for a reconsideration of the vote. It was a tie vote, two in favor, two against the election petition. Akiachak needed the support of three of the five LBC members to get approval for an election.

The Local Boundary Commission was established by the State Constitution to deal with a variety of matters, including municipal boundary changes, annexations,

and dissolutions. Their consent to an election is the last major step for Akiachak in a year-long petition process.

Member Josephine Anderson from Wrangell voted against Akiachak. "I'm not against their dissolving their municipal government. I think it's very foolish, but I'm not against it." She said she voted against the petition because Akiachak did not meet the financial standard set forth in statute. She said the municipal government has outstanding debts which must be settled.

According to Kasayulie, those debts include insurance payments, light bills, and other bills totalling about \$10,000, and an uncertain amount of money owed the Internal Revenue Service for a building the city purchased. The amount owed the IRS was first estimated at over \$40,000.00 but may be as little as

\$1,100. Kasayulie hopes to have the City of Akiachak's finances in order in time to push for reconsideration of the LBC decision at its May 31st workshop in Anchorage.

Kasayulie said he was "kind of surprised at first," (by the LBC denial) because most of the talk was in favor (of the LBC granting the request). Kasayulie doesn't believe LBC approval is really necessary to Akiachak's government goal. The local IRA council held a vote more than a year ago, he said, in which only two negative votes were cast out of more than a hundred cast on the dissolution question. But, the staff at the Department of Community and Regional Affairs convinced village leaders that they should do it the state's way. Kasayulie said the community will continue in that process by requesting reconsideration "to show other Native communities

that there is a process whereby villages can dissolve their municipal governments. We wouldn't ask for reconsideration if it wasn't affecting other communities."

Acting Commissioner of the Department of Community and Regional Affairs, Jeff Smith, said he was "real disappointed" by the LBC decision. The Department has been in the awkward position of disapproving of Akiachak's move, while championing their right to do it.

"No one can dictate what form of government they should have. Government simply can't work unless it has the support of the people," said Smith. But he doesn't think dissolution of the village's municipal government is a good idea. "If Akiachak could show me one new power, one new dollar (coming into the community the day after dissolution), I'd reassess my position." He's

not worried that the Akiachak decision may open the doors for other communities to dissolve their municipal governments. "I think what's going to be shown is that nothing is gained," he said. In fact, he estimates the community would have lost \$76,000.00 this year in state money.

Akiachak leaders see the money issue as a future fight, just one battle in the fight for recognition of IRA authority by the State of Alaska. They argue they should get the same amount of money regardless of the form of government they choose. But, the sovereignty questions will take a long time to resolve.

"What we're requesting right now is to get this issue (of municipal dissolution) resolved," said Willie Kasayulie.

Both Kasayulie and Smith think there is a good chance the Local Boundary Commission will approve Akiachak's petition for an election upon reconsideration.