



PLANNING BOARD—Members of the planning and development board were joined in Fairbanks last month by newly appointed AFN executive director Harry Carter (second from left). He is

shown here with James Wells of Noorvik (left), Luther Nagarok of Elim and Henry Kanayurka of Barrow (right), all members of the soon to be defunct board. (See story on Page 5.)

EDA's No'west Planning Board on the Fadeout

As March ends, the Northwest Economic Planning and Development Board, as well as other regional planning boards funded by an EDA technical assistance grant, fades out of existence.

At the end of the month, the technical assistance grant which funds the board terminates, and has not been renewed by AFN.

The villagers who compose this board, which comprises the small as well as the large villages of the Arctic Slope, Kobuk, Norton Sound and Seward Peninsula areas, fear nothing will arise to take its place.

At the beginning of the 2 year pilot program, the board members faltered. What was the purpose of a technical assistance grant? What do we need? Noorvik, Barrow and other villages thought of a hundred projects, then listed a few priorities.

They needed many things—housing, electricity, plumbing, and most important, economic development to bring jobs, cash income.

Thus, the board set planning priorities.

Chief among its endorsed priorities is the proposed Barrow Air Terminal, a project which is moving into its last stages of obtaining funding and contracts.

If enough money is obtained in time to order supplies upon the North Star III for this summer, the terminal will be a reality—along with almost 200 full time and seasonal jobs for Barrow residents.

The terminal facility will probably expand the Barrow tourist industry—already substantial despite the fact there are no overnight tourist accommodations as yet.

At its February 24-26 meeting in Fairbanks, attended by Commissioner of Economic Development Irene Ryan, the board voted some way to continue its work after the present EDA grant ends.

The members from smaller villages feel no other agency will develop industry in their villages, seek funding, develop economic programs.

As of now, no one has provided a source of funding to continue their work. Commissioner Ryan has no applicable funds in her department. The AFN will not serve as grantee for the technical assistance grant, which has become a sore spot among its board members.

Also, it is pushing for consolidation of planning rather than proliferation of local boards.

With no municipal or borough government capable of regional planning, smaller villages feel they will be lost while programs proliferate in the larger villages of Kotzebue and Barrow.

Barrow Terminal, the No. 1 priority project of the board, will file its final written proposal for funding from the EDA Indian Desk shortly. First, they must qualify themselves as a "reservation" for eligibility purposes.

During various pre-planning and proposal meetings, they have been advised they can receive close to \$3 million in grant and loan funds from the Indian Desk of EDA—plus a grant to pay for utilities. Letters were written by ASNA president Joe Upicksoun and Barrow Mayor Lester Suvlu requesting reservation designation.

On January 30, NWP & D Board director Hugh Nicholls went to Washington, D.C. along with Joe Upicksoun, Charlie Edwardson, and BIA and EDA representatives for a pre planning

conference. If the project is not stopped by an administrative tangle, the funds will go through.

If they are not received in time to book passage on the North Star III for materials, the project will default the leases it has signed with the federal government, state government, and Wien Airlines for space in the new terminal.

The planning board also considers and is working on over a dozen projects in small villages—sawmills, canneries, reindeer industry, cottage industry, freezing facilities, etc.

At their February meeting, director Nicholls presented Commissioner Ryan with a seven page outline of proposed economic and development projects in the northwest Alaska region. Many of these provisions comprise an overall development plan for the Northwest area.

One village is never considered in isolation. A sawmill development project in Noorvik in the Kobuk valley can provide materials for the ASHA homes to be built in nearby villages.

The village could provide lumber for less than it costs to ship in. The money would further develop a local industry—providing more jobs.

Other important development projects the board proposes are: creation of a Native banking and trust company—holding native funds in trust to serve native enterprise.

—creation of a Native trade union to bargain with companies desiring to do business within "Indian country."

—a native controlled general construction company;

—a native controlled geophysical—seismo exploratory corporation;

—a planned wildlife hunting and preserving company with retail outlets, cannery, contracts with hunters and whalers and with epicurean specialty markets as well as local outlets;

—cold storage facilities could be developed in many villages to preserve meat and fish. Women could make and market parkas in the Barrow area, and develop native handicrafts commercially.

The development board also concentrates on creating tourist facilities—places for hunting, skiing, fishing employing Native guides and managers.

Some of the resources the planning and development board has researched are far in the future. At their February 25 meeting, the board invited a BLM engineer to speak on the possibilities for geothermal energy use in the Northwest region. This uses the heat of the earth's core, where it is close to the surface, as an energy source for electrical power.

In Los Angeles, geothermal energy is already being used to provide electric power as it has been used in Rome, Italy for many years. Alaska has the same possibilities, he concluded, though perhaps not enough population to make generation worthwhile at the geothermal sites in the near future.

In all, the future of the board looks dim. Commissioner Ryan has volunteered her staff of economic and development specialists for the use of any village contemplating projects.

When asked by Tom Eccles of the EDA regional office, she has said she will look into using the department as a possible grantee for EDA funds. However, a state agency cannot set up a private industry without risking the charge of overstepping governmental authority.

Perhaps, the most significant accomplishment of the grant has been in training village people to understand the complexities of planning and development. The board's members are trained to see possibilities, look for funding, see the faults and weaknesses in proposals.

Such men as Lester Suvlu of Barrow, the board's chairman, are now sophisticated enough to deal with the complicated maze of federal and state funding proposals and programs. In two years, the grant has created a trained group of planners capable of assessing needs and growth in their villages.