

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON TRIBAL AFFAIRS**

March 26, 2019

8:02 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Tiffany Zulkosky, Chair
Representative Bryce Edgmon, Vice Chair
Representative John Lincoln
Representative Dan Ortiz
Representative Chuck Kopp
Representative Dave Talerico
Representative Sarah Vance

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Representative Zack Fields
Representative Grier Hopkins

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION(S): CASE STUDY IN TRIBAL PARTNERSHIPS

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

GAVIN DIXON, Community Development Manager
Division of Environmental Health and Engineering
Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented on and answered questions about ANTHC's involvement in several major projects, notably the Newtok Village relocation effort.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:02:14 AM](#)

CHAIR TIFFANY ZULKOSKY called the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs meeting to order at 8:02 a.m. Representatives Talerico, Kopp, Lincoln, Vance, and Zulkosky were present at the call to order. Representatives Edgmon and Ortiz arrived as the meeting was in progress.

PRESENTATION(S): Case Study in Tribal Partnerships

[8:02:54 AM](#)

CHAIR ZULKOSKY announced that the only order of business would be a presentation by Gavin Dixon of the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC).

[8:03:16 AM](#)

GAVIN DIXON, Community Development Manager, Division of Environmental Health and Engineering, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, thanked the committee for allowing him to present. He began a PowerPoint presentation [hard copy included in committee packet] titled "Case Studies in Tribal Partnerships." He addressed slide 2 and explained that the presentation would relay information about several tribal partnership projects, notably the Newtok Village relocation effort. He discussed the preventative work ANTHC does through its Division of Environmental Health and Engineering, particularly the maintenance of healthy water, sewer systems, and health clinics. He said ANTHC's vision is to ensure Alaska Native people are the healthiest people in the world.

[8:04:54 AM](#)

MR. DIXON addressed slide 3. He remarked that the State of Alaska (SOA) has taken a leadership role in efforts to relocate Newtok Village. He explained that Newtok is a community located on the Ningliq River at a spot approximately 90 miles west of Bethel. He relayed the community's long-term experience with severe environmental changes, including the degradation of permafrost, the reduction of river ice, and the acceleration of catastrophic erosion. He noted that Newtok has averaged 80 feet of erosion per year over the past two decades and added that the rate is accelerating. He discussed a recent storm event that caused 40 feet of erosion over a 10-day span. He commented that erosion is often thought of as a slow phenomenon but Newtok's erosion is "a live event."

MR. DIXON said ANTHC supports the village in its effort to relocate. He noted that Newtok Village is a federally recognized tribe. He relayed that community members have known about the erosion problem for many years and long ago selected a relocation option. He addressed a graphic on slide 3 indicating the location of predicted erosion. He said the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) predicted in 2003 that erosion would cause a house to fall into the Ningliq River. He said the first house is expected to fall into the river later this year. He commented that the USACE projection was only slightly off.

[8:07:37 AM](#)

MR. DIXON addressed slide 4. He detailed various issues with Newtok, explaining that the decision to relocate has meant very little investment has gone toward improving the existing village. He described Newtok's degrading boardwalks, its lack of running water and sewer, and its susceptibility to brownouts. He relayed that Newtok is home to 375 people living in 65 occupied houses with an average size of 800 square feet. He noted that this works out to an average of 6.5 people living in a house without running water and equipped with a honey bucket. He added that flooding conditions have afflicted the community with black mold. He explained that the Newtok Village Council (NVC) is focusing its efforts on relocating the village to a new site known as Mertarvik.

MR. DIXON addressed slide 5 and detailed work done since 2003 to facilitate the move. He said the Mertarvik site has been developed thanks to various funding sources and that it now features several houses, an emergency shelter known as the Mertarvik Emergency Center (MEC), a shallow draft barge landing, and a water well. He relayed that many studies have been conducted in Mertarvik to measure geotechnical issues, water quality, bathymetry, and wind. He mused that those are all necessary things to study when designing a new community. He added that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has funded an airport layout plan created by the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOTPF). He said Mertarvik is located 10 miles south of Newtok on Nelson Island at a site with access to clean spring water. He noted that Mertarvik is named after a Yupik phrase describing the process of gathering water from the spring. He added that Nelson Island is a basalt island, which means the relocated village will be constructed on a rock foundation not affected by the erosion problems that have plagued Newtok. He mentioned that the best resource for

learning more about the relocation effort is Newtok Planning Group website operated by SOA.

[8:11:24 AM](#)

MR. DIXON addressed slide 6. He described the relationship between ANTHC and Newtok Village. He said ANTHC helped develop a community layout plan in 2016 so that the needs of the community could be cohesively and strategically addressed. He called the process "community-led" and "iterative," and explained that it covered what should be built, where it should be built, and why it should be build. He introduced a design on slide 7 that he said is the result of six months of planning meetings. He remarked that the layout would ensure that Mertarvik is a safe, relatively affordable community not troubled by the health challenges of Newtok. He noted that the various surveys and studies conducted in Mertarvik had informed the design. He described the process of submitting the community layout plan to the Department of Natural Resources.

MR. DIXON addressed slide 7. He said ANTHC and NVC have worked together to develop the master implementation plan that prioritizes what gets built and when. He clarified that NVC led the effort and ANTHC provided support.

[8:13:54 AM](#)

CHAIR ZULKOSKY asked Mr. Dixon to discuss the formation of the relationship between ANTHC and Newtok Village.

MR. DIXON said he would address that later in the presentation.

[8:14:14 AM](#)

MR. DIXON, returning to the presentation, compared the master implementation plan to a sheet of music that guides funding and construction. He said the plan is a cooperative effort that reflects the priorities of the community informed by analysis by ANTHC.

MR. DIXON addressed slide 8. He said the next step of the relationship between Newtok Village and ANTHC is the management of design and construction. He noted that design and construction activities in Mertarvik have been led by a variety of groups, including the tribe, SOA, USACE, and the Department of Defense's (DoD) Innovative Readiness Training (IRT) program. He said ANTHC has entered into a partnership with NVC to oversee

all design and construction efforts. He listed contractors involved in the efforts. He said ANTHC oversees a master builder contract with Ukpeagvik Inupiat Corporation's (UIC) construction company. He described the nature of that contract and the bidding process for additional contracts related to the 30 projects planned for the next few years.

MR. DIXON addressed slide 9. He said funding acquisition is another piece of the partnership between Newtok Village and ANTHC. He explained that this aspect of the relationship involves developing and managing the Mertarvik site, as well as acquiring funding for future efforts. He said this work follows the master implementation plan. He described how ANTHC identifies and leverages appropriate funding sources.

MR. DIXON addressed slide 10. He relayed that the master implementation plan has three main goals. He said the 2019 goal is to establish a year-round occupied community by relocating one-third of the population of Newtok to Mertarvik. He explained that this requires a minimal level of infrastructure to support the population, including reliable electricity, an education facility, an emergency landing strip for medical evacuation access, self-haul treated water, a portable alternative sanitation system, sufficient fuel storage, a landfill, and 21 occupied houses. He reiterated that the expectation is for all this to be realized by fall 2019.

[8:19:25 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON stated that he previously represented Newtok before redistricting. He relayed seeing a list of all the state and federal entities with whom the community had to coordinate. He noted that all those agencies and funding streams were a source of confusion. He asked if ANTHC has taken control of keeping track of things.

MR. DIXON answered that ANTHC's role is as a coordinating entity. He said the Newtok project involves work with "essentially every federal and state agency," plus regional partners, nonprofit organizations, and press organizations. He noted that SOA and the Denali Commission also help coordinate communications with various agencies. He clarified that ANTHC helps guide NVC regarding funding opportunities, rules, regulations, and project delivery.

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON remarked that there are "more Newtoks" along the West Coast. He asked if ANTHC would assume a similar

role with other communities in the future. He asked if there is a master plan that includes future projects.

MR. DIXON said ANTHC has plans to support other environmentally threatened communities and pointed to its Environmentally Threatened Communities Grant Center as one arm of that effort. He remarked that just the one relocation project is "a ton of work." He shared that ANTHC has a full-time team of four people that focuses solely on the Newtok project. He commented that the needs of environmentally threatened communities far outweigh the amount of available support. He shared an expectation that there will be more projects like the Newtok relocation for ANTHC to take on in the future. He opined that ANTHC will not be able to handle relocation efforts on its own. He said other tribal and regional partners can also support rural communities in similar situations.

8:22:29 AM

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON asked if ANTHC signs Memoranda of Agreement (MOAs) with state and federal entities with whom it works. He also asked if SOA capital budget monies support the new education facility in Mertarvik.

MR. DIXON stated that ANTHC mostly supports and advocates for NVC. He said Newtok Village maintains direct relationships with federal and state entities, especially as relates to funding. He said ANTHC has mechanisms to allow it to support NVC fulfill its obligations to those entities, including cooperate project agreements (CPAs) and MOAs. He added that, in some cases, ANTHC does work directly with the state or federal entity. He stressed that its role is most often a supporting one. Addressing the topic of the education facility, he said ANTHC has worked with Lower Kuskokwim School District (LKSD) for several years on the relocation project. He said the MEC can serve as a "portable classroom" and support an administrator and teachers. He noted that it is not designed as an education facility and that it is not intended to be a long-term solution. He said a new school would be needed to accommodate the entire student population, which amounts to approximately 110 students.

8:24:58 AM

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON noted that when he sat on the Alaska Northern Waters Task Force (NWTTF), it became painfully apparent that SOA did not have a clearinghouse to perform the duties that ANTHC seems to be performing in Newtok. He spoke to the dire

environmental situation faced by the community of Kivalina, describing it as "code red." He described the lack of a systematic approach to addressing such an issue. He commented that ANTHC seems to be doing a great job.

MR. DIXON agreed. He clarified that each project is unique, and no single agency currently includes the protection or relocation of communities as part of its mission. He commented that each agency has a part to play in a project like the Newtok relocation. He said ANTHC strives to fill the gaps and serve as a coordinator. He commented on the critical contributions of different agencies and the challenge of maximizing the benefits of those contributions.

[8:27:17 AM](#)

MR. DIXON addressed slide 11. He shared that the next goal for the project is to safely relocate the entire population of Newtok by 2023. He said this goal includes the presence in Mertarvik of a DOTPF airport, a full school, a health clinic, and partial running water and sewer service. He said the 2023 goal also includes cleanup of the Newtok site and the construction of enough homes in Mertarvik to accommodate all residents of Newtok. He commented that the 2023 goal aligns with the Newtok erosion timeline. He noted that Newtok's school and airport will be so affected by erosion that they will be rendered unusable sometime between 2021 and 2023. He remarked that the 2023 vision of Mertarvik would not be considered a completion of the project.

MR. DIXON addressed slide 12. He said the relocation project would be considered complete when the community no longer experiences overcrowding in housing and has access to full running water and sewer, low-cost renewable energy, economic development, and a trail system leading to subsistence resources. He shared that the goal is for the project to reach these levels of completeness in 2027. He summarized that the relocation will occur in three main phases: the establishment of a year-round population at the new site, the accommodation of the entire population by 2023, and the elimination of certain challenges to rural living by 2027. He said every project within the master implementation plan works toward those goals in a phased manner.

[8:29:50 AM](#)

CHAIR ZULKOSKY reflected on a statement made by Mr. Dixon in which he explained that the average home in Newtok is approximately 800 square feet and houses an average of 6.5 people. She asked him to elaborate on the goal of eliminating overcrowding by 2027.

MR. DIXON stated that overcrowding is not unique to Newtok and that many communities in Alaska have insufficient housing. He spoke to the goal of constructing houses that are appropriate for the Mertarvik site. He said the houses being built in 2019 are 4-bedroom, 1,400 square foot homes that can accommodate big, multigenerational families. He noted that not every house is expected to be that size but shared that the intent is to move as many people as possible away from the public health crisis in Newtok. He added that the houses are built to a 6-star energy rating so they will be inexpensive to heat and will feature good indoor air quality.

[8:31:43 AM](#)

MR. DIXON addressed slide 13, which featured a photo captioned "Recent Construction Progress - Quarry". He said a rock quarry near the site is being developed by Brice, Inc. to support all the material in Mertarvik. He said the quarry is a unique opportunity for economic development to support the project. He stated that the gravel resource is a major factor in the relocation effort and that Newtok is fortunate to have access to it. He relayed the large amount of material that has been quarried and stockpiled to support the project.

MR. DIXON addressed slide 14, which featured a photo of the Mertarvik Evacuation Center (MEC). He said the MEC was primarily funded by SOA. He stated that it is designed to accommodate the entire population of Newtok for a two-week period in the event of a disaster. He noted that the MEC will temporarily serve as an education facility. He said the MEC was completed in 2018 by Wolverine Supply, Inc. He stated that it has a heating system, is well-insulated, uses minimal fuel, measures out to approximately 6,000 square feet, and will serve during the summer as a bunkhouse for military servicemembers assisting on the site.

MR. DIXON addressed slide 15, which featured a photo of a newly constructed home. He said the Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP) Regional Housing Authority (RHA) has contributed to building new housing. He noted that the houses, completed in summer 2018, are not yet occupied. He said two of

the homes were funded by the Title VI Loan Guarantee Program operated by RHA and two were funded through a Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Imminent Threat (IT) grant. He said there are currently eight occupiable homes in Mertarvik, though none presently has access to electricity or fuel storage facilities.

[8:34:22 AM](#)

CHAIR ZULKOSKY asked for clarification on the occupancy status of the homes.

MR. DIXON said three of the homes are seasonally occupied during the summer but are closed for the winter when the residents return to Newtok.

[8:34:44 AM](#)

MR. DIXON addressed slide 16, which featured a photo captioned "Recent Construction Progress - Power Plant". He said, in order to maximize the Mertarvik building season, certain modular facilities are being developed in Anchorage. He noted that these facilities include the water plant and power plant; the latter is scheduled for installation in 2019. He said the development of the power plant is a partnership with SOA and the Alaska Energy Authority (AEA).

MR. DIXON addressed slide 17, which featured a photo of an airplane. He said the road that had been built to the rock quarry was designed to function as an emergency landing strip to accommodate planes. He stated that Cessna 207s has regular access to Mertarvik last year. He clarified that the landing strip is not an airport and is not maintained by DOTPF. He shared that an expansion will take place in 2019 to accommodate medical evacuation aircraft. He said the landing strip supports construction efforts and community safety.

[8:36:00 AM](#)

MR. DIXON addressed slide 18. He shared construction plans for spring 2019 with the goal of delivering an inhabitable village by fall 2019. The projects included gravel production, completion of the landing strip extension, completion of a barge landing access road, expansion of the construction laydown area, safety improvements for the MEC, construction of 13 house pads and foundations for new homes, development of access trails to the house pads, setup of an additional construction camp to

accommodate more workers and military personnel, and connection of temporary water/sewer to those facilities. He said these projects are expected to be finished by the first week of June 2019.

MR. DIXON addressed slide 19 and shared construction plans for summer 2019. He said DoD will provide 50 servicemembers through its Innovative Readiness Training (IRT) program to assist with infrastructure development in Mertarvik. He said the IRT projects will include a landfill, a heavy equipment shop, four complete houses, one mile of roads, the power plant installation, and gravel production. He spoke to the mutual benefits of the IRT program, which allows DoD to conduct training resulting in usable infrastructure for the community. He said these projects will be finished in August 2019.

MR. DIXON addressed slide 20 and shared construction plans for fall 2019. He said the master builder will complete nine additional houses. He stated that, when the IRT personnel depart, the MEC will be adapted to accommodate a pioneering school. He said additional projects include the installation of a water plant, a limited water distribution system for the MEC, portable alternative sanitation systems, and an electric distribution system.

[8:39:05 AM](#)

CHAIR ZULKOSKY asked Mr. Dixon to define "pioneering school."

MR. DIXON said the [Lower Kuskokwim School District] (LKSD) uses the term "pioneering school" to describe a school that does not initially meet the needs of the community but provides a sufficient space for educational operations. He said the plan is to move one-third of the population of Newtok to the Mertarvik site by October 15, resulting in 40 students attending the pioneering school at the MEC. He noted that LKSD intends for students to participate in on-site education as well as tele-education. He said the MEC renovation will include the installation of bathrooms, a fire suppression system, and several classrooms. He said the MEC already has a warming kitchen and noted that the facility will be able to be used as a community center in the future.

[8:40:15 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ORTIZ asked if the Mertarvik site has broadband capacity to support tele-education.

MR. DIXON said ANTHC is working with General Communications, Inc. (GCI) and United Utilities, Inc. (UII) as the main telecom utilities. He stated that there is currently 3G cell service onsite. He said the school district plans to install a "microwave repeater" to allow educational services in Newtok to be transmitted to the Mertarvik site. He shared that most rural school districts' tele-education is funded through the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). He said the construction efforts in Mertarvik are supported by an internet system that can be utilized by the community during winter. He remarked that the long-term solution will require a larger repeater to obtain service from a large cell tower in Tununak that does not currently have line-of-sight access to Mertarvik. He said service is currently limited but both ANTHC and GCI know it must be improved.

[8:41:44 AM](#)

MR. DIXON addressed slide 21. He said the busy 2019 building schedule will be supported by approximately 100 onsite construction workers. He characterized the project as being much larger than a typical rural Alaska community project. He listed 2020 projects that have been funded: a bulk fuel farm funded through AEA, two duplex housing units funded through the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC), a heat recovery system funded by the United States Department of Energy (DOE), a DOTPF-funded airport to be completed in 2021, and cleanup of threatened infrastructure in Newtok.

[8:42:53 AM](#)

CHAIR ZULKOSKY asked how long [NVC] has been working toward the relocation.

MR. DIXON said the community categorically decided to relocate in 2003. He said significant progress was made in 2007, then again in 2012. He clarified that by "progress" he meant significant steps forward related to key funding and coordination efforts. He said increased involvement by the Denali Commission since 2016 has "jumpstarted" the project.

[8:43:47 AM](#)

MR. DIXON addressed slide 22. He said some projects planned for 2020 still need to be funded, specifically the construction of 16 additional housing units and extensions of roads and power

lines. He said ANTHC is pursuing every funding source imaginable to secure funding for these projects.

MR. DIXON addressed slide 23. He described the relationship between NVC and ANTHC as a cooperative project agreement. He said NVC, which is the village's governing body, provides preapproval of all projects and selects contractors. He added that NVC provides local coordination and support. He reiterated that the nature of the partnership is ANTHC supporting NVC in accomplishing its relocation goal. He said ANTHC goes to Newtok every month and that he communicates daily with the village relocation coordinator. He stated that ANTHC coordinates a steering committee, oversees design and construction activities, and coordinates regional, state, and federal partners.

[8:45:50 AM](#)

CHAIR ZULKOSKY asked for confirmation that Newtok does not have an active municipal government, meaning the tribal government serves as the local government structure.

MR. DIXON confirmed it. He said, "Newtok is only a tribe; there is no second-class city out there." He noted that, throughout the relocation effort, NVC must still provide safety and essential services to Newtok residents. He said ANTHC strives to reduce the burden of NVC's many responsibilities.

MR. DIXON addressed slide 24. He said a MOA allows NVC to use ANTHC's existing contractors. He described the process through which ANTHC puts out a request for proposal (RFP) on behalf of NVC. He said the MOA reduces costs and procurement time. He mentioned how important the time factor is given the race against erosion. He said the MOA also allows for swift support for NVC regarding invoice processing, contract management, and payroll.

[8:48:18 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON noted that, because there is no municipality in Newtok, ANTHC was able to operate outside the State Procurement Code [AS 36.30]. He posited that this allowed ANTHC to have a more direct and efficient relationship with NVC than if it had been working with SOA entities.

MR. DIXON said each funding source for the Newtok project comes with its own set of rules. He said, for example, SOA funding requires adherence to the State Procurement Code. He explained

that, through the MOA, NVC can pursue SOA funding through ANTHC's existing channels.

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON remarked that most of the funding for the project has been federal.

MR. DIXON said there has historically been much SOA support for Newtok. He commented that federal funding has increased since ANTHC became involved. He clarified that most of that funding has been through the Denali Commission.

[8:49:48 AM](#)

MR. DIXON addressed slide 25. He shared that the partnership between ANTHC and NVC allowed the latter to apply for the IRT program through DoD. He said the current program is the second time NVC has been accepted into the IRT program, citing a prior multi-year project that began in 2011. He said all the work done by IRT will be coordinated by ANTHC. He said NVC and ANTHC work together to decide which projects should be addressed by IRT, and then ANTHC ensures IRT is equipped to handle those projects.

MR. DIXON addressed slide 26 and spoke to the importance of the partnership between ANTHC, NVC, and SOA. He discussed working with the Division of Community and Regional Affairs (DCRA), which provides web hosting, distributes a quarterly newsletter, supports a move-out/move-in manual for the benefit of Newtok residents, and helps coordinate Newtok Planning Group meetings. He said AEA has been helpful in troubleshooting and repairing the current power plant in Newtok. He added that AEA will also perform commissioning activities on the new power plant in Mertarvik. He said DNR and the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) each play a role in permitting, platting, recording, and regulatory support. He stated that they also offer guidance on the feasibility of certain projects. He said DOTPF oversees design and management for the new airport planned for Mertarvik.

MR. DIXON addressed slide 27. He discussed SOA funding for certain projects, including the MEC, the MEC access road, and the barge landing access. He spoke about the importance of SOA matching funds that complement Denali Foundation funding for housing and transportation. He said the Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs (DMVA) bought out seven threatened houses in Newtok through its Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP). He commented that demolition of those houses, which has already

begun, will ensure they do not fall into the river. He said the HMGP funds have been reinvested toward building new homes in Mertarvik.

[8:54:49 AM](#)

CHAIR ZULKOSKY relayed her understanding that there was some intent to relocate existing buildings from Newtok to Mertarvik. She asked if that is still the case.

MR. DIXON noted that the project is focused on relocating people, not infrastructure. He said the buildings in Newtok are not in good condition and there is not much interest in bringing the problems of Newtok to the new site. He discussed the technical challenge of moving a building from Newtok to Mertarvik. He noted there are three homes and two community facilities in Newtok that are "in a quality worthy of relocation." He commented that those structures would need to be moved during a winter when the Ningliq River has completely frozen over. He noted that the river can no longer be depended upon to freeze to a suitable standard.

CHAIR ZULKOSKY asked for how many years it has been a goal to relocate structures from Newtok to Mertarvik and how many times during that span the river ice has been of a condition to support the move.

MR. DIXON said it has been NVC's intent to move rather than demolish the structures for about five years. He stated that relocation would have been impossible in three of those years and only perhaps possible in the other two years during brief spring windows when the ice was at its thickest. He commented that such a relocation is very difficult to plan, noting as well that favorable weather does not always align with grant timing. He shared that NVC and ANTHC asked the military about the possibility of airlifting the homes but were told it was not possible.

[8:57:26 AM](#)

MR. DIXON addressed slide 28. He discussed the importance of NVC's partnership with the Denali Commission, the primary funder of the project. He said the commission helps to coordinate other federal agencies and that its funds have special "non-federal match" status that allow NVC and ANTHC to leverage additional funds for the creation of special programs. He listed other federal agencies that are partners: The Bureau of

Indian Affairs (BIA), HUD, DOE, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). He said the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) has assisted with developing sanitation systems to replace honey buckets. He said the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) has awarded a grant to fund cleanup work in Newtok. He spoke to the importance of coordinating and organizing funding from various supporters and how those efforts encourage additional support from outside entities. He said USACE and the FAA have funded critical portions of the project, with the latter funding the airport through DOTPF.

[8:59:53 AM](#)

MR. DIXON addressed slide 29 and discussed various regional partners. He said the Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation (YKHC), LKSD, AVCP RHA, and AVCP, Inc. have all contributed to the success of the project. He said YKHC will operate a small clinic in Mertarvik starting in 2019 and will participate in environmental health programs, such as for the elimination of bed bugs and the design of water/sewer systems. He said LKSD operates the school in Newtok and noted that the school serves additional key community functions, such as providing a place of refuge during storms. He said LKSD is working towards operating the school facility in Mertarvik. He added that LKSD provides temporary housing to displaced Newtok residents. He said AVCP RHA, in addition to contributing with housing construction and funding, is assisting the village with creating housing policy.

[9:01:43 AM](#)

CHAIR ZULKOSKY sought clarity on the relationship between ANTHC and NVC as regards the "coordination and delivery of support."

MR. DIXON stated that ANTHC's partnership with NVC is similar to cooperative project agreements (CPAs) between ANTHC and other Alaska tribes. He said the CPAs focus on environmental health and engineering projects. He explained that the partnership involves ANTHC supporting the community in developing and managing funds received for water and sewer projects, as well as in carrying out all grant conditions and requirements. He said the CPA with NVC establishes additional ANTHC roles and responsibilities, and that it allows funds received by either NVC or ANTHC to be managed together under one process focused on securing the tribe's vision.

CHAIR ZULKOSKY commented that Mr. Dixon's presentation has demonstrated that the needs of communities across Alaska are unique, complex, and multilayered. She said these needs require endurance and perseverance. She remarked that tribal leaders are "ready to engage" but need coordination support. She expressed appreciation for the work done by ANTHC in helping NVC advocate for itself against the backdrop of a multi-decade project.

MR. DIXON thanked Chair Zulkosky. He shared that he draws inspiration from leadership in Newtok. He commented that the residents have endured much and continue to work for their community. He said ANTHC is honored to have the opportunity to support them.

[9:04:02 AM7](#)

MR. DIXON addressed slide 30. He expressed that he would address other ANTHC projects. He described the Community Utility Assistant Program (CUAP) as a partnership between ANTHC, the Northwest Arctic Borough (NWAB), the Maniilaq Association, and rural communities in that region. He said CUAP supports water and sewer services and is funded by NWAB with payment in lieu of taxes (PILT) from Red Dog Mine. He said the goals of CUAP are to reduce water and sewer emergencies, reduce water and sewer costs, improve career opportunities for utility operators, and improve competitiveness and eligibility for capital funding from SOA and federal programs. He stated that the structure of the CUAP partnership involves NWAB paying operator salaries, providing training, and purchasing fuel for regional utilities. He added that ANTHC's role includes billing/payroll management, overseeing maintenance and operations, and providing additional training. He said the local communities hire operators and must comply with SOA "best practices" standards. He said the Maniilaq Association provides operations and maintenance support, as well as office space for ANTHC staff.

[9:07:08 AM](#)

MR. DIXON addressed slide 32 and discussed the benchmark goals of CUAP. He said the program strives to reduce average residential water/sewer rates by two-thirds. He added that the goal of having fewer emergencies will be pursued through improved maintenance. He said additional goals are to provide regional training and support, as well as to increase construction grant eligibility. He remarked that CUAP is a \$1.8 million investment across 10 communities within NWAB.

MR. DIXON addressed slide 33. He said SOA's involvement with CUAP is based on the "best practices" evaluation criteria developed by DEC and DCRA, which evaluates every community in rural Alaska for its water/sewer capacity. He stated that SOA provides the basis for the program which rural communities and tribal groups fulfill. He said it is a CUAP goal to improve scoring and fulfillment of DEC criteria. He added that DEC's Remote Maintenance Worker (RMW) program and specialist programs provided through DCRA contribute toward the fulfillment of training obligations.

MR. DIXON addressed slide 34. He said CUAP has been active for approximately one year. He explained that, in that time, there have been no reported emergencies. He credited preventative maintenance and support provided to the communities. He said average water/sewer costs have dropped by two-thirds across the region. He commented on major improvements in compliance with a preventative maintenance plan. He said the Maniilaq region has the highest average "best practices" scores in the Alaska. He opined that CUAP is working and shared his expectation that it will continue for the next five years.

[9:09:08 AM](#)

MR. DIXON addressed slide 35. He discussed ANTHC efforts to help develop a portable alternative sanitation system (PASS). He described challenges associated with delivering water/sewer in rural Alaska. He said some rural communities are in environments that will never allow for inexpensive water/sewer. He spoke about the Alaska Water and Sewer Challenge (AWSC), instituted by SOA to find an alternative to piped water that still provides health benefits. He said PASS is ANTHC's response to that challenge. He added that it is a simple technology with low capital and operations costs.

MR. DIXON addressed slide 36. He said PASS has a water component and a sewer component. He explained that the water component includes a simple in-home treatment system with a 100-gallon storage tank. He said it provides water for handwashing, drinking, and cooking. He stated that one could shower with PASS, but it would involve much water-hauling. He explained that the more-complicated sewer component is based around a separating toilet. He said liquid waste is disposed of locally and solid waste is dried with a fan before being hauled away by the homeowner. He clarified that the solid waste becomes "a dried product that gets hauled a lot less often." He contrasted

PASS with a honey bucket, which may be hauled out daily. He said PASS reduces exposure to waste and increases indoor air quality. He clarified that PASS is not a substitute for running water/sewer, but noted that it is a practical, affordable, and portable option for those without those services.

[9:12:37 AM](#)

MR. DIXON addressed slide 37. He said the PASS project was made possible through funding by ANTHC, Indian Health Service (IHS), Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC), and UMCOR. He remarked that design, installation, and testing is carried out by ANTHC, Lifewater Engineering Company, CampWater Industries LLC, and the Cold Climate Housing Research Center (CCHRC). He said PASS is patented and is manufactured in Alaska by Silverline LLC. He noted that there is interest in PASS from Arctic communities in nations like Canada and Russia. He said PASS has been installed in Kivalina, Alatna, Allakaket, Chalkytsik, and Oscarville. He noted that an additional 20 systems are set to be installed in Kivalina during the summer, as well as 21 systems for Newtok. He described PASS as a rural Alaska solution developed by the tribes and ANTHC to solve a problem not easily solved with SOA and federal partners.

[9:14:11 AM](#)

CHAIR ZULKOSKY asked what communication ANTHC has had with the Village Safe Water (VSW) program regarding PASS.

MR. DIXON said VSW, in partnership with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), has worked on the Alaska Water and Sewer Challenge (AWSC). He said ANTHC has received no funding from VSW but has coordinated with it. He stated that there is \$2 billion worth of need in terms of water and sewer development in rural Alaska. He said PASS will not fulfill all that need. He described the coordination relationship between ANTHC and VSW as one in which "we try to coordinate who can accomplish what."

CHAIR ZULKOSKY asked for "a high-level comparison" of the difference in cost between serving a home with running water/sewer versus with PASS.

MR. DIXON noted that running water and sewer costs vary wildly across rural Alaska. He said installing those services can cost \$100,000 to \$400,000 per house. He said PASS costs \$20,000 to \$50,000. He said PASS is much cheaper but noted that it does not provide the same health benefits as running water/sewer.

[9:16:37 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked about facilities at Mertarvik to allow residents to bathe and clean laundry.

MR. DIXON said the community construction camp currently has a facility with three washers, three dryers, four toilets, and three showers. He said that facility will be accessible to the community by the end of the 2019 construction season so that residents have access to benefits not provided by PASS. He noted that ANTHC recommends that PASS be accompanied by access to a laundry facility with washers and dryers. He added that the MEC will have running water and sewer.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked about long-term plans for a laundry facility and washhouse to accommodate a fully populated Mertarvik.

MR. DIXON agreed that the facility at the construction camp is not sufficient. He noted that NVC is responsible for prioritizing projects. He said NVC has determined that housing is the key priority. He stated that there is interest in developing laundry infrastructure, but the goal is to follow the desires of NVC. He said NVC is comfortable with a "pioneering relocation" which includes a willingness to move to a site with minimal infrastructure and without full services.

[9:20:25 AM](#)

CHAIR ZULKOSKY sought to clarify that NVC has decided to make compromises on the types of services available in Mertarvik in order to prioritize housing and execute a swift relocation.

MR. DIXON affirmed that community members have been informed about their options and have designated what services they deem absolutely necessary. He mentioned that the limited nature of funds and resources played a role in the decision-making.

[9:21:46 AM](#)

MR. DIXON addressed slide 38 and discussed another ANTHC project, Passive Thermosiphon Conversion (PTC). He said a thermosiphon is a refrigeration system that transfers heat from the ground in order to keep the ground frozen. He said passive thermosiphons are not powered by energy; they achieve refrigeration through a natural evaporation process. He noted

that rising temperatures will cause thermosiphons to fail. He said one solution is to incorporate an active management system, which he explained involves pipes, energy, and much expense. He noted that the [Trans-Alaska Pipeline System] has over 120,000 active management thermosiphons. He said workers who specialize in refrigeration are necessary to operate active management thermosiphons. He opined that active management does not make sense for rural communities that have only about 20 thermosiphons. He said the goal for ANTHC was to design a solution that is appropriate for rural communities and that features low technical complexity and low capital and maintenance costs.

MR. DIXON addressed slide 39. He said the PTC project is funded by ANTHC and includes partnerships with CCHRC and Lifewater Engineering Company. He commented that the PTC project is currently in the prototype state with expected application in 2020. He described the system as "partially active" powered by a small solar panel. He said ANTHC is working on securing a patent and plans for PTC to be locally manufactured in Alaska.

[9:24:36 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KOPP thanked Mr. Dixon for his presentation. He expressed appreciation for the "evolved partnership." He mused that if Alaska were its own country, it would be among the 10 largest in the world by land mass. He discussed how Alaska's size makes it difficult to create "single solutions" for housing, infrastructure, education, healthcare, transportation, and public safety. He said he is encouraged to see ANTHC take the lead with a project like the Newtok relocation. He expressed support for further regional partnerships that work on region-specific solutions. He said the partnership model and its network of connections could be applied to other areas, such as public safety and education. He commented that Alaska is too big for a "single solution state."

[9:26:29 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON said it is interesting that the focus of the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs is extending to the affairs of all of rural Alaska. He recognized that ANTHC is a "tribal umbrella entity" that brings a lot of money into Alaska. He commented on how the Newtok project, ostensibly a rural project, also benefits urban partners such as Brice, Inc. He stated that the issue of erosion is "a sleeping giant" in Alaska. He spoke to the major role played by the University of

Alaska in studying erosion in partnership with various SOA entities. He noted that many of those entities are "on the chopping block" in Governor Michael J. Dunleavy's proposed budget. He commented on the positive effects of federal dollars that come to Alaska. He noted that ANTHC is performing a role that had previously been filled by SOA agencies. He spoke to the difficulties posed by unique Alaska challenges. He advocated for a better understanding of how rural Alaska works. He spoke to the importance of learning about the symbiotic relationships built by rural communities. He noted that there is no "umbrella governing entity" in Alaska to do what ANTHC appears to be doing with NVC. He expressed a desire to have ANTHC return before the committee to help committee members learn what more can be done to holistically support rural Alaska communities in times of dwindling SOA funding.

[9:29:49 AM](#)

CHAIR ZULKOSKY reflected on the committee's recent conversations about the role of tribes and communities, the different types of tribal entities, Alaska Native Corporations, and the ways in which those organizations work together. She said she was a proponent of forming the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs because she felt it would demonstrate that tribes, tribal non-profit organizations, and SOA have shared goals. She connected that position with Mr. Dixon's presentation, which she said focused on the goals of establishing sustainable communities, providing for the health and welfare of remote communities, and reducing the costs of infrastructure systems. She discussed the shared values and commonalities of rural communities and SOA. She thanked Mr. Dixon for presenting concepts not in an abstract manner, but with concrete examples of on-the-ground application that involve real dollars and real community leaders. She thanked him as well for his work and advocacy.

[9:32:02 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs meeting was adjourned at 9:32 a.m.