

**Association of Village Council Presidents
Regional Housing Authority**
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“Our mission is to empower tribal communities of the AVCP Region through locally-developed quality housing and facilities.”

AVCP REGIONAL HOUSING AUTHORITY

ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

BACKGROUND

AVCP RHA is a non-profit organization based in Bethel and serves the AVCP Region, a 75,000-square-mile area in the Y-K Delta region that is comparable in size to the state of Wisconsin or Illinois, and consists of 56 federally-recognized tribes.

AVCP Housing was one of 16 housing authorities formed on October 17, 1974, by the Alaska Legislature to address affordable housing services and opportunities in rural Alaska. This makes AVCP RHA a state “public body corporate” with the same rights, duties and immunities as those associated with the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation and its predecessors, the Alaska State Mortgage Association and the Alaska State Housing Authority (Source: Stephen Hutchings, Esq., Birch, Horton, Bittner and Cherot).

ISSUE: NAHASDA

Prior to the Native American Housing Assistance and Self Determination Act of 1996 (NAHASDA), all housing in rural Alaska was provided under the 1937 Housing Act by U.S. Department and Urban Development (HUD). With the passage of NAHASDA, housing funds went directly to tribes, which then determine housing opportunities and programs in their communities. NAHASDA also allowed for a tribe to name a Tribally Designated Housing Entity (TDHE) to implement the NAHASDA program on its behalf. As of January 2009, 49 of the 56 federally-recognized tribes in the Y-K Delta have named AVCP Housing as their TDHE.

NAHASDA has allowed AVCP Housing to broaden its service opportunities. Today, the housing authority provides homeownership and housing opportunities for moderate to very-low income families to its member tribes. It also provides home repair and renovation opportunities and tenant-based rental assistance opportunities. In addition, the company works with village corporations, and tribal and municipal governments, in developing rental housing and homeownership opportunities for the private sector at the village level.

Under NAHASDA, AVCP Housing builds between 25 to 50 homes annually and approximately 250 existing homes are repaired, renovated or modernized each year. The company manages, maintains and operates more than 1,080 units including low income rentals, elderly, handicapped and assisted living facilities. NAHASDA provides millions of dollars for construction of homes in the severely depressed economies of the Bethel Census and Wade Hampton Census districts, which compose AVCP RHA’s service area, also

known as the Yukon-Kuskokwim (Y-K) Delta Region. Since 1976, AVCPRHA has constructed over 1,630 homes in 48 communities of the Y-K Delta.

AVCP RHA employs on average of 55 full time, year-round employees and hundreds of seasonal workers (in 2008, we shipped out 565 W-2s). The authority spends an average of \$8.7 million in new housing construction work per summer and \$3.75 million for modernization projects, for a total of \$12.45 million in summer work projects in villages.

RECOMMENDATION: Continue support for NAHASDA by the President, Congress, and Housing and Urban Development.

ISSUE: FORCE ACCOUNT LABOR

AVCP Housing constructs its own houses using the force account method. Force account enables AVCP Housing to construct and hire work staff without contracting, resulting in time and financial savings. Close to 100 percent of its hundreds of workers includes field project superintendents, carpenters, plumbers, electricians, and laborers from AVCP region villages.

Force accounting has benefited the AVCP Region greatly. When the force account method began to be implemented, there was a lack of trained and skilled work force in the region. To remedy this, AVCP Housing began training local people in housing construction and modernization jobs in partnership with the State of Alaska Department of Labor, the Alaska Works Partnership, Denali Commission, and Yuut Elitnaurviat. This resulted in a trained workforce for AVCP Housing to draw upon from the Y-K Delta every construction season, and a greater percentage of unemployed or unemployable local residents from nearly every village now have careers or the skills and knowledge to work in construction fields.

Today, up to 500 locals are hired annually by AVCP Housing during each construction season. This is very important because the AVCP region – consisting of the Bethel Census District (16.6%) and Wade Hampton Census District (25.3%) – has the highest unemployment and poverty rates in the state and some of the highest in the nation (State of Alaska and US Census).

RECOMMENDATION: Continue support for NAHASDA at the Congressional and administrative levels. Alaska housing authorities should be able to have the option to utilize Force Account instead of being forced to comply only with Davis-Bacon or contracting options.

ISSUE: SUBSTANDARD HOUSING IN RURAL ALASKA

AVCP Housing's service consists of the Bethel Census and Wade Hampton Census districts. Bethel Census District (unemployment rate: 16.6%) and Wade Hampton Census District (unemployment rate: 25.3%, highest in the state). AVCP Housing collects housing applications from residents from all of its member villages. Applicants complain of aging, substandard, and crowded home conditions, with some applicants stating having up to 11 people living in a small, one bedroom home. AVCP Housing has completed research that indicates that about 3,500 new homes are needed in the Y-K. At the cost of \$250,000 to \$300,000 each to build a 3 bedroom home in rural Alaska, the cost of meeting this housing need of the region's residents will cost between \$800 million to \$1 billion. At the rate of funding for housing projects in rural Alaska's Y-K Delta, around \$10 million annually, it

will take 105 years to build these 3,500 homes. AVCP Housing, and other housing authorities in rural Alaska, need larger amounts of annual funding to meet the housing needs of rural Alaska in a more timely fashion. The health and well-being of Native Alaskans living in villages continues to be in jeopardy because of the substandard housing and overcrowded conditions.

RECOMMENDATION: President Obama needs to advocate for the housing needs of rural Alaskans. The Congress and Federal Government needs to increase funding for the Native American Housing Assistance and Self Determination Act, to enable housing authorities in Alaska to receive \$30 to \$50 million annually in order for them to develop more housing for rural Alaska residents in a more-timely fashion.

ISSUE: WATER AND SEWER SERVICES

“Rural Alaska is characterized by over 280 isolated villages scattered across an area more than twice the size of Texas. Populations in these communities are predominately Native and range between 25 and 6,000 residents, averaging about 300 residents per village.”
(Village Safe Water, State of Alaska)

Rural Alaska has been largely ignored when it comes to water and sewer services, in the form of piped water. Alaska receives certain funding for water and sewer services from the federal government, therefore, few villages in the AVCP Region have piped water, so many Alaska village residents continue to suffer having to use 5-gallon paint buckets as toilets and keeping them in the home until they can be disposed of when they become full. Much effort is taken to dispose of the buckets, manually carrying them for long distances to a sewage lagoon or dumpsite.

Water for washing has to be obtained in buckets from local watering points or lakes and streams and brought home to be stored in a container, often a “clean” 30-gallon plastic trash can or washed-out 55 gal. “drum” once used for fuel or chemical storage. For washing, water is dipped with a pitcher by a household member with dirtied hands and poured into a wash basin, which results in contamination of the wash water or drinking water container (Source: Office of Environmental Health, Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corporation). Lack of modern water service in Alaska is associated with high pediatric Lower Respiratory Tract Infection incidence (Alaska Division of Public Health, May 2008).

Every year, an assessment of the sanitation needs of Native Americans across the country is completed for the Indian Health Service According (SDS or Sanitation Deficiency System). According to this assessment, the estimated 2009 total sanitation need of Alaska’s Native Villages is 429 projects with a cost \$736 million for their completion (Village Safe Water, State of Alaska).

RECOMMENDATION: Development of water and sewer services in the Y-K Delta has been slow, and actual construction is impeded due to construction issues and monetary constraints. For that reason, it does appear that development of water and sewer services in the Y-K Delta is deliberately delayed, while the rest of Alaska communities have been enjoying water and sewer services for decades.

All by itself, according to the SDS, the Y-K Delta has 34% of Alaska’s total monetary need for 120 projects (25% of Alaska’s total projects) , \$248 million (or is needed to provide

adequate piped water and sewer services, as well as landfill and other supporting infrastructure, to each community that doesn't have running water or lack complete services.

ISSUE: VILLAGE INFRASTRUCTURE - Board Walks, Roads and Streets

Without streets and roads in rural Alaska, it is extremely difficult to develop housing and other construction activities in the villages. Due to the need to be close to and gain access to subsistence hunting and fishing opportunities, most Alaska villages are situated on the shoreline of the Alaska coast and banks of sloughs and rivers. The terrain of these community locations is low-lying consisting of mud, sand or clay and prone to annual flooding. Therefore, boardwalks and roads or streets are needed and must float or be elevated enough to be above annual flood water levels.

RECOMMENDATION: Construction of adequate boardwalks can cost up to \$500,000 and streets or roads up to \$2 million. Village revenues and fiscal accounts are not sufficient enough to finance road and street construction. About one-half of the 50 villages in the Y-K Delta need adequate boardwalks and roads at a cost of \$62 million.