Northwest Arctic Borough 2030: Planning for Our Future
Comprehensive Plan Update, November 2021 – FINAL

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Process and Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall - Winter 2020</th>
<th>Winter - Spring 2021</th>
<th>Summer - Fall 2021</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discover and learn</td>
<td>Listen and engage</td>
<td>Share and finalize</td>
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**Fall - Winter 2020**
- Compiled data on the people, economy, lands, infrastructure and more.

**Winter - Spring 2021**
- Conducted regional surveys:
  - Regional survey with 574 responses
  - Youth survey with 39 responses
- Held small group discussions and meetings with:
  - Northwest Arctic Borough (NAB) Assembly
  - NAB Planning Commission
  - NAB Planning Department staff
  - Northwest Arctic Leadership Team
  - Village Improvement Commission
  - NANA’s Economic Investment Commission
  - Northwest Inupiat Housing Authority
  - NAB Energy Steering Committee
  - NAB Lands Committee
  - Subsistence leaders and representatives
  - Regional, state, and federal land use managers

**Summer - Fall 2021**
- Released for 60-day comment period
  - Hosted NAB subregional teleconferences to get community and leadership input
- Revised, finalized, and adopted plan
  - November 2021: NAB Planning Commission passed a resolution in support of Comprehensive Plan adoption
  - November 2021: NAB Assembly adopts Comprehensive Plan
- Work together to bring the plan to life
  - We are here

**Reviewed background documents, including:**
- NAB Comprehensive Plan (NAB 1993)
- Northwest Area Plan (Alaska Dept. of Natural Resources, 2008)
- NAB Coastal Management Plan (2010)
- Iñupiaq Language Plan (NAB, 2012)
- Northwest Arctic Regional Energy Plan (Northwest Arctic Leadership Team, 2016)
- NAB Economic Development Strategy (NAB, 2019)
- NAB Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan (Northwest Arctic Borough, 2019)
- Village Improvement Fund Annual Reports (Northwest Arctic Borough, 2018, 2019, 2020)
- Northwest Alaska Transportation Plan (Alaska Dept. of Transportation & Public Facilities; in progress)
- Community Comprehensive Plans (varies)
Community Voices: Highlights from the Regional Survey

What do you **like most** about living in the Northwest Arctic Borough?

*Figure 1: Word Cloud Featuring Survey Responses to the Question, “20 years from now, what do you want the region to look like?”*

**Top categories in descending order of frequency, out of 569 responses**

- **Subsistence**: access to subsistence, ability to hunt and fish
- **Community Support**: communities are close-knit and people help one another
- **Lands**: the region is beautiful and bountiful, with healthy air, land, water, wildlife
- **Family**: being close to family
- **It’s Home**: the region feels like home for those born and raised in NAB villages
- **People**: people are friendly, helpful, kind
- **Freedom**: the remoteness, isolation, and sense of independence
- **Culture**: connections to heritage, ancestry and Iñupiaq traditions are thriving
- **Adventure**: the ability to camp and explore in the outdoors

What do you **like least** about living in the Northwest Arctic Borough?

*Quotes from the Regional Survey*

**Top responses in descending order of frequency, out of 569 responses**

- **Cost of Living**: it is very expensive to live in the NAB; including costs for groceries, travel, mail, fuel, and utilities
- **Weather and Darkness**: the climate and darkness, especially in winter
- **Alcohol and Drugs**: misuse of alcohol and drugs is a health, wellness, safety, and economic issue
- **Housing**: shortage of available and affordable housing, with severe overcrowding

**Our prices of food, fuel, housing availability.**

**The climate and weather is sometimes a bit much. And the midwinter darkness.**

**Alcoholism and drugs amongst our community. Not good for our young people.**

- Quotes from the Regional Survey
About the Northwest Arctic Borough Region

Who is the Northwest Arctic Borough?

The Northwest Arctic Borough (NAB) is the second largest borough in Alaska, comprising approximately **36,000 square miles** along the Kotzebue Sound, Wullik, Noatak, Kobuk, Selawik, Buckland, and Kugruk Rivers.

Voters in the region approved the **formation of a borough in 1986** and adopted a Home Rule Charter in 1987. As a Home rule regional government, the Northwest Arctic Borough provides **essential programs and services** to improve the quality of life for all residents. This includes providing education, planning, and zoning, and taxation.

Where does funding come from for the Northwest Arctic Borough? Where does it go?

- Most of the borough’s funding comes from Red Dog Mine.
- About 29 percent of the NAB budget is spent on the Northwest Arctic Borough School District, with the rest going to general government operations and services.
- In addition to helping fund the borough, Red Dog contributes to NAB communities each year through the Village Improvement Fund, which supports community infrastructure priorities. Red Dog has contributed about $8 million annually over the past three years.

**Figure 2: Northwest Arctic Borough General Fund Revenues by Source, 2020**

- Funds from Red Dog Mine (Payment in Lieu of Taxes), 83%
- Usage fees (payments for school district use of NAB buildings), 7%
- Investment income from NAB investments, 2%
- State and federal payments, 6%
- Other local revenue (e.g., tobacco taxes), 2%
- Total FY2020 General Fund Revenue: $31.4 million

Source: Northwest Arctic Borough (2021)
PEOPLE

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<tr>
<th>Population: 7,583</th>
<th>Median age: 29.8 years</th>
<th>School enrollment: 1,952</th>
<th>Iñupiaq: 85%</th>
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<td>Generally steady</td>
<td>Increasing, though still younger than the state</td>
<td>Increased 2011-2016, slight decrease 2016-2020</td>
<td>Residents who identify as Iñupiaq alone or in combination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td></td>
<td>2019-2020 school year</td>
<td>2015</td>
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**Figure 3: Northwest Arctic Borough Population, 2010-2020**

Kotzebue represents about 40% of the region’s population

ECONOMY

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<th>Government Jobs: 1,024</th>
<th>Private Sector Jobs: 1,924</th>
<th>Residents in the workforce</th>
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<tr>
<td>Decrease from 2010</td>
<td>Increase in mining, transportation jobs; decrease in leisure, hospitality, information jobs</td>
<td>(working or looking for jobs): 55% Decrease from 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>2018</td>
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**Figure 4: Northwest Arctic Borough Employment, 2019**

Federal Government, 2%
State Government, 2%
Local Government, 31%
Private Industry, 65%

Subsistence is a key part of the region’s economy, with approximately 403 pounds of subsistence harvests per person annually.

Sources for this page: U.S. Census American Community Survey, Alaska Department of Education & Early Development Data Center, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, State of Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development Division of Community and Regional Affairs, Northwest Arctic Borough, Alaska Department of Fish & Game
PLACE

11 Tribes, 10 Municipalities

35,899 square miles of land, 3,560 miles of coastline

66% of land federally owned

Figure 5: NAB Regional Map with Land Ownership

Northwest Arctic Borough 2030: Comprehensive Plan Update – Executive Summary, November 2021
**Vision:**

Thriving, adaptable Iñupiaq communities, working together to prepare for a changing future.

### Land Use & Subsistence

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<th>Key Themes:</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Subsistence, specifically the protection of subsistence resources, is critically important in the region.</td>
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<td>• Climate change is impacting the region, with much uncertainty about the future.</td>
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<td>• A patchwork of regional, Tribal, state, and federal lands creates challenges for land management.</td>
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<td>• There is a need to support economic development while mitigating negative impacts to lands, resources, and communities.</td>
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<table>
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<th>Goals:</th>
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<tr>
<td>A. Ensure the protection of subsistence resources and promote food security.</td>
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<tr>
<td>B. Prepare communities for a changing climate and monitor progress.</td>
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<tr>
<td>C. Promote responsible community and economic development while ensuring the protection of subsistence resources.</td>
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<th>Strategies:</th>
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<td>1. Create and implement a future land use map that guides future decisions about land use and growth. Potential features of a future land use map are identified at the end of this section.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Continue to preserve and protect subsistence use of lands and waters, with subsistence identified as the primary and highest priority use.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Identify and support land exchanges between federal agencies and regional landowners to create additional options for community infrastructure.</td>
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4. Increase communications between subsistence stakeholders, land management agencies, and relevant committees.
5. Support communities in their response to climate change, including working with communities to anticipate, prepare for, and implement adaptation and relocation initiatives.
6. Implement the recommendations in the Northwest Arctic Borough Hazard Mitigation Plan and community hazard mitigation plans.
7. Identify and integrate key policies from the Northwest Arctic Borough Coastal Management Plan into the borough’s Title 9 Zoning and Land Use code and remove Title 9 references to the Coastal Management Plan.
8. Support the environmentally and socially responsible use of lands within the Northwest Arctic Borough for economic development projects that bring more and better paying jobs, business opportunities, and wealth to borough residents and communities.
9. Support accelerated conveyances (transfers) and patents of previously selected federal lands from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to relevant stakeholders.

**Culture & Health**

**Key Themes**
- People in the region are deeply connected to Iñupiaq culture, and the Iñupiaq language is still spoken today.
- There is limited public safety presence in NAB communities.
- Health and dental services are limited.

**Goals:**

| A. The Iñupiaq language and way of life are thriving. | B. Youth in the region grow up embracing cultural traditions while also developing the skills needed to thrive in an increasingly technological world. | C. Residents are healthy, safe, and self-sufficient. |

**Strategies:**
2. Promote healthy lifestyles and support efforts to address substance abuse, behavioral health needs and suicide prevention.
3. Ensure every NAB community has a public safety/law enforcement presence.
Transportation

Key Themes:
- Northwest Arctic Borough communities cannot be reached by road.
- Aviation is the primary mode of travel to, from, and within the region.
- There is little to no data in rural Alaska for vehicle accidents.
- Increasing national and international interest in the Arctic will bring increased transportation traffic and opportunities.

Goals:
| A. NAB communities are strategically connected. |
| B. Residents and businesses have the access needed to support the safe, affordable movement of people and goods. |

Strategies:
1. Support implementation of the Northwest Alaska Transportation Plan, including recommended improvements to airports, winter trails, roads, and ports.
2. Support continued collaboration between borough, Tribal, state, and federal agencies on strategies such as winter trail marking, shelter cabins, and safe connectivity between communities.
3. Complete development of the Cape Blossom Road and Port.
4. Further assess and potentially establish strategic inter-regional road connections between communities.

Community Facilities, Infrastructure, & Housing

Key Themes:
- The Village Improvement Fund invests in new community infrastructure, but finding operations and maintenance funds can be a challenge.
- The region has limited utilities, including insufficient water, sewer, and internet services.
- Education infrastructure is limited.
- Energy costs are high but regional partners are pursuing innovative solutions.
- Housing in the region is expensive and there is significant overcrowding.

Goals:
| A. Invest in renewable energy, promote energy efficiency, and reduce reliance on imported fuels. |
| B. Increase supply and access to affordable, quality housing. |
| C. Establish reliable, affordable, high-speed phone and internet connections. |
| D. Ensure communities have safe and reliable water, sewer, and solid waste systems, and the ability to operate and maintain them locally. |

Strategies:
General
1. Provide funding research and proposal development support to NAB communities.
2. Advocate for simplified applications and reduced cost sharing requirements for federal opportunities.
3. Improve internet connectivity in the region through infrastructure investments.
4. Ensure new facility and infrastructure investments have long-term maintenance and operations plans in place prior to construction.
5. Preserve and advocate for local/regional authority and management of key infrastructure such as road networks (DeLong Mountain Transportation System, future Ambler Road), port facilities (Cape Blossom), and tank farms.

Housing
6. Encourage the Northwest Inupiat Housing Authority to conduct a regional housing needs assessment to identify the housing gaps and barriers in each community, and prepare recommendations to increase the availability of affordable, quality housing.
7. Support efforts to establish senior housing and long-term care options for Elders who want to age in their communities.
8. Prioritize the use of in-region equipment, labor, and materials to construct and operate housing and other facilities.

Energy
10. Advocate for continuation of the State of Alaska’s Power Cost Equalization (PCE) program funding.
11. Continue collaborating with federal and state energy partners on pilot projects, including testing new technologies in rural solar, biomass, heat pumps, and solid waste incineration.
12. Continue to seek funding for building and monitoring renewable energy projects in partnership with NANA Regional Corporation, communities, and utility providers.
13. Create a business plan for an energy efficiency cooperative and establish a joint action agency for supporting energy infrastructure buildout and bulk fuel purchasing.
14. Develop adequate fuel storage in communities, including expanding and repairing tank farms where appropriate.
15. Work with Red Dog to explore whether the Delong Mountain Transportation System assets (port, fuel tanks, etc.) could be repurposed for regional use, such as barging goods to the region, if/when Red Dog ultimately slows or suspends operations.
16. Continue to explore for and develop in-region natural gas.
17. Support development of renewable energy microgrids.

Economic Development

Key Themes:
- Red Dog Mine is an important economic generator in the region.
- The Northwest Arctic Borough has a small and geographically dispersed population.
- The region has a high cost of living.

Goals:
A. Encourage economic diversification and growth.
B. Prepare residents for jobs in the region.
C. Pursue economic and community growth while protecting subsistence as a key economic activity.

Strategies:
1. Support strategic natural resource development such as mining and gravel extraction.
2. Expand educational and training opportunities.
3. Support small business development and economic diversification.
4. Prepare for economic, military and transportation opportunities in the Arctic.
5. Work with communities to ensure they are engaged in economic development planning and permitting for proposed and emerging projects that may impact them.
6. Support the expansion of childcare options to make it easier for parents to participate in the workforce.
7. Support the development of smaller industries such as tourism, fisheries, and agriculture by implementing recommendations in the NAB CEDS.

Borough Management, Administration & Finance

Key Themes:
- Borough government is largely funded by the Red Dog Mine.
- The school district serves nearly 2,000 students, and demographic projections show the youth population growing through 2025.
- Some NAB communities lack the capacity to prepare and maintain village comprehensive plans.

Goals:

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>A. Diversify borough government revenues.</th>
<th>B. Support and improve community-level planning.</th>
<th>C. Provide efficient, effective, fiscally responsible government services.</th>
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</table>

Strategies:

1. Engage local communities and residents to discuss the role of the Northwest Arctic Borough and identify ways to diversify revenues used to fund the borough.
2. Sustain the borough’s schools.
3. Improve the effectiveness and regionwide impact of the Village Improvement Fund (VIF) program.
4. Increase the availability of funds and technical assistance support for villages to develop updated community comprehensive plans; encourage neighboring communities to collaborate on shared priorities.
5. Increase coordination between borough departments when traveling out to and communicating with villages.
6. Continue to facilitate and encourage regular meetings (at least quarterly) of the Northwest Arctic Leadership Team (NWALT).
Future Land Use Map

What is a future land use map?
The NAB Future Land Use Map will provide a tool for NAB residents, landowners, and leaders to plan for growth and change. The map expresses objectives for the general location of different types of growth and land use. NAB does not currently have a future land use map.

The future land use map will not change zoning districts or zoning code policy. The map provides broad guidance for future policy and development decisions, which will likely result in future revisions to the underlying zoning. The map is intended to be used as a generalized map and is not intended to follow specific property lines. Any zoning changes would require a separate, subsequent process with further public review.

The map can help guide plans for road and other infrastructure improvements, expansion of economic opportunities, protection of important subsistence areas, and sustain the qualities residents value most about the region. The map covers lands in all ownerships, including public and private lands.

What is a zoning map?
Zoning describes how land can be used. A zoning map is used to show how the NAB region is divided into different districts, or zones. It establishes policies for each of these districts to protect certain features and guide the types of development that are allowed. The purpose of each NAB district is defined in Title 9, along with a list of allowed uses and activities requiring permitting. This copy of the zoning map was last updated in summer 2018.

For a list of purposes of the current NAB land use districts, see the Core Plan. For full definitions and uses, see NAB Code Title 9.12.

Northwest Arctic Borough Future Land Use Map: Proposed Features

These recommendations assume the future land use map would mostly reflect the existing zoning map, with some changes identified below.

1. Maintain existing subsistence land use zoning districts and related protections.

2. Identify additional strategic transportation corridors. Corridor planning should include route selection that considers impacts to hydrology, subsistence resources and access impacts, and must follow all required review and evaluation regulations. See the transportation section for proposed corridors.

3. Add a utility district as a new land use category. This would be like the current transportation corridor district, but more focused on utilities such as energy interties (when communities have connected energy systems).

4. Add a coastal overlay district that brings in key policies and features of the Northwest Arctic Borough Coastal Management Plan, with requirements for any project or development that impacts coastal uses or resources.

5. Using the heat maps developed as part of the NAB Subsistence Mapping Project, ensure areas with high concentrations of subsistence activities and resources are protected under the Subsistence Conservation District zoning designation.

NAB completed the Subsistence Mapping Project in 2015. The project documents traditional knowledge and scientific information depicting subsistence uses and important ecological areas for seven NAB communities. Learn more and view the maps here: https://www.nwabor.org/subsistence-mapping-program/
Figure 6: Current Zoning Map for the Northwest Arctic Borough