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

CORE PLAN
Acknowledgements

Thank you to all Northwest Arctic Borough communities, businesses, organizations, and other local, state and federal partners who contributed to the Northwest Arctic Borough (NAB) 2030 Planning process.

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* = Core team member. The Core Team met throughout the project to guide the process.

Photos courtesy of Northwest Arctic Borough, Agnew::Beck and PDC Engineers unless otherwise noted.
This plan was produced by Agnew::Beck Consulting with support from Northern Economics and PDC Engineers.
NORTHWEST ARCTIC BOROUGH ASSEMBLY
ORDINANCE 21-13

AN ORDINANCE OF THE NORTHWEST ARCTIC BOROUGH ASSEMBLY TO APPROVE THE 2030 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

WHEREAS: Section 8.08.020(A) of the Borough Code provides that the Borough Planning Commission will prepare and submit to the Borough Assembly a proposed comprehensive plan for the systematic and organized development of the Borough; and

WHEREAS: Sections 8.08.020(B) and (D) of the Borough Code further provide the Borough Planning Commission review and recommend amendments to the comprehensive plan for submittal to the Borough Assembly, including measures necessary to implement the comprehensive plan; and

WHEREAS: the Borough Planning Department has been working since July 2020 on the 2030 Comprehensive Plan, and has conducted extensive public outreach and received substantial input and public comment toward completion of the plan; and

WHEREAS: the Borough Planning Commission adopted Resolution 21-06 on October 28, 2021, attached to this ordinance as Exhibit A, recommending the Borough Assembly to approve the 2030 Comprehensive Plan; and

WHEREAS: Section 7.02 of the Borough Charter requires that the Borough Assembly by ordinance shall adopt and implement, and from time to time modify, a comprehensive plan setting forth goals, objectives and policies governing the future development of the Borough; and

WHEREAS: the Borough Assembly has determined that it is in the Borough’s best interest to approve the 2030 Comprehensive Plan, attached to this ordinance as Exhibit B.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT ENACTED:

Section 1: This Non-Code Ordinance shall be effective immediately upon adoption.
Section 2: The Borough Planning Commission Resolution 21-06, attached as Exhibit A, and the Northwest Arctic Borough 2030 Comprehensive Plan, attached as Exhibit B, are hereby incorporated by reference.

Section 3: The Northwest Arctic Borough Assembly approves the 2030 Comprehensive Plan.

PASSED AND ADOPTED THIS 28th DAY OF December 2021.

Nathan Hadley, Jr., Assembly President

PASSED AND APPROVED THIS 28th DAY OF December 2021.

Dickie Moto, Sr., Mayor

SIGNED AND ATTESTED TO THIS 28th DAY OF December 2021.

Helena Hildreth, Borough Clerk

ATTEST:

First Reading: November 23, 2021.
Second Reading: December 28, 2021.
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1. Introduction

Purpose

What is a Comprehensive Plan?

Planning for our Future, The Northwest Arctic Borough (NAB) Comprehensive Plan Update, is a regional guide. This plan identifies where NAB residents and leaders want to be in the future (vision), and how to get there (goals and strategies). The plan provides direction to leaders, residents, funders, and other partners on topics such as land use, economic development, transportation, and fiscal health. The current Northwest Arctic Borough Comprehensive Plan was originally created in 1993.

The plan is initiated by the Northwest Arctic Borough under the leadership of the Planning Commission and Assembly. The planning process engages residents in shaping the region’s future, providing opportunities to discuss ideas and concerns.

Methodology: How was this plan developed?

The Northwest Arctic Borough, led by planning staff, oversaw this effort with help from consulting team Agnew::Beck Consulting, with additional subcontractor support from Northern Economics and PDC Engineers. The planning process started in fall 2020 and took approximately one year. The process was adapted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For an overview of the planning timeline and community engagement, see the Executive Summary. For a detailed summary of the process, see the appendices.

Contents: What’s in the plan?

- **Executive Summary**
  *Offers a condensed, graphically rich summary of the Plan, including the region’s vision and key policies (goals and strategies) for achieving that vision.*

- **Core Plan** (this document)
  *A clear and concise Plan to guide decision-making with a full list of policies. This includes additional information on the process, and key issues informing plan policies.*

- **Appendices**
  *Includes background and contextual information used to inform plan policies and plan implementation, such as land use, housing, economic data, and summaries of public input.*
Plan Amendments and Updates

Outlined below are the steps for amending and/or updating the NAB Comprehensive Plan Update:

- A minor change is a change that does not modify or add to the plan’s basic intent, and that serves only to clarify the plan, make it consistent, facilitate its implementation, or make technical corrections. Such changes can be made administratively and do not require additional approval.
- An amendment permanently changes the plan by adding to or modifying the basic intent. Such changes can be recommended by the administration or public and approved by the Planning Commission and Assembly.
- A more detailed update of the Northwest Arctic Borough Comprehensive Plan should be conducted every five to ten years, starting with a thorough review by the Planning Commission and key NAB staff to determine which goals and strategies have been accomplished and which may need to be revised, added, or deleted. Residents and other key stakeholders should also be engaged during the update process.

Accomplishments since the 1993 Comprehensive Plan

- **Subsistence**: Subsistence remains a top priority in the region. Subsistence activities support food security, preserve cultural traditions, and are part of the economic fabric of the region. Land managers continue to prioritize, protect, and preserve subsistence resources for residents.
- **Mining**: Red Dog Mine employs residents and generates revenues that fund government, schools, and the Village Improvement Fund (see next paragraph). Red Dog is exploring other potential deposits that could extend the mine’s life. Other mineral explorations are also underway, and there is growing interest in creating a road to mineral deposits located east of Ambler.
- **Village Improvement Fund**: The Village Improvement Fund (VIF), overseen by the Village Improvement Commission (VIC), distributes money to communities in the region to address priority infrastructure needs. In 2020, the VIC approved twenty-two VIF applications and thirty VIF projects were completed, with $9.4 million awarded. VIF funds are being successfully used as matching funds for many other federal opportunities, essentially doubling the amount of money available.
- **Cape Blossom**: The Cape Blossom Road and port project continue to advance through construction and planning phases, creating a key connection between Kotzebue and the port and barge landing facilities at Cape Blossom. This project, which is being led by the City of Kotzebue and the Native Village of Kotzebue, will ultimately support more efficient delivery of cargo and fuel,
helping reduce costs throughout the region. Other benefits include improved tourism infrastructure, increased opportunities for commercial fishing, improved subsistence access, and more.

- **Energy**: Many regional entities have collaborated on projects to increase the reliability and availability of locally available energy sources, including significant investments and innovation in renewable energy. The NAB is on track to achieve a 10 percent decrease of imported diesel fuels by 2020 from 2013 levels. All communities have at least some solar; other communities also are using biomass, heat pumps, wind power and more. These improvements and investments are happening at both the community level and household level. The Northwest Arctic Regional Energy Plan has helped guide energy investments in the region since 2008 and will be updated in 2022.

- **Regional Collaboration**: Organizations in the region work well together on shared priorities. For example, the Northwest Arctic Leadership Team brings leadership from Maniilaq Association, NANA Regional Corporation, the Northwest Arctic Borough and the Northwest Arctic Borough School District together to collectively advocate for and strategize on shared priorities with one voice. NWALT has successfully pursued over $60 million in appropriations for key infrastructure projects in the region including long term care and the Star of the Northwest Magnet School.

- **Housing**: The Northwest Inupiat Housing Authority (NIHA) has successfully partnered with the NAB, NANA Regional Corporation, Kikiktagruk Iñupiat Corporation and communities to secure funding and construct homes in the region; NIHA estimates 56 homes have been constructed over the past ten years. NIHA has also provided weatherization services in existing homes in partnership with the state. Construction and weatherization projects also bring jobs to communities.
• **Emergency Response, Search and Rescue:** All communities now have fire safety gear. Search and rescue technology has improved, and communities have improved search and rescue training and coordination, likely saving many lives over the past ten years. Additionally, the U.S. Coast Guard has established a presence in the region based out of Kotzebue in response to open Arctic waters.

• **Nikaitchuat Ilisagviaq:** This Iñupiaq immersion school is the only Iñupiaq school in the U.S. The school, which is located in Kotzebue, has many local, regional, and federal partners who contribute to its success, including the Northwest Arctic Borough.

• **Climate Change Response:** As NAB communities increasingly experience the impacts of climate change, villages and regional partners have collaborated with state and federal agencies to collect data, evaluate changes, prepare mitigation plans, and act. For example, Kivalina is successfully moving forward with an evacuation route for the community.
2. Vision Statement

Thriving, adaptable Iñupiaq communities, working together to prepare for a changing future.
3. Land Use and Subsistence

Subsistence is identified as the highest priority land use in the NAB Code (title 9).

A 2017 Alaska Department of Fish & Game report found that about 400 pounds of subsistence foods are harvested per person in the Arctic region.

Approximately 66 percent of land in the NAB is federally owned. Most of this land is contained within national parks, with five national parks fully or partially in the NAB boundaries. NAB is also home to the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge and Bureau of Land Management lands.

Key Themes Guiding the Plan

Subsistence, specifically the protection of subsistence resources, is critically important in the region.

- One of the challenges to protecting subsistence resources is the lack of data, including information about predators, changes in caribou migrations, and climate change impacts.
- Subsistence resources are also important for non-monetary reasons, including food security and the preservation of traditional activities.

Climate change is impacting the region, with much uncertainty about the future.

- The region is already experiencing impacts from climate change, including erosion, melting permafrost, flora/fauna changes.
- This presents challenges for communities and land managers who must decide how to respond.
- Climate change is and will continue to impact subsistence resources. This includes changes to the availability, health and migration patterns of flora/fauna, and transportation-related impacts (changing snow coverage, unsafe ice conditions) that can limit access to subsistence resources.
A patchwork of regional, Tribal, state, and federal lands creates challenges for land management.

- Many state and federal agencies have complex regulations with bureaucratic systems that are difficult to understand and navigate. Each agency has separate land management objectives and regulations, making it harder to come together around shared priorities such as subsistence and economic development.
- NAB previously relied on the Coastal Zone Management Plan to help guide regional land use and consultation with other agencies, but the program was eliminated by the State of Alaska in 2011. Today, Alaska is the only coastal state not participating in the National Coastal Zone Management Program.
- There are many outstanding land conveyances (transfers) from federal and state agencies to Alaska Native allottees, NAB, NANA, village corporations and communities, which creates management uncertainty and stall potential projects.¹

There is a need to support economic development while mitigating negative impacts to lands, resources, and communities.

- The region’s remoteness and lack of transportation options drive up costs and limit economic development opportunities.
- Mining has historically been one of the primary drivers of the region’s economy and there are many mineral deposits that could further support the region’s economy.
- However, mining requires roads and infrastructure that can threaten local resources, including those critical to subsistence activities. Rezoning in the Ambler Mining District will be necessary for mineral development to move forward at the Upper Kobuk Mineral Projects.
- Communities and leadership in the region are continuously striving to find a balance between protections and development.

¹ The U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is the lead federal agency for administrating land selections, conveyance, and patents pursuant to the Alaska Statehood Act of 1959, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971, and the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) of 1980. For more details, see the appendix.
Land Use and Subsistence Goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal A</th>
<th>Goal B</th>
<th>Goal C</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ensure the protection of subsistence resources and promote food security.</td>
<td>Prepare communities for a changing climate and monitor progress.</td>
<td>Promote responsible community and economic development while ensuring the protection of subsistence resources.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Current NAB Title 9 definition of subsistence: “Subsistence,” in addition to its meanings under state or federal law, means an activity performed in support of the cultural beliefs or nutritional needs of the residents of the borough and includes hunting, whaling, fishing, trapping, camping, food gathering and other traditional or cultural activities. The term “subsistence” includes preparation for and transportation to and from the activities listed in this definition. The term “subsistence” also includes construction and use of drying racks, traditional shelters, and other small-scale, traditional structures. It does not include construction for residential, equipment storage, equipment maintenance, warehousing, or similar purposes.

Land Use and Subsistence Strategies

1. Create and implement a future land use map that guides future decisions about land use and growth.
   
   NOTE: The future land use map does not change codes or zoning; it offers broad guidance for residents, leaders, and land use managers as they make future policy and development decisions. Potential features of a future land use map are identified at the end of this section.

2. Continue to preserve and protect subsistence use of lands and waters, with subsistence identified as the primary and highest priority use.
   a. Consider establishing a fund to purchase lands/allotments that become available in the region to protect for subsistence use.

3. Identify and support land exchanges between federal agencies and regional landowners to create additional options for community infrastructure.

I like how our river provides fish, fresh water, and how the mountains have caribou.

- Youth Survey

Subsistence IS economic development.

- Interagency land manager work session
4. Increase communications between subsistence stakeholders, land management agencies, and relevant committees.
   a. Convene key representatives together for an annual summit to share what groups are learning, what’s working, and articulate shared priorities.
   b. Support efforts to integrate Tribal and Indigenous knowledge and scientific data to fill in the gaps regarding subsistence resources and drivers of change (e.g., changing caribou migration patterns).
   c. Advocate for better alignment of local, state, federal definitions of subsistence.
   d. Partner with other landowners to lead or facilitate data collection on subsistence topics.

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.
   a. For example, consider rezoning the Ambler lowlands area from subsistence conservation to resource development.

9. Support accelerated conveyances (transfers) and patents of previously selected federal lands from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to relevant stakeholders including eligible Alaska Native allottees or descendants, the State of Alaska, the Northwest Arctic Borough, Northwest Arctic Native Association (NANA), Kikiktagruq Iñupiaq Corporation (KIC), and the ANCSA Municipal Land Trust on behalf of each of the NANA villages/municipalities.²

² The U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is the lead federal agency for administrating land selections, conveyance, and patents pursuant to the Alaska Statehood Act of 1959, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971, and the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) of 1980. For more details, see the appendix.
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.

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/

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.
**What are the zones in the NAB land use code? (defined in Title 9)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Name</th>
<th>Purpose (from NAB Title 9.12 ZONING DISTRICTS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Village (V)                            | The village district governs the sites and immediate environs of each village in the borough except Kotzebue. The intent of the village district is to accommodate uses which:  
  1. Reinforce traditional values and lifestyles;  
  2. Are in accord with the borough and village comprehensive plan;  
  3. Are in accord with the desires of the residents of the village;  
  4. Protect or enhance the health and general well-being of village residents; and  
  5. Facilitate commercial development of gravel sources.  
  Except where excluded as a “use” under NABC 9.04.070, land use in the village district is prohibited, unless permitted or approved as required by this title. |
| Subsistence Conservation (SC)          | Subsistence use of lands and waters within the borough has traditionally been the primary and highest priority use. The subsistence conservation (SC) district encompasses certain undeveloped areas of the borough that have been determined to have high importance to borough residents for subsistence resources or activities. Recognizing SC districts provides a foundation for health, social and cultural well-being for borough residents. The SC district is intended to:  
  1. Include areas that are used regularly for subsistence harvest;  
  2. Conserve the natural ecosystem for all the various plants and animals upon which borough residents depend for subsistence; and  
  3. Promote access to those resources for subsistence purposes.  
  Uses will not be allowed unless the administrator or planning commission determines by substantial evidence that such uses will not interfere or conflict with subsistence uses. Subject to this overall intent, the SC district can accommodate mineral exploration and development and minor resource extraction, but applicants for major development projects must apply for rezoning to the resource development district. Commercial recreation uses are not allowed in the subsistence conservation district, except by permit. Mineral or oil and gas development requires a rezone to the resource development district because it is not allowed in this district.  
  Except where excluded as a “use” under NABC 9.04.070, land use in the SC district is prohibited unless permitted or approved as required by this title. |
| Habitat Conservation (HC)              | The habitat conservation (HC) district is a district that encompasses areas of the borough that provide habitat essential for the maintenance of subsistence species and have high importance to borough residents for subsistence resources. These areas are not appropriate for development activities. The HC district is intended to ensure that such areas are protected from development and to protect the health, social, and cultural well-being of borough residents. These areas may include denning, calving, feeding, molting, brooding, migrating, fish habitat, whale resting and feeding areas and other areas that are critical to subsistence resources. Subsistence activities may be conducted in the HC district without a permit. Uses and activities will only be allowed in these areas if it is determined they will not interfere or conflict with subsistence uses or the maintenance of the habitat functions related to the productivity of the habitat. Uses with the potential for a significant adverse effect to the habitat are not allowed without a zone change including:  
  Bulk fuel storage and movement; Landfills; Major resource extraction; Major development projects; Roads; Public facilities; Water or sewer utilities; Energy facilities; Airports and airstrips; Water and sewer projects; Wetlands fill; Mineral or oil and gas development; Gravel extraction; and Permanent structures not related to habitat improvement including schools, churches, child |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>General Conservation (GC)</td>
<td>The general conservation (GC) district encompasses the undeveloped areas of the borough outside the boundaries of the other districts. The general conservation district is intended to conserve the natural ecosystem for all the various plants and animals used for subsistence. Major resource extraction will not be allowed without a zone change. Uses will only be allowed in the GC district if the administrator or planning commission determines such uses will not unreasonably interfere or conflict with access to or use of the environment or subsistence resources. Subject to this overall intent, the GC district can accommodate mineral and oil and gas exploration projects, minor resource extraction, and development projects on a limited scale. Applicants for major development projects, including oil and gas development, must apply for rezoning to the resource development district. Except where excluded as a “use” under NABC 9.04.070, land use in the GC district is prohibited, unless permitted or approved as required by this title.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resource Development (RD)</td>
<td>The resource development (RD) district is designed and intended to address the individual and cumulative effects of major developments and to offer developers efficient and predictable permit approvals. The purpose of the RD district is to accommodate major development projects and major resource extraction including mineral development, oil and gas development, and similar activities which: 1. Do not result in significant adverse effects to the capacity of the surrounding ecosystem to support the plants and animals upon which borough residents depend for subsistence; 2. Do not result in significant adverse effects to subsistence uses; 3. Do not result in significant adverse effects to human health or well-being; 4. Are planned and developed as a unit, or series of interrelated units that may be under an approved master plan under Chapter 9.20 NABC, with provisions made for all necessary public and private facilities; and 5. Meet the objectives of the comprehensive plan and coastal management plan as well as the conditions of approval and special policies imposed on each individual resource development district at the time of designation. Some uses not associated with a development, such as schools and single-family residential housing, are not allowed unless the area is rezoned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation Corridor (TC)</td>
<td>The transportation corridor (TC) district is established to provide a strip of land or body of water to accommodate linear transportation facilities such as roads, railroads, pipelines, and barge and ship activities. The TC district will ensure that such transportation uses comply with all borough policies including those that apply specifically to transportation corridors in Chapter 9.25 NABC. The TC district provides an area for development associated with the use of a transportation corridor. Development within this corridor is intended to minimize the negative effects of the transportation corridor (such as increased access and effects on fish and wildlife), accommodate industrial development and enhance economic opportunities for residents of the borough by means of an approved master plan, under Chapter 9.20 NABC, with provisions made for all necessary public and private facilities associated with the proposed transportation corridor. The regulations in this section apply to uses and activities within and along transportation corridors. Except where excluded as a &quot;use&quot; under NABC 9.04.070, land use in the TC district is prohibited, unless permitted or approved as required by this title. Some uses not associated with a development, such as single-family residential housing, schools, churches, child care facilities, and health care facilities, are not allowed unless the area is rezoned.</td>
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4. Culture and Health

**People in the region are deeply connected to Iñupiaq culture, and the Iñupiaq language is still spoken today.**

- The Iñupiaq Language Commission has implemented many projects to preserve, promote and share the Iñupiaq language including creating a language phone application, updating the language dictionary and the creation of Elder and youth events to encourage transmission of culture and language.
- Preserving Iñupiaq language and culture was also a top priority in the summer 2021 regional survey.
- The Nikaitchuat Ilisagviat Iñupiaq immersion school, located in Kotzebue, is the only Iñupiaq school in the U.S.

**There is limited public safety presence in NAB communities.**

- The state’s Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO) program in the region is administered by the borough and serves NAB villages. The VPSO program works in conjunction with the Alaska State Troopers to meet the public safety needs in rural communities.
- Many NAB communities lack VPSO facilities, with vacancies and/or part-time coverage. This makes it harder for communities to respond to emergencies such as search and rescue, fire, medical issues, and crime prevention.

**Key Themes Guiding the Plan**

- 14% of residents are fluent in Iñupiaq. *(based on 2005 survey done by Aqqaluk Trust and the Native Village of Kotzebue with funding provided by the Administration for Native Americans)*
- NAB has two village public safety officers serving the region; this means most communities only have part-time coverage. *(based on 2020 Country Health Rankings)*
- In 2020 the Northwest Arctic region was ranked 24 out of 25 regions in Alaska for health outcomes (length and quality of life) and 22 out of 25 for health factors (behaviors, access to care and others). *(based on 2020 Country Health Rankings)*
Health and dental services are limited.
- The regional hospital is in Kotzebue.
- All communities in the region have some form of clinic with an itinerant nurse.
- The communities of Kiana and Kotzebue are the only communities with dental care available.
- With limited health and dental services available locally, patients are flown to either Fairbanks or Anchorage for in-depth care in the event the Kotzebue hospital is unable to provide the needed level of care.
- Access to reliable and affordable broadband is critical to support the delivery of health care in villages, including telehealth.

Culture and Health Goals

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal A</th>
<th>Goal B</th>
<th>Goal C</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Iñupiaq language and way of life are thriving.</td>
<td>Youth in the region grow up embracing cultural traditions while also developing the skills needed to thrive in an increasingly technological world.</td>
<td>Residents are healthy, safe, and self-sufficient.</td>
</tr>
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Culture and Health Strategies

1. Support culturally relevant recommendations in the NAB Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), including the following:
   a. Support development of an Iñupiaq Cultural Center.
   b. Establish culture camps in all villages.
   c. Promote community mentorship of teachers to integrate cultural activities into the academic curriculum.
   d. Update and implement the Iñupiaq Language Plan to preserve and perpetuate Iñupiaq language and culture.
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.

I love the values the Elders and adults share to the young children.
- Youth Survey

I would like our region to be seen by the state as one full of skilled people doing interesting, valuable work. I'd like to see us more self-sufficient, able to staff and operate our organizations with fewer imported employees.
- Regional Survey

In the future I hope our region is safe, pristine, yet updated when it comes to technology such as cellular and internet capabilities (similar to the saying of walking in two worlds with one spirit).
- Regional Survey
5. Transportation

Figure 2: Summary of Transportation Infrastructure in NAB Communities

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</thead>
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<td>Ambler</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deering</td>
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<td>70</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiana</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kivalina</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<td>No</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
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<td>N/A</td>
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<td>Noatak</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Noorvik</td>
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<td>43</td>
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<td>Selawik</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shungnak</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>185</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Northwest Alaska Transportation Plan Update, AWOS = Automated Weather Observing System

Key Themes Guiding the Plan

Northwest Arctic Borough communities cannot be accessed by, nor are they connected by road.

- NAB communities are accessible by air, winter trails, and seasonal barge only.
- Within the region, there are few roads and trails that connect NAB communities.
- Limited access makes travel to and from the communities more challenging and costly, especially in the event of a medical emergency.
- Residents will often use snow machines to travel within and between their communities during the winter along a system of winter trails.
Aviation is the primary mode of travel to, from, and within the region.

- Airports are critical for NAB communities. Planes provide year-round access, and in some cases, flying is the only reliable way to reach certain villages.
- Federally subsidized air services such as bypass mail and Essential Air Service are critical to the region’s economy and help offset transportation costs in the region, which impacts the overall costs of living in the region.
- Most runways in the region are gravel and experiencing damage from climate change, especially permafrost thaw. Runway degradation is stretching the capabilities of maintenance crews to keep the airfields operational.
- There are few air carriers who serve the area. Many communities rely on only one air carrier for travel between communities, creating uncertainty if, for some reason, the carrier is unavailable.

There is little to no data in rural Alaska for vehicle accidents.

- It is assumed that accidents occur, but they are not reported or tracked.
- The lack of reporting makes it harder to advocate for funding for road repair and maintenance.

Increasing national and international interest in the Arctic will bring increased transportation traffic and opportunities.

- The growing focus on the Arctic also presents a growing need for transportation infrastructure and safety guidelines.
- Increases in Arctic transportation can also impact commerce, subsistence, natural resources, and other sectors.
**Transportation Goals**

**Goal A**

NAB communities are strategically connected.

**Goal B**

Residents and businesses have the access needed to support the safe, affordable movement of people and goods.

**Transportation 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 Port.
4. Further assess and potentially establish strategic inter-regional road connections between communities, including:
   a. Connect Cape Blossom Port to Kotzebue.
   b. Connect Noatak and the Delong Mountain Transportation System.
   d. Connect Kiana, Noorvik and Selawik.
   e. Corridor for the Kivalina Evacuation Road.
   f. Corridor for the Ambler Road.

   **Roads between communities would help with high energy costs. We could drive in more fuel and more easily build transmission lines.**
   - Stakeholder Interview

   **The Cape Blossom port should be our number one priority to reduce the cost of living.**
   - Stakeholder Interview

   **Air travel is expensive, grocery prices are high because most villages have only air accessibility. Barges cannot reach many villages when water is low.**
   - Regional Survey

   **New road construction in the northern half of Alaska is going to be a major part of economic development. NANA, ASRC, Doyon and other Alaska regional corporations should do joint ventures to do new road construction.**
   - Emailed Comments
6. Community Facilities, Infrastructure, and Housing

Top Community Priorities

Teck, the operator of Red Dog Mine, contributes between $4 million and $8 million to NAB communities each year through the Village Improvement Fund, which supports community infrastructure priorities. Village Improvement Commissioners identify community priorities annually which are summarized in the Village Improvement Fund annual reports. The following table shows all project types that appear on at least half of the communities’ priority lists in 2020. The full project names by community are listed in the 2020 Village Improvement Fund Annual Report. Water and sewer projects are the most frequently repeated priority, showing up on the priority list for ten out of 11 NAB communities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Type</th>
<th>Ambler</th>
<th>Buckland</th>
<th>Deering</th>
<th>Kiana</th>
<th>Kivalina</th>
<th>Kobuk</th>
<th>Kotzebue</th>
<th>Noatak</th>
<th>Noorvik</th>
<th>Selawik</th>
<th>Shungnak</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Water &amp; Sewer</td>
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<td>Housing</td>
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<td>Parks &amp; Outdoor Sports Facilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public Safety/Search &amp; Rescue Building</td>
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<td>Law Enforcement/VPSO</td>
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<td>Multipurpose/Community Center</td>
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<td>Energy Upgrades</td>
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<td>Road Maintenance</td>
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<td>Solid Waste (landfill, recycling)</td>
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<td>Wellness</td>
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<td>Cemetery/Grave Sites</td>
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<td>Washeteria</td>
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</table>
### Key Themes Guiding the Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Village Improvement Fund invests in new community infrastructure but finding operations and maintenance funds can be a challenge.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- NAB communities have relatively small populations, which create challenges for generating the funds to improve, maintain, and replace community infrastructure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Many facilities lack long-term maintenance and operation plans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Coastal communities have erosion concerns that can affect barge accessibility, runway operations, and may ultimately force communities to move.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- With such small communities and dwindling state funds, the cost of maintenance and repair can overburden small communities without new state or federal assistance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The region has limited utilities, including insufficient water, sewer, and internet services.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Many NAB communities have insufficient and/or aging piped water and wastewater systems. Some communities rely on delivery or haul away while others use “honey buckets” for their waste. Lack of in-home water and wastewater systems can contribute to health issues such as severe skin infections and respiratory illnesses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The region also lacks access to affordable high-speed internet. Reliable internet connectivity has become increasingly important for education, training, commerce, and even microgrid technology.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education infrastructure is limited.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- NAB communities have local schools with no educational powers. They rely on communication networks to provide education services online.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The lack of high-speed affordable internet makes it harder to offer reliable distance learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Additionally, the area has struggled to retain teachers due to limited housing, geographic isolation, and high cost of living.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Energy costs are high but regional partners are pursuing innovative solutions.

- NANA has been a regional leader and funder of renewable energy investments, along with partners such as the City of Kotzebue, Kotzebue Electric Association, Alaska Village Electric Cooperative, Ipunchiaq Electric Company, Alaska Energy Authority, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, and other organizations.
- Each community produces their own electricity. The only electric intertie is between Kobuk and Shungnak. This means when a community loses power, they cannot purchase electricity from another provider through an intertie.
- Most communities rely heavily on diesel for energy generation; diesel is expensive, and prices fluctuates frequently. As a result, private and public sector partners have been investing in and developing renewable energy sources.
- Renewables still have operational costs once installed, such as maintenance and insurance, but many of those operational funds go toward higher paying skilled jobs in the region, instead of leaving the region to go to fuel suppliers.
- Barriers to renewable energy development include high costs of construction, and poor internet infrastructure; microgrids require quality internet connections to operate.

Housing in the region is expensive and there is significant overcrowding.

- The region is experiencing a housing shortage, resulting in overcrowding; NAB is the second most crowded region in Alaska.
- The cost of new construction creates a barrier to affordably construct new homes due to high material and freight costs.
- Even when funding is available to construct new homes, many communities face additional challenges that limit construction such as aging water and sewer infrastructure systems unable to support new houses, a shortage of developable land, and lack of key materials such as gravel.
- Access to affordable and suitable housing is an important part of retaining the region’s population and quality of life.
### Community Facilities, Infrastructure, and Housing Goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal A</th>
<th>Goal B</th>
<th>Goal C</th>
<th>Goal D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Invest in renewable energy, promote energy efficiency, and reduce reliance on imported fuels.</td>
<td>Increase supply and access to affordable, quality housing.</td>
<td>Establish reliable, affordable, high-speed phone and internet connections.</td>
<td>Ensure communities have safe and reliable water, sewer, and solid waste systems, and the ability to operate and maintain them locally.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Community Facilities, Infrastructure, and Housing 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. Possible strategies to be considered in the housing needs assessment include:
   a. Promote the use of public-private partnerships between large landowners, Tribes, and relevant state and federal agencies to develop affordable residential subdivisions with water and sewer infrastructure.

---

*We have sky high prices on just about everything we need such as food, heating oil, gasoline, light bill, and airfare.*

- Survey Response

*We need to explore all different avenues for housing. Helping municipalities extend their roads and utilities, helping families who want to build on their own, partnering on energy projects to use innovative energy technology in new and existing homes.*

- Stakeholder Interview
b. Identify needed policy changes that would make it easier to blend and leverage state and federal funds.
c. Identify a clear path for residents who want to construct their own homes and promote home ownership.
d. Provide homeowner education on energy efficiency upgrades, weatherization, and how to reduce energy costs.

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.

*Note: Renewable energy infrastructure also benefits from improved road/utility connections; faster, reliable internet; and a locally trained workforce who can support installation, programming, and maintenance; see other chapters for related strategies on these topics.*
7. Economic Development

The Red Dog Mine started operations in 1989, producing zinc concentrates that are transported to a private port on the coast, south of Kivalina. The mine owner announced plans for expansion in 2010 and is expected to continue producing until 2031.

Source: Northern Economics, 2019

Local government is the largest single source of employment in the NAB, representing nearly one third of total employment in 2019.

Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis

Median household income in the Northwest Arctic Borough is $62,949 and an average of 25% of residents have lived below the poverty level in the last 6 months.

Source: American Community Survey 2018 5-Year Estimates

Figure 3: Average Annual Economic Contribution of Red Dog Mine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contribution</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct and indirect jobs annual income</td>
<td>$65,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royalty payments to NANA Regional Corporation (before 7i distribution)*</td>
<td>$130,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payments to Northwest Arctic Borough</td>
<td>$20,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct shareholder employment (2017)</td>
<td>57% of all employees (excluding contractors) are NANA shareholders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source for annual income, royalty payments and NAB payments: Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (2019)


*Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, Section 7(i) [43 USC § 1606(i)] is a revenue sharing provision between all regional corporations. The revenue source must come from certain specified large natural resource development projects (i.e. mining, oil and gas development, timber harvesting). 70% of revenue receipts from such development projects are required to be shared by payment amongst all regional corporations. Source: Case, David S, and David A. Voluck. 2013. Alaska Natives and American Laws. 3rd ed. University of Alaska Press: Fairbanks, AK.

Key Themes Guiding the Plan

Red Dog Mine is an important economic generator in the region.

- Most of the NAB’s general fund revenue comes from the Red Dog Mine, which is also the largest private employer in the borough.
- Red Dog Mine has an expected mine life through 2031. To avoid a catastrophic decline in revenues and employment, the region urgently needs to develop other economic development opportunities in the region.
- The Village Improvement Fund (VIF), which is funded by Red Dog revenues, is an essential contributor to local and regional economic development.
The Northwest Arctic Borough has a small and geographically dispersed population.
- The region’s population has been steadily growing over the years. However, many of its smaller communities are expected to lose population.
- Labor force participation rates and employment rates have declined over the past decade. Residents need opportunities for economic and educational growth to help retain and grow the population in their communities.

The region has a high cost of living.
- Kotzebue residents spend more on food and energy than many peer communities in the state; costs are even higher in some of the smaller communities around the borough.
- An affordable cost of living is an important part of retaining the borough’s workforce and supporting quality of life, including the ability to participate in subsistence activities.
- High energy, housing and freight costs also increase the cost of doing business in the region, creating challenges for companies and entrepreneurs seeking to establish or grow a business.

Economic Development Goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal A</th>
<th>Goal B</th>
<th>Goal C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encourage economic diversification and growth.</td>
<td>Prepare residents for jobs in the region.</td>
<td>Pursue economic and community growth while protecting subsistence as a key economic activity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Economic Development Strategies

1. Support strategic natural resource development such as mining and gravel extraction.
   a. Support continued exploration to identify mineral deposits that could extend the mine life at Red Dog Mine.
   b. Support re-zoning efforts (e.g., an Ambler Mining District re-zone) that enable economic development projects to move forward, while minimizing negative impacts to subsistence. For more information, see the Land Use & Subsistence section.

2. Expand educational and training opportunities. Possible actions are outlined below; see the NAB Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for additional recommendations.
   a. Work with the University of Alaska Fairbanks to build on its Chukchi Campus offerings and encourage more residents to pursue higher education.
   b. Work with the University of Alaska Fairbanks to expand educational opportunities to residents outside of Kotzebue, both through remote learning and on-campus experiences.
   c. Continue to develop and support vocational programs at the Alaska Technical Center in Kotzebue.
   d. Engage with businesses in the community to identify career pathways, needed trainings, and entrepreneurship opportunities for young residents, especially in key trade skills.

3. Support small business development and economic diversification.
   a. Establish an entrepreneurship and low-cost loan small business development program.

4. Prepare for economic, military and transportation opportunities in the Arctic.
   a. Participate in international natural resource management conversations on topics such as Arctic fisheries and advocate for changes, as-needed, to key legislation such as the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

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.

[20 years from now], I’d like to see us more reliant on the wealth of resources available within the region than on resources available outside the region. One is much more reliable than the other and has a much longer track record to prove it.

- Regional Survey
8. Borough Management, Administration and Finance

**Key Themes Guiding the Plan**

Borough government is largely funded by the Red Dog Mine.

- Payments from Red Dog Mine amounted to 83 percent of the NAB’s general fund revenues in 2020. It is also an important source of employment for regional residents.
- The Northwest Arctic Borough formed in anticipation of the Red Dog Mine opening, and as the mine approaches the end of its life, the borough needs to find its next source of revenue.
- With the mine currently forecast to remain open until 2031, it is time for the borough to work with its communities and residents to identify future revenue opportunities that residents support.
The school district serves nearly 2,000 students, and demographic projections show the youth population growing through 2025.

- The school district is largely funded by the State of Alaska. As the state continues to grapple with fiscal instability, the borough and school district should prepare for expected declines in state funding for education.

Some NAB communities lack the capacity to prepare and maintain village comprehensive plans.

- In addition to this regionwide comprehensive plan, villages should each maintain their own comprehensive plan.
- The NAB Planning Department provides limited funding to support Village Planning Committees but many remain inactive.
- The Village Improvement Commission also contains members from each community, and these commissioners often step in to identify priorities in communities with less active Village Planning Committees. This creates an opportunity for improved collaboration and coordination between the Village Improvement Commission and Village Planning Committees.
Borough Management, Administration and Finance Goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal A</th>
<th>Goal B</th>
<th>Goal C</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diversify borough government revenues.</td>
<td>Support and improve community-level planning.</td>
<td>Provide efficient, effective, fiscally responsible government services.</td>
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Borough Management, Administration and Finance 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.
   a. Evaluate the effectiveness of existing taxes and explore the potential for new taxes as a borough revenue source.
2. Sustain the borough’s schools.
3. Improve the effectiveness and regionwide impact of the Village Improvement Fund (VIF) program.
   a. Identify and eliminate barriers to participation.
   b. Provide increased technical assistance to communities to help them navigate the application process.
   c. Expand promotion of VIF opportunities.
   d. Better integrate Village Planning Committee activities with the work of the Village Improvement Commission.
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).

Red Dog is a great source of income but we’ve been there for 30 years, it will not last forever. We need to find something else.
- Stakeholder Interview

Help the city offices to become more self-reliant…The NAB needs to come into the villages more often and involve them in all aspects of what is offered to help our communities.
- Regional Survey