

One pyramid—slightly used

Reuse of the now-terminated Safeguard anti-ballistic missile (ABM) site near Nekoma, N.D., might be just the booster the doctor ordered for the sagging economies of ABM impact area communities.

Most recent information indicates there's a good possibility northeastern North Dakota communities will get that booster but the question of when and how still remains.

Currently, the State of North Dakota appears the best bet to acquire some of the existing facilities such as base housing, command headquarters, community center and other non-tactical buildings. No one, however, has a firm idea on what, if anything, will happen to the tactical facilities such as the pyramid which housed the Missile Site Radar complex.

Under the federal guidelines for "excessing the properties" at the site, there is a priority basis for reuse of the facilities, with Army needs coming first, then other military organizations and federal agencies and then state and local entities. Thus far, only the State of North Dakota, acting in conjunction with area communities, has expressed a legitimate interest in acquiring the site.

A state task force, appointed by Gov. Arthur A. Link, has been examining reuse possibilities for the site. Herb Mack, task force coordinator working out of the state Planning Office, says the site presents "a package too good to turn down."

However, he cautions, the site "is too large for any single entity" and thus would necessitate

using it as a "multi-purpose facility in conjunction with other state institutions." Reuse of the site would be aimed at augmenting services offered by existing institutions.

A prime possibility currently being considered, for example, would be to use the site as a vocational education and rehabilitation training facility in connection with the nearby Grafton State School. Under the plan, the less severely handicapped persons would be taken out of the institutional environment and placed in a "home-like environment" at the site to prepare them for private life.

Even if the state decides it wants the site, before it can get it, a number of hurdles must be cleared, both on the state and the federal levels. If it negotiated all the obstacles successfully, the very earliest the state could implement the site's facilities would probably be after July 1977.

First the task force must come up with a firm set of proposals. According to Mack, a final package of proposals could be unveiled by late this week. If the state should propose to use the site for "health or educational" purposes, it would be eligible to acquire the site at no cost.

Those proposals would then be submitted to the legislature, which has final authority on whether to authorize the acquisition. Among other things, the legislature would have to appropriate funds to maintain the facilities and staff and operate the programs there.

On the federal level, the House Armed Services Committee has yet to act on proposed "excessing of property" at the ABM site. Such a decision is not ex-

pected until late January. If Congress approves release of the property, the state would still have to clear the priority guidelines before it could be offered the site.

Meanwhile, the ARM Steering Committee, composed of officials from various ABM area communities, has been trying to attract industry to the area. Working under a federal grant, the committee is interested in luring industrial development which might be compatible to the proposed uses the state has for the site.

For example, one of three firms, a Canadian garment manufacturer, which has expressed genuine interest in some of the ABM site facilities, now has a program to train handicapped persons for employment in its Canada plants.

No matter how it happens, reuse of the site would mean added jobs and income for northeastern North Dakota communities which are still looking for some economic spark to replace ABM.