

Alle-Kiski Intergovernmental Council Meeting Minutes
Meeting #10
June 16, 2022
New Kensington City Hall

Attendees (*D-Delegate, A-Alternate*)

AK IGC: Kristen Sarno (A-East Vandergrift), Barbara Sharp (D-East Vandergrift), Tom Guzzo (D-New Kensington), Dennis Scarpiniti (A-New Kensington), Matt Grantz (D-West Leechburg), Ren Steel (D-Allegheny Township), Michael Kornis (A-Allegheny Township), George Hawdon (D-Arnold) Mark Saxon (City of Arnold Redevelopment Authority)

Westmoreland County Planning: Corey Block, Victoria Baur
Public: Jody Sarno (Vandergrift), Marilee Kessler (Vandergrift)

Meeting started at 5:01 PM.

Tom called the meeting to order, confirmed that everyone had a chance to review the meeting #9 minutes, and asked if there were any questions or concerns. A motion was made by Barbara to approve the minutes and it was seconded by George. The meeting #9 minutes were approved.

Tom transitioned to share that the letters to non-member Alle-Kiski communities were successfully sent on behalf of the AK IGC. Victoria reminded the group that the intent of the letters was to encourage future participation from non-member communities to grow the IGC.

Tom then transitioned to follow-up on Vandergrift's admission into the IGC. Corey noted that she attended Vandergrift's June council meeting to talk about joining the AK IGC. She said that the decision was pushed to the July meeting, as not all council members were present. Victoria suggested that the decision to admit Vandergrift to the IGC be tabled until the July AK IGC meeting. She noted that by then, Vandergrift will have ideally formally adopted the resolution to join the AK IGC. Jody thanked Corey for attending their meeting.

Tom moved on to the formal vote to approve the revised proposed Year 2 Dues Schedule. Victoria noted that the group had a quorum (at least four communities present) with Allegheny Township, Arnold, New Kensington, East Vandergrift, and West Leechburg at the meeting and could proceed with a formal vote.

Victoria brought up that since the last meeting, each community was provided a copy of the costs/dues summary to help shed light on what the dues cover. Tom thanked the Planning Division for preparing a summary and asked if there were any questions or comments about the costs/dues summary. He asked if there were any final comments on the revised proposed Year 2 Dues Schedule.

Tom asked for a motion to approve the revised proposed Year 2 Dues Schedule. A motion was made by Matt to approve the revised proposed Year 2 Dues Schedule and it was seconded by George. Representatives present from Allegheny Township, Arnold, New Kensington, East Vandergrift, and West Leechburg all affirmed approval of the revised proposed Year 2 Dues Schedule by formal roll call. The revised proposed Year 2 Dues Schedule was approved.

Victoria moved on to discuss AK IGC Year 2 operation. She brought up the issue of non-designated alternate delegates making motions at meetings. She shared that this item was discussed amongst the AK IGC executive committee via email. She clarified that the bylaws stipulate that delegates and alternates must be elected and appointed officials and that communities must identify one delegate and at least one alternate, but that there can be additional alternates. She asked the group how flexible they wanted to be when non-designated alternates represent their communities at meetings, specifically around motions and voting on ordinary or more formal business.

Tom said that this depends on the importance of agenda items and suggested that more formal items should be voted on by designated delegates and alternates. He also suggested that perhaps communities could assign additional alternates on an as needed basis so that a representative from their community could vote on ordinary business items (such as approving minutes and adjourning meetings) and also on more formal items (such as approving dues and agreements) by proxy if the designated delegate or alternate cannot attend a meeting and the assigned alternate is given specific instructions to attend the meeting on behalf of their community. The group confirmed that they wanted to be flexible on assigning additional alternates to attend meetings.

Victoria went over the next steps leading up to the start of Year 2 for the AK IGC. She noted that if any community has decided not to continue participating in the IGC, that they will need to formally repeal their individual IGC resolution. She said that for any community not participating to please let her know before the next AK IGC meeting in July. She added that the drafting of the Year 2 agreement hinges on Vandergrift's decision to join the IGC and that the Planning Division needs to know who is still participating in order to prepare an accurate agreement.

Victoria shared that the Year 2 agreements will be distributed for participating member communities to sign in time for their August or September council meetings, after Vandergrift is formally voted in at the July AK IGC meeting. She added that signed agreements will need to be mailed to the Planning Division along with the Year 2 Dues. She said that the agreement would be fully executed at the September or October County Commissioner meeting.

Victoria said that AK IGC meetings will continue to be held at New Kensington City Hall at 5PM on the third Thursday of every month, without any pause for the agreement to be executed. She added that the Planning Division will advertise and circulate calendar invitations for the Year 2 meeting dates in July.

Tom transitioned the group to continue the discussion on drone opportunities through eye-bot. He noted that Victoria created a list of short-term and long-term applications for drones based off of the discussion at the May meeting. Tom confirmed that he forwarded this list on to Jake Lydick at eye-bot. He added that he invited Jake to return to the AK IGC meeting in July and asked him to bring sample demonstration data and cost estimates for projects discussed.

Victoria shared that she reached out to Jake directly to set up a separate meeting to discuss the application of drones in the blight inventory project. She said that because the Planning Division would be providing this service to communities at a cost, they could incorporate the cost for drone service into their scope of work. She added that the meeting would be a good opportunity for the Planning Division to see sample data from eye-bot and better understand if drones could be affordably used to assist with data collection in the blight inventory project.

Ren asked if drones would be used for police work. Tom noted that drones could potentially be used for police and code enforcement in the long-term. Corey reminded the group to research and discuss drone applications amongst their councils and with their solicitors. Mike shared that it might be inefficient and expensive for each community to obtain separate legal opinions from their solicitors on this topic.

Tom suggested that perhaps the group could get one legal opinion, specifically about the use of drones in code enforcement, from one solicitor and suggested the county's solicitor. Victoria and Corey noted that they could look into this, but that property maintenance may not be the solicitor's area of expertise. They agreed that additional research could be done, even if the county's solicitor cannot provide an opinion.

Victoria agreed that drones could be used for more long-term applications like police or code enforcement down the road. She suggested that the group focus on establishing a relationship with eye-bot first and accomplishing short-term projects like marketing the Tredway Trail or assessing a handful of repository properties in greater detail.

Victoria asked the group to confirm their interest in having Jake return at the July meeting to show samples and discuss costs. She said that pursuing the use of drones for projects may not be a priority for all communities and that the group should be mindful of everyone's time. Barbara noted that East Vandergrift isn't really interested in drone applications since the borough is so small, but that they would be willing to hear Jake speak again. The larger group confirmed that they had interest in Jake returning.

Tom transitioned the group to continue the discussion on pursuing an interim project to create a list of developable/vacant properties to market. Victoria noted that this was discussed at the May meeting, but that some communities weren't present. She summarized that the topic of creating a list of developable properties to market has come up at several meetings and that this was a standalone priority. She added that at some point, the blight inventory project and creating a list of developable properties to market, melded together. Victoria said that since the blight inventory project isn't going to occur this year and that it will likely take some time to work up to, the group could create a list of developable properties in the interim.

Victoria reminded the group that non-residential properties that are listed for sale in their communities could be added to www.westmorelandsites.com, which is managed by the Westmoreland County Industrial Development Corporation. This website can help reach new buyers or developers, as it features listed properties throughout the county. She referenced an application form and noted that the Planning Division is willing to assist communities obtain information about non-residential properties for sale to help get them listed on this site.

Victoria added that the Planning Division can also help create "drop-sheets" for properties that are for sale - which could be handy for interested developers or buyers. She brought up that an additional option would be to create a Google MyMap to show available developable properties on the ReimaginingOurWestmoreland.org site, but that this may be redundant or not as impactful if properties are already listed on WestmorelandSites.com or if only a few communities decide to list properties. She asked if the group had interest in the interim project.

Mike, Ren, and Tom expressed interest in pursuing the interim project. George also expressed interest and shared that the properties that he has in mind for marketing are city-owned and cleared of blighted

structures or will be cleared in the near future. He said that because the city owns the properties, they are aware of the tax status and other details and can offer to consolidate adjacent properties if needed. He added that in the past, the city has prepared “packets” for interested buyers with information on properties. George said that the city plans to continue to do this, but that they would welcome the county’s assistance to help with marketing.

Victoria summarized that it sounded like there was some interest to pursue the interim project by a few communities. She noted that perhaps the Planning Division can work separately with interested communities on their list of developable properties.

Tom transitioned the group to continue the discussion on pursuing a shared code enforcement officer (CEO). Victoria said that this topic was brought up again at the last meeting and that it will continue to be an agenda item so that the group can take steps towards this goal, as it was identified as a priority across all communities.

Victoria asked if East Vandergrift had any luck reaching out to Oklahoma Borough to hear first-hand experience about sharing a CEO with Allegheny Township. Barbara said that they hadn’t spoken with Oklahoma yet. Victoria asked about the status of East Vandergrift’s new CEO arrangement. Kristen and Barbara shared that Lee Shumaker, who is Allegheny Township’s CEO, agreed to provide code enforcement duties for the borough. They added that they didn’t have much to report because they were unsure whether he started working in their community yet. Mike and Ren shared that Lee is very busy. Ren added that Lee might be better suited to train CEOs, rather than attempting to provide CEO services in other communities.

Tom asked the group how they can solve the need for additional code enforcement amongst communities and specifically asked how an additional CEO’s time could be divided between eight communities. Corey asked how many communities have a need for additional code enforcement help. The group confirmed that each community (all eight) could benefit from having access to an additional CEO.

The group discussed arrangements for sharing a CEO. Jody asked how the CEO’s salary and workman’s compensation would be handled in a shared arrangement. Matt and Tom noted that one community may end up having to pay the full salary, but other communities utilizing the CEO would reimburse the main community based on hours or days of use. Barbara and Mike pointed out that a shared CEO would have to be knowledgeable and experienced enough to enforce codes across cities, boroughs, and townships. Dennis pointed out that in addition to time out in the field citing violations, CEOs have to attend hearings, so this would have to be factored into their time as well.

Tom asked if the CEO would be a municipal staff person or if they would be a contractor without benefits. Matt suggested that the shared CEO could be an IGC employee. Victoria and Corey said that, as the IGC currently exists, it isn’t capable of hiring staff. George suggested that the CEO be under one community, having a “home-base”, and “ad-hock” for the rest of the communities on a first-come first-served basis. Barbara brought up that East Vandergrift wanted someone in their community on a regular schedule, as working off of a first-come first-served basis may leave their community, and others, out of the loop if other communities have a greater demand.

Jody suggested dividing the CEOs 40 hour work week between communities based on fluctuating need - giving each of the 8 communities 5 hours of time as a base and ramping down or up as needed, for example. Tom said that this division of hours might be difficult to schedule and execute and that the CEO might not like working in an on-call capacity. George shared that Arnold and New Kensington would only need a CEO in an emergency situation, since they typically have full coverage. Tom said that he didn't think there was 40 hours a week of additional CEO work needed amongst the 8 communities and suggested that the group look into a part time CEO at 20 hours a week.

Jody shared that he wanted to talk with Vandergrift's CEO to see how much assistance was needed. He suggested that the shared CEO could be used to represent the Borough in court at hearings, alleviating court time from their regular CEO.

Kristen brought up that the shared CEO would have to coordinate with other CEOs in communities. She asked how the CEO would know whether a property had already been cited for a violation, if filling in for another CEO. Barbara echoed this and asked how each community would know when a violation has been issued or taken through the legal process.

Tom shared that New Kensington utilizes a log-sheet to help track CEO work and that these are regularly presented at council meetings. He added that the log-sheets show all citations issued, any follow-up visits to residential/commercial properties, and scheduled hearings. George added that in Arnold, CEOs enter information into an Excel spreadsheet that he has access to review. The group discussed and agreed that participating communities could develop a standard communication process/expectation for CEOs around reporting.

Dennis asked if it was possible for the communities that have currently CEOs to make their CEOs available to support other communities in need, just a few hours a week. George suggested that this arrangement might be the easiest to accomplish in the short term. Tom said that this arrangement already isn't really working. Corey suggested that the group continue to look into adding CEO capacity, rather than tapping into the CEO capacity that already exists.

Kristen asked if there was a way to unify codes between communities to make sharing CEOs easier. Mark echoed this and said that this could be an additional avenue for the group to pursue. He added that having consistent codes across communities would help them grow and would be better for residents, business owners, and developers in the Alle-Kiski. Victoria suggested that this path would take longer to do, but would be beneficial in the end, helping to streamline the development process.

Dennis suggested that the group reach out to someone from one of the statewide borough or township organizations to see if anyone could come and speak about sharing CEOs or unifying codes. Tom asked Dennis to look into this and let the group know. Tom said that it would be useful to have a speaker experienced in this area to come and talk to the group about their success.

Corey asked the group to discuss this topic amongst their respective council's and with their current CEOs to determine the need for a shared/additional CEO. The group agreed that they would discuss this topic and get a better understanding of the need in their communities.

Tom pointed out the value of the IGC by facilitating the conversation around shared code enforcement between communities. He added that leaders in the room might not be having this type of conversation without the existence of the IGC and that this stands to benefit the whole group.

Tom transitioned the group to the blight inventory project. Victoria noted that Mike Conley from Upper Burrell Township stopped by before the meeting to drop off their blight maps. Victoria asked if Allegheny Township brought theirs to the meeting. Mike Korn noted that Greg was going to use the Township's plotter to scan and email the maps to the Planning Division. Victoria noted that Lower Burrell was not present and that she would reach out to them directly to mail or drop-off their maps.

Victoria provided an update on the blight inventory project. She reminded the group that printed municipal maps were distributed to Allegheny Township, Upper Burrell Township, and the City of Lower Burrell to gain input on areas to include in the blight inventory project, as these communities are more rural and spread-out. She added that the Planning Division needs this information to be able to draft a scope of work for this joint project. She noted that the Planning Division is still working to outline this project in a scope of work for the group to review soon. Victoria also added that the Planning Division would have a better idea soon as to whether drones would be included in the project scope.

Victoria also asked the group to confirm their interest in pursuing the joint blight inventory project, as the Planning Division does not want to assume full participation in the scope of work if some communities aren't interested. Mike noted that Allegheny Township is interested at a lesser extent, because blight isn't a concentrated issue. Victoria asked if East Vandergrift is interested in data collected from the blight inventory project. Kristen and Barbara said that they weren't sure yet.

Marilee brought up that Vandergrift has been working with the Redevelopment Authority of Westmoreland County (RACW) to locate blighted properties. She said that they have information collected on almost the entire community. She asked if this work would contribute to or go against the joint blight inventory project. She added that the RACW had started off piloting software and collecting information in just one of the Borough's census tracts, but that the work has since expanded to other areas of the community. Victoria and Corey noted that they weren't completely aware of the scope of work that the RACW was conducting in Vandergrift but that the Planning Division intends to coordinate efforts and information as they move forward with the joint blight inventory project.

Victoria transitioned the group to the TIP update. She said that the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (SPC) is the organization that directs the use of state and federal transportation and economic development funds throughout the region and within their communities. She noted that a project in Allegheny Township, that was identified as a part of the mobility planning phase of the Alle-Kiski Planning District process, has been awarded funding and is on the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) schedule. The project is a bridge rehabilitation on SR 4073 (White Cloud Road) over PA 56 in Allegheny Township.

Victoria reminded the group that the Planning Division collaborates with SPC on a monthly basis and advocates on behalf of communities to push projects forward. She encouraged the group to continue bringing priorities and issues to the AK IGC meetings, as the group acts as a forum for communities to share priorities so that the Planning Division can continue to advocate for projects and funding.

Victoria referenced the Draft 2023 - 2026 TIP website, <https://bit.ly/3GO6mwp>, where anyone can see transportation projects planned throughout the county over the next four years.

Tom asked if there were any additional remarks or public comments.

Victoria reminded the group that the monthly AK IGC meetings are open to the public. She said that any interested council members or staff are welcome to come if they want to learn more about the IGC or participate in meetings.

Barbara brought up that one of East Vandergrift's council members is interested in improving broadband within the region and asked if the group could discuss broadband issues at an upcoming meeting. Tom agreed that broadband is an important and worthwhile topic to discuss as a group. Corey noted that broadband will be discussed at upcoming meetings as the County is kicking off its broadband program to understand gaps and needs and will need the AK IGC member's participation.

Kristen brought up that East Vandergrift has struggled with landlord issues and asked if the group could spend time sharing information. She added that the borough has struggled to get some landlords to cooperate with certain requirements and wondered if other communities struggle in the same way. Tom agreed that discussing landlord requirements and sharing information around this issue would be beneficial. He said that the group could discuss this topic at a future meeting.

Tom asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. A motion was made by Ren and seconded by Matt.

The meeting ended at 6:00 PM.