

Alle-Kiski Intergovernmental Council
Regular Meeting Minutes
Meeting #11 - July 20th 2023
New Kensington City Hall

Attendees (D-Delegate, A-Alternate)

AK IGC: Mike Korn (D-Allegheny Township), Matt Grantz (D-West Leechburg), Melissa Cortileso (D-Upper Burrell), Tom Guzzo (D-New Kensington), John Andrejczik (D-Lower Burrell), George Hawdon (D-Arnold), Jody Sarno (D-Vandergrift), Marilee Kessler (A-Vandergrift Borough)

Westmoreland County Planning: Jason Rigone, Jillian Caswell, Victoria Baur

Guests: Cheryl Yakopec, Stephen Yakopec Jr **Public:** None

Meeting started at 5:02 PM.

1. Review/approve minutes from Meeting 10

A motion was made by John and seconded by Missy to approve the Meeting 10 minutes. The Meeting 10 minutes were approved.

2. AK IGC Year 3

a. Review/approve proposed Dues Schedule

b. Discuss meeting frequency, time, location, and format

Victoria said the group discussed AK IGC Year 3 arrangements at the last meeting and that the proposed Dues Schedule and Year 2 Costs Summary were shared since then. She pointed out that the Year 2 Dues did not cover the costs incurred to administer the AK IGC and that this is reflected in the proposed Year 3 Dues. Victoria noted she didn't really receive any comments or questions since the last meeting.

Victoria shared Kristen Sarno from East Vandergrift's comments. Kristen indicated East Vandergrift's council was not happy with the increased Dues. She suggested that the group consider incorporating virtual meetings or cut back on meetings to cut down on costs. Kristen added that East Vandergrift's council is open to hiring a consultant like Susan Hockenberry, if this is cost effective.

Victoria noted that if the group wants to consider utilizing a consultant like Susan Hockenberry, this will take time to arrange. She added that there are tradeoffs to working with a consultant, compared to the county, noting that the group would likely have to take on more of the administrative duties like preparing agendas and doing meeting minutes. Victoria said a consultant like Susan might provide different services compared to the county and that this isn't a one-for-one comparison.

Victoria said that based off of the conversation from the last meeting about Year 3, it sounded like the group was still interested in having the county provide administrative services to the IGC. She reminded the group that they should be working towards self sufficiency in Year 3, as the county's support was only intended to be temporary. She said the group needs to be preparing to take these duties on gradually so that when it is time for the county to exit in its current role, but

remain involved in a different role, the members feel confident and comfortable in the sustainability of the IGC.

Jody said any reduction in the Dues would be helpful for Vandergrift. John echoed these comments for Lower Burrell. Mike said Allegheny Township could approve the Dues, but if there are members who can't, the group should try to rework them.

Jody asked if the Dues could remain the same from Year 2. He noted that AK IGC meetings are beneficial and he wants to continue to show fellow council members that there is value in participating in the IGC. Jody asked if the Dues could reflect the AK IGC members taking on some of the administrative work off of the county. Missy suggested that she could print meeting materials to help cut down on costs. Victoria said that whatever the group decides to start taking on now will help in the long term.

Members discussed the pros and cons of either reducing meetings or utilizing a virtual format to cut down on costs. Members discussed the desire to maintain the number and frequency of meetings to keep the momentum. Tom asked if incorporating virtual meetings would change the Dues. Victoria said this change would cut down on travel and meeting costs.

Jason suggested the group consider having a virtual meeting every other month for consistency. Tom asked if the Dues could be recalculated to reflect this change and redistributed. Victoria and Jason agreed that the Dues could be revised and redistributed to the group.

Tom made a motion to change the meeting format to be virtual every other month, with the first virtual meeting scheduled for September 2023. Jody seconded the motion. Members agreed to the motion. Victoria noted that this detail would need to be included in the annual advertisement for the AK IGC.

Victoria said the group needs to provide a formal vote on the Dues at the next meeting, before the Year 3 agreements can be distributed and executed. She noted that the county will continue providing administrative support outside of the agreement. The agreement will be backdated to begin August 1.

Victoria asked if everyone was okay with keeping the in-person meeting location at New Kensington City Hall. Tom indicated the City is still able to host meetings. Members agreed the meeting location would stay the same.

c. Discuss Office positions

Victoria reminded the group that there is no limit on the number of times a member can hold an office position. Currently, Tom serves as the Chair, Ren is the Vice-Chair, and John is the Secretary. She said with the changes at Allegheny Township, the Vice-Chair position is open. Victoria asked for any volunteers or recommendations.

John made a motion to maintain Tom as the Chair of the AK IGC. Mike seconded the motion. Members agreed to Tom continuing to serve as Chair.

Jody recommended Mike Korn for the Vice-Chair position. Marilee seconded the motion. Members agreed to Mike taking on the position of Vice-Chair.

d. Discuss Delegate/Alternate representatives

Victoria asked members to let her know if there are any changes to delegates/alternates as soon as possible. Victoria said it is important to ensure either the delegate or alternate identified is able to attend most of the AK IGC meetings to represent their community and make decisions.

Mike asked if there had to be an alternate or if a delegate is enough. Victoria said she would consult the bylaws. It was noted that having an alternate is helpful when the delegate is unable to attend. Members were reminded that delegates/alternates can be either elected or appointed officials from member communities - not just members of the public.

George said there will be changes regarding Arnold's delegate and alternate soon. He said he would let the group know in November after their meeting. George noted he will be moving on from his position at Arnold and will no longer be participating in IGC meetings.

John said changes will also be occurring at Lower burrell. He noted that Chris Fabry will be the new Mayor and likely the new delegate. He added that Ron Welker may be the new alternate but that he would let the group know as soon as possible about these changes. John clarified that he still plans to be involved in IGC meetings.

3. AK IGC Blight Inventory and Plan

Victoria noted that the blight inventory and plan agreements were sent out in the mail a few weeks ago. Communities were instructed to approve and return both copies to the county as soon as possible. She said once the agreements are executed by the Commissioners, participating communities will receive a fully executed copy in the mail for their records. Victoria noted she recently received New Kensington's agreement. She asked if those participating in the project had received their agreements in the mail.

Matt said West Leechburg approved their agreement. Mike and Jody said they weren't sure if their community had received their agreements yet.

Jason applauded the communities participating in the project, noting that this is a very unique partnership that should be celebrated. He added that once the agreement is in place, the county plans to share and celebrate this news.

Jody brought up that Vandergrift's decision to participate wasn't unanimous and that there still could be pushback when it comes time to approve the agreement. He asked what would happen if they approve the agreement but then decide they can't make it work.

Victoria said that the agreement stipulates that if a community no longer wants to participate in the project, they have to give 30 days notice to the county. She added that the county does not

want communities to commit and then back out of the project - communities should follow through.

Mike asked what would happen if a community isn't able to approve the agreement and backs out at this stage. Victoria said this will change the costs for everyone and a new agreement will need to be made with the remaining participating communities.

George expressed concern with getting the agreement approved in Arnold. He asked for support from either a county staff person or another participating AK IGC member to help convey the importance of the project at their August 15th meeting. Jason said if support is needed to let him know.

Jody echoed similar concerns and said support may be needed at Vandergrift's meeting. Jason and Victoria said if additional support is needed at their meeting to let them know.

John asked if there is any opportunity for Lower Burrell to participate in this project in the future. Jason said although the county does not want to exclude any community, there is a point of no return - especially once field data is already complete. He added that perhaps a separate agreement could be executed for a slightly different end product at a different cost in the future. Jason reminded the group that part of the cost savings is doing the data collection at once all together.

Victoria reminded the group that the project cannot start until the agreement is executed. She said time is running out for good weather this year to conduct data collection in the field. She explained that once agreements are in place, one of the first things will be to compile a list of project team members, with representatives from police, fire, code enforcement, etc. from each participating community. She added that project meetings will likely be virtual, during the day, and monthly to provide updates on the project's progress.

4. Shared code enforcement

a. Subcommittee report

b. Discuss third party presentations - tentative August 17th

George provided a subcommittee report, noting that contact was made with three third party companies that provide code enforcement services - KLH Engineers, Harshman CE Group, and Strategic Solutions. George said the companies were asked to prepare 15 minute elevator pitches to present to members at the August meeting.

George asked members if they were okay with having a slightly longer meeting, to allow for the presentations and to ask questions. Members agreed to a slightly longer meeting. Members thanked George for arranging the presentations.

Victoria reminded the group that it would be beneficial to prepare questions for the presenters ahead of time. George said to send questions to him as soon as possible so he can forward to the presenters.

5. Shared fire service

a. Subcommittee report

b. Discuss member interest/participation

Mike noted that there hasn't been enough time to take any action and that there wasn't a subcommittee report to share. Mike asked who is interested in participating in these discussions moving forward. Victoria asked if members had gauged interest from their fire service members.

Matt said their fire department recently unmerged from an arrangement with Hyde Park and that they vocalized disinterest in this topic. He noted that members expressed difficulty working with other departments.

Mike reminded the group that the subcommittee will likely not focus on the topic of merging or consolidating fire departments (although this can work). He said the discussions should focus on departments figuring out ways to share resources, execute cooperative agreements to obtain volunteers, share costs of large purchases, etc.

Victoria suggested that the subcommittee could try focusing on arranging regular regional meetings of Alle-Kiski fire service members to talk about common challenges and solutions. She said there is an intangible value in meeting and discussing issues, which can lead to more tangible results later.

Mike asked if a meeting like this occurs now. Members indicated this does not occur now. Tom said it costs nothing to listen and go to a meeting. He added that with how expensive new ladder trucks are, he would like to see if there is a way to jointly purchase these kinds of large equipment items.

Jason asked if there is a municipal obligation to provide fire service. Members said they are required to provide this service. Mike said if you can't find volunteers, you have to pay people to provide the service or find someone else who can serve your community.

Jason asked about the obligation to provide emergency medical services. Tom explained the arrangement between New Kensington and Arnold and how this is one of the ways the City loses money. Communities have to provide the service, but that doesn't mean they always pay for the service if they are covered by another community. He said New Kensington is often not reimbursed for providing service to other communities, but they still have to provide the service regardless.

6. Discuss House Bill 255 and House Bill 1163

George lead the discussion on House Bill (HB) 255 and HB 1163. George noted that both proposed bills passed in the House and should pass in the Senate. He added that if they do pass, the bills will help communities move forward against blighted and problem properties.

He explained that HB 255 allows municipalities to join in cooperative agreements to fight blight. This allows communities to establish a municipal property maintenance code assistance fund under DCED that will match grants for up to three consecutive years. He noted that municipalities

can establish their own mitigation funds financed by penalties assessed by blight code violations (something that Arnold is already doing). This bill would also allow counties to establish property maintenance codes to enforce in municipalities.

George explained that HB 1163 requires owners to respond during a specific amount of time with repairs to their property or appeal, otherwise this permits the land bank to seize the property in violation. He said right now, even if there are a number of citations on a property, action can be delayed endlessly. This bill would enable the land bank to step in if the municipality brings up a court order to step in. He said the bill would help force the property owner to take action.

Members thanked George for sharing this information.

7. Next AK IGC meeting date: Thursday, August 17th, 2023 @5pm

Tom reminded the group of the next meeting date.

8. Public comment

None.

Other Discussion

Victoria asked members if they would consider hearing the guest visitors at the beginning of the meeting rather than after agenda business. Jody made a motion, which was seconded by George to hear the guests early. Members agreed to hear the guests early.

John introduced Magisterial District Court Judge, Cheryl Yakopec, and Steve Yakopec, Lower Burrell and Upper Burrell's Solicitor. Cheryl introduced herself and said she is running for re-election. She provided a brief presentation and distributed some informational materials to the group.

Tom asked for members to reconsider inviting or encouraging individuals seeking elected positions to use AK IGC meetings as platforms to talk about political campaigns. He noted that other general public meetings are more conducive for this purpose. Members agreed and noted visitors should at least sit through the agenda and have an opportunity to speak during the public comment period.

Victoria shared that the county recently supported Verizon's proposal to complete early action projects to expand broadband infrastructure in the communities of Derry, Fairfield, and Ligonier Township. The county also supported several proposals from other Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in hopes that they will receive funding through the state to expand broadband infrastructure to the rest of the connectivity opportunity areas throughout Westmoreland County.

9. Adjournment

A motion was made by Jody and seconded by Missy to adjourn the meeting. The meeting ended at 6:04 PM.