

Alle-Kiski Intergovernmental Council
Organizational Meeting Minutes
Meeting #1 August 15, 2024
New Kensington City Hall

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

AK IGC: Greg Primm (D-Lower Burrell), Dennis Scarpiniti (A-New Kensington), Tom Guzzo (D-New Kensington), Jody Sarno (D-Vandergrift), Melissa Cortilesio (D-Upper Burrell Township), Marilee Kessler (A-Vandergrift), Adam Zweig (D-Arnold)

Westmoreland County Planning: Josh Spano, Victoria Baur, Jillian Caswell

Guests: Jeaneen Zappa **Public:** None

Meeting started at 5:06 PM.

1. Review/approve minutes from Meeting 11

A motion was made by Greg and seconded by Missy to approve the Meeting 11 minutes. The Meeting 11 minutes were approved.

2. PA DEP MORE Program

Tom introduced speaker, Jeaneen Zapp from [Energy Efficiency Alliance \(EEA\)](#) - a nonprofit dedicated to advancing energy efficiency in the Mid-Atlantic through education and awareness. EEA was provided funding through the R. K. Mellon Foundation to assist communities in Allegheny and Westmoreland Counties apply for funding through the [Municipal Opportunities for Retrofits and Energy Efficiency \(MORE\) Program](#), under the Pennsylvania Energy Development Authority (PEDA). Jeaneen provided an overview of the PA DEP MORE program.

The MORE Program is a financing program to support local governments to deploy energy efficiency and renewable energy projects on municipal buildings and facilities through grants and loans. Counties, Cities, Boroughs, Towns, Township, and Municipal Authorities are eligible to apply. Priority communities in the Alle-Kiski area include Arnold, New Kensington, and Vandergrift Borough - priority application deadline is August 30th, while the final deadline for all communities is October 25th. New Kensington is working with Jeaneen on an application as a priority community.

MORE grants up to \$50,000 can be used to conduct energy efficiency audits, planning for projects, and interest rate buydowns. Jeaneen noted that applicants have to know how they plan to use the funds up front when applying. She clarified that there are “no strings attached” to the plan or audit to implement anything that was identified. It was noted that consultants hired to conduct the energy audit or to create a plan could be hired under professional services, rather than through a request for proposal process.

MORE loans can be used to implement energy efficiency projects identified during the audit/planning. Jeaneen noted that applicants do not have to apply for a loan, but if applicants are applying for the loan, they must have applied and received grant funds through the MORE program first. Loans must be for at least \$5,000 and can have repayment terms of up to 15 years.

Jeaneen noted that loans do have a market interest rate, but that recipients of the MORE grants can buy down their interest rate to as low as 0%.

Members discussed and spoke positively about the MORE program. Dennis pointed out that if communities decide to work with Jenanne, she and the EEA are well-connected and can assist with other funding opportunities when it comes to implementation.

3. AK IGC Year 4

a. Affirm/select Delegate/Alternates and office positions

b. Year 4 agreements sent via mail

Victoria asked members if there were any questions about the Year 4 agreements. These were distributed via mail and email at the beginning of August. She reminded that both copies of the agreement are to be executed (signed, dated, and sealed) and returned to Westmoreland County Planning along with the Year 4 dues by October 1st (or after each communities next meeting date). Victoria noted that she received East Vandergrift's agreement and dues as well as Lower Burrell's dues.

Jody indicated that there may be some lag between when they sign the agreement and when they pay their dues because of budgeting. Victoria asked for Vandergrift to maintain communication about this.

Victoria reminded members to share any changes to each community's designated Delegate and Alternate. She noted that Allegheny Township's Alternate position is open and that perhaps with their new Manager, they might be able to fill this position. She noted that if there are any changes to D/A's, she can distribute an updated contact list to members.

Victoria asked if there were any changes to the office positions of Tom as chair, Mike as vice-chair, or Greg as secretary. She reminded members that there is no limit on the number of terms members can serve in these positions. Members agreed to keep the office positions the same.

4. Battery Reflection Exercise

Victoria and Jill lead members through a Battery Reflection Exercise. The purpose of the exercise was to provide members with an opportunity to reflect on the last year of AK IGC operation (year 3), bring any issues up, drive home lessons learned, clarify expectations, and get excited about year 4 operation. Members reflected on their experience participating in the AK IGC, sharing one "positive" aspect, one "negative" aspect (or opportunity to improve), and one aspect that "charges" (or excites them) about the IGC. Responses from the activity are summarized below:

Positive - members express they were happy about: productive discussions on code enforcement solutions; Lower Burrell's addition to the blight project; virtual meetings have been established (convenient); discussions on supporting volunteer fire departments; discussions on community-based projects (decided on spring tree planting); and progress on the regional blight inventory project.

Negative - members expressed some areas of opportunity such as: the need to gain more recognition for the IGC as an established group; need to encourage more neighboring communities to participate (grow the IGC); virtual meetings (some expressed that these are not as impactful as in-person meetings); and the IGC could work to make more progress on furthering shared code enforcement.

Charge - members expressed excitement about: looking forward to continue working with neighboring communities and sharing community ideas; accomplishing the blight inventory project; continued discussions to work together as a region (solidarity); growing a relationship with state legislators; continued growth and teamwork; continued progress on code enforcement; identifying new programs we can do together; and continuing to represent our communities in the IGC.

Missy and Adam noted that virtual meetings are not as impactful as in-person meetings. Adam asked if meetings need to occur every month. Victoria noted that the dues are based on monthly meetings (every other month being virtual). The option of meeting in person only every other month was not explored and members already voted on the dues schedule for year 4. Victoria asked if monthly meetings were too frequent. Tom noted that since the dues schedule was based on the current meeting schedule for Year 4, that members explore this arrangement for Year 5. He suggested that the IGC prioritize speakers for virtual meetings to encourage more meaningful discussions.

Jody noted that he appreciates that the IGC is a great place to network with other local officials and that the council serves as a sounding board for common issues and challenges. He noted that after mentioning Vandergrift's difficulty with residents not paying their sewage bill at last month's meeting, their council has a plan to encourage compliance, thanks to the IGC's feedback.

5. AK Blight Inventory and Plan Project

a. Status Report

Jill provided a brief status report on the blight inventory project, reminding members about its two phases. Phase I, which involved data collection and fieldwork, is complete. The Planning Division is shifting to work through Phase II, which involves reviewing data and tools as well as meeting with a regional blight task force members.

Lower Burrell is the last community verifying property condition data, with a deadline of August 19th. Jill and Victoria asked if Lower Burrell has any feedback on the data that was collected. Greg said the City didn't have any feedback.

Jill let members know that the Planning Division recently met with LGA to check-in on the progress of the project. She said after Lower Burrell's data verification period, the Local Government Academy (LGA) will reach out to Lower Burrell, as well as New Kensington and Arnold, to schedule one-on-one meetings to discuss the results of the blight inventory data and other data analysis such as demographics, housing, and municipal budgeting - related to the market analysis component of the project. Meetings are anticipated to be scheduled in September.

Jill mentioned that instead of having additional one-on-one meetings with all communities, LGA will instead be engaging with communities at a larger regional meeting in the fall that will be lead by Westmoreland County Planning. Victoria added that at this and other meetings in the fall, participants will review and analyze data and also strategize what will be prioritized in the blight mitigation plan. Victoria said the Planning Division will likely be scheduling these meetings starting in October at the earliest.

6. Shared fire service

a. Subcommittee report

Jill shared an update from the recent fire subcommittee meeting held virtually on August 13th. At this meeting, subcommittee members reviewed and finalized the talking points that will be used when approaching school districts about the High School Entry Level Fire Training (HS-ELFT) program through Allegheny County Fire Academy.

Jill noted that subcommittee member Becky, a counselor from Springdale School District, has been helpful in providing a lot of information from the school district perspective. She noted that the program can be counted towards the pathways program, which is a state requirement. Jill shared that the subcommittee suggested making testimonial videos for the program where former students, current teachers, and others can share their experience and advocate for participation in the program. Jody suggested that the testimonial videos could be linked via a QR code on the talking points document to make it easier for people to access. Victoria and Jill agreed this could be added.

Victoria shared that she spoke with the president of the Allegheny-Kiski Health Foundation, John Pastorek, regarding possible funding for transportation costs. John spoke positively about the fire training program and recalled funding transportation for the Highlands High School for their first year. He said that he is open to discussing providing funding to cover transportation for Westmoreland-based schools to participate in the HS-ELFT program for their first year, but that coordination with schools is going to be key (in order to share buses). She noted that future transportation could potentially be covered by each school district's CTC buses.

Tom asked when members can start talking with school districts. Victoria said the talking points are essentially ready to use and that members can start having these conversations at any point. She added that when video testimonials are prepared, these can be shared/distributed as a follow-up to the discussions. Victoria asked for members to keep the IGC informed of these discussions with school districts. Jill reminded members of the HS-ELFT brochure, which has a lot of helpful information when approaching school districts, in addition to the talking points.

7. EMS crisis letter

Victoria noted that seven out of eight member communities adopted a resolution in support of the solutions identified in the EMS Crisis in PA White Paper that was prepared by Greg Primm. After some additional follow-up, the Planning Division will be mailing and emailing a letter as well as the resolutions and white paper as attachments to legislators and delegates to advocate for

policy reform and solutions to this crisis. The letter includes an invitation to upcoming IGC meetings.

Victoria thanked Greg for his work putting together the EMS Crisis in PA White Paper and initiating this effort. She said that if others have topics they'd like to pursue and address state legislators with, please suggest those ideas and the Planning Division can help support this.

8. Nonmember letter

Victoria distributed a copy of the letter that was sent to neighboring nonmember communities located in the Alle-Kiski Planning District area including Washington Township, Hyde Park Borough, and Oklahoma Borough. She reminded members that a decision was made at last month's meeting to offer a discounted rate to new member communities of 50% off of their first years dues if they participate in the IGC.

The purpose of the letter serves to reminder nonmember communities of the AK IGC, its purpose, current activities, and invite communities to upcoming meetings. Victoria noted that these letters were sent last week and that follow-up email could also be sent on the IGC's behalf.

9. Next AK IGC meeting: Thursday, September 19th, 2024 @ 5PM (meeting will be virtual)

a. Discuss agenda items

Tom and Victoria reminded members to send any agenda items along. Tom asked if there was any interest in following up with Michael Halpern from MuniReg for another presentation virtually regarding his services. Victoria noted that Michael had already attended a virtual IGC meeting and that the group had suggested inviting him back for an in person meeting.

Victoria noted that the IGC could reach back out to Michael from MuniReg to present virtually again, and or to other speakers such as the Westmoreland Conservation District and HRG to discuss MS4 projects. Adam suggested a transportation presentation from Josh would be beneficial for members at the September meeting.

10. Public Comment

None.

Other Discussion

Josh provided an update regarding the [Westmoreland Broadband Program](#), noting that the Planning Division organized virtual meetings to discuss the [Pennsylvania Broadband Ready Communities Program](#) (BBRC). The purpose of the program is to create a process to ensure that communities are prepared for new broadband infrastructure. He noted that if communities indicated they plan to participate in the program, the county and consultant Michael Baker International will be reaching out directly to walk communities through the processes.

Greg asked for additional step-by-step instructions for what communities need to do to participate in the BBRC program. He said something like this would be helpful for the City's council. Josh reminded that there is a 5-minute video on the Westmoreland Broadband website summarizing the program. Greg he can share the video at their upcoming council meeting, but

that it may lead to more questions. Jill and Josh noted that they could provide a follow-up with step-by-step instructions.

Josh provided an update regarding the [Westmoreland County Hazard Mitigation Plan](#). The Westmoreland County Department of Public Safety is working on making updates to the county's hazard mitigation plan, which aims to address hazards that impact communities. He noted that there is a [public survey](#) where input is being collected. Additionally, communities are encouraged to participate in this process - the next working group meeting will be at the Westmoreland Intermediate Unit in Greensburg on September 19th at 10AM.

Josh shared that his background is in transportation planning and that he could provide an overview of the transportation funding that is available to communities. Members agreed that a presentation on transportation would be beneficial.

Victoria provided an update on efforts to explore joint MS4 projects. She noted that the Planning Division reached out to HRG and received additional contacts to connect with. She said she will continue to follow-up to see if HRG would be willing to attend a meeting to talk about regional MS4 permitting or joint MS4 projects.

Adam noted that Arnold recently hired a new full time code enforcement officer.

Adjournment

A motion was made by Jody and seconded by Adam to adjourn the meeting. The meeting ended at 6:09 PM.