

**Alle-Kiski Intergovernmental Council**  
**Regular Meeting Minutes**  
**Meeting #4 - November 17, 2022**  
**New Kensington City Hall**

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

**AK IGC:** George Hawdon (D-Arnold), Tom Guzzo (D-New Kensington), Dennis Scarpiniti (A-New Kensington), Kristen Sarno (A-East Vandergrift Borough), Jody Sarno (D-Vandergrift Borough), Marilee Kessler (A-Vandergrift Borough), Matt Grantz (D-West Leechburg)

**Westmoreland County Planning:** Corey Block, Victoria Baur

**Guests:** Amanda Settelmaier (Turtle Creek Valley Council of Governments)

**Public:** Eric Gartley (City of Arnold Fire Department), Jaclyn Shaw (City of Arnold Solicitor)

Meeting started at 5:05 PM.

**1. Review/approve minutes from Meeting 3**

A motion was made by Jody and seconded by Kristen to approve the Meeting 3 minutes. The Meeting 3 minutes were approved.

**2. Guest speaker: Amanda Settelmaier, Turtle Creek Valley Council Of Governments (TCVCOG)**

**a. Regional code enforcement program**

Amanda provided background information on the TCVCOG and cited blight as a common problem in communities. She noted that the TCVCOG, Steel Rivers COG, and Twin Rivers COG conducted a study on the cost of blight within their communities in 2012. This study helped quantify the problem and identify that about 60 percent of Allegheny County's blight is located within the footprint of three COGs.

With this information, the three COGs joined forces to create the Tri COG Land Bank to help address blight. The TCVCOG also used this information to help enhance code enforcement within the region by creating their own digital system. Amanda stressed the importance of technology in code enforcement, especially in communities with limited resources. She noted that having a digitized history of compliance is critical when pursuing and enforcing fines. Amanda also stressed the importance of paying code officers well in order to keep and attract them, as this line of work is challenging and undervalued.

Amanda walked members through the CODENFORCE system, which helps build a violation case and walk the code enforcement officer (CEO) through workflows and checklists. She noted that the system is both parcel and person-based and is able to generate reports to provide to council and staff. Amanda added that the TCVCOG is willing to work with other communities interested in the code enforcement software.

Amanda shared that out of the 20 member municipalities, two currently subscribe to the COGs code enforcement program. She noted that the COG did have five communities using the program at one time, but that some communities dropped out of the program due to high costs and or wanting to control code enforcement on their own again.

Amanda said that the TCVCOG is looking into workforce development training for CEOs. Victoria shared that the County's Redevelopment Authority is also looking at training for CEOs by working with the Local Government Academy. Victoria noted that the RACW is working to develop an affordable code enforcement software to deploy in communities, but that its availability may be a few years off.

Members asked questions and discussed the TCVCOGs code enforcement program. George asked who the CEOs work for - the municipality or the COG. Amanda clarified that CEOs work for the TCVCOG and that they are paid \$20.60 per hour plus \$13,000 per year for benefits. She added that communities that subscribe to the code enforcement program pay a 15% flat participation fee, plus a fee based on the total number of parcels in each community, and a fee for estimated inspection costs (this is on top of their annual COG dues). Amanda noted that any inspection fees accrued go back into the COG.

Corey asked whether the digital code enforcement program has value in small communities with just a few hundred parcels. Amanda said that a digital code enforcement program has value regardless the size of the community.

Jody asked how to streamline the court process in regards to pursuing fee collection from violators. Amanda noted that by having a digital code enforcement system, communities have a better documented history of violations to use in court to pursue and collect fees. She added that approaching district judges to discuss these issues and streamlining the process isn't a bad idea.

Dennis asked if there is a solicitor for the COG or if each individual municipal solicitor is used for issues. Amanda clarified that each individual solicitor is used when needed for the respective municipality's business, but that there is a solicitor for the COG as well.

### **3. Arnold Fire Chief, Eric Gartley**

#### **a. Volunteer Tax Credit for Firefighters**

Eric provided an overview of the Volunteer Firefighter and EMS Tax Credit Incentive Program. He explained that the program offers real estate or earned income tax incentives to help attract, retain, and thank firefighters and EMS personnel for their service. He noted that there are requirements to participate in the program such as participants serving a certain number of volunteer hours or completing training or certifications, in addition to reporting requirements. He added that the more certifications volunteers have, the more grants/funding the fire departments can access.

Eric explained that although each municipality can individually participate in the program, a group of municipalities, such as the Alle-Kiski Intergovernmental Council, can participate. He noted that if all of the AK IGC municipalities participate in the program, this would benefit firefighters and EMS personnel greatly as they often live, work, and volunteer across municipal boundaries and serve multiple departments.

Eric clarified that if multiple municipalities banded together to participate in the program, the real estate and or earned income tax incentive rates and participation requirements would have to be the same across municipalities.

**4. Next AK IGC meeting date: Thursday, January 19th, 2023 @ 5PM**

**a. Reminder: No meeting in December! Happy Holidays!**

**b. Discuss agenda items for upcoming meeting**

Victoria reminded the group that there wouldn't be a meeting in December.

**i. AK IGC Bylaws (Review/discuss proposed amendments)**

Victoria reminded the group to re-review the proposed bylaw amendments to discuss at the January meeting. She noted that no additional comments were submitted by members since the proposed amendments were distributed to review in October 2022.

Kristen shared comments on the proposed bylaw amendments and suggested additional language be added to the financial section regarding financial reporting from the County to AK IGC members. Victoria noted that the suggestions could be incorporated into the bylaws if the group agrees. The group discussed and expressed the need for regular financial reporting to show dues coming in and expenses going out of the AK IGC. The group expressed that this type of report would be helpful for municipal elected officials.

Corey and Victoria acknowledged the need for financial reporting but noted that the IGC does not have a budget and that dues only pay for administrative support as agreed to in the cooperation agreement. Victoria and Corey noted that additional reporting could be explored if this is needed.

**ii. AK IGC Blight Inventory and Plan (Review/discuss draft proposal)**

Victoria reminded the group to review the draft blight inventory and plan proposal to discuss at the January meeting. She noted that the proposal is just a jumping off point to determine which communities are interested in the project. Victoria added that County Planning staff capacity and vehicle access would also determine the timeline and limitations of the project.

**5. Public comment**

None.

**Other Discussion**

Victoria reminded members to download and try using the Slack chat application that was previously shared. She encouraged members to continue discussions amongst members to keep momentum and work on items in between meetings. Victoria noted she would reshare instructions to join Slack after the meeting.

## **6. Adjournment**

A motion was made by Matt and seconded by Jody to adjourn the meeting. The meeting ended at 5:58 PM