

Alle-Kiski Intergovernmental Council
Regular Meeting Minutes
Meeting #5 - January 18th, 2024
New Kensington City Hall

Attendees (D-Delegate, A-Alternate)

AK IGC: Tom Guzzo (D-New Kensington), Matt Grantz (D-West Leechburg), Dennis Scarpiniti (A-New Kensington), Kristen Sarno (A-East Vandergrift), Barbara Sharp (D-East Vandergrift), Marilee Kessler (A-Vandergrift), Michael Korn (D-Allegheny Township), Greg Primm (D-Lower Burrell), Chris Fabry (A-Lower Burrell), Melissa Cortileso (D-Upper Burrell), Adam Zweig (A-Arnold)

Westmoreland County Planning: Jillian Caswell, Victoria Baur

Guests: N/A **Public:** George Hawdon (Resident of Arnold)

Meeting started at 5:02 PM.

1. Review/approve minutes from Meeting 4

A motion was made by Missy and seconded by Matt to approve the Meeting 4 minutes. The Meeting 4 minutes were approved.

2. AK IGC Year 3

a. Document Delegate/Alternate Changes

b. Nominate new secretary

Adam stated that he is currently the City of Arnold's alternate delegate but he is unsure if he or another council member will be the primary delegate moving forward. Adam mentioned that he will discuss the delegate position with his council at their next meeting.

Chris confirmed that he will be the alternate delegate for Lower Burrell and Greg will be the primary delegate for Lower Burrell.

Victoria informed the group that there is an open secretary position and asked the group for nominations. Victoria also reminded the group that the secretary's responsibilities are to review and offer changes to meeting minutes and to serve as a member of the executive committee.

A nomination was made by Tom and seconded by Missy to nominate Greg as secretary. Greg Primm was made secretary by formal roll call majority vote.

Victoria announced to the group that the year three agreement was executed in December by the county commissioners and members will be receiving copies from the solicitor's office soon.

3. MuniReg follow-up

a. Discuss questions

Victoria reminded the group that Michael Halpern, President and founder of MuniReg, provided an overview of MuniReg and its programs at November's meeting. Victoria informed the group that MuniReg assists communities with mitigating blight by administering vacant property registration ordinances and vacant property rental ordinances. Victoria also said that MuniReg

helps to navigate banking and financial institutions to find out who to contact when properties become foreclosed. Lower Burrell and New Kensington currently work with MuniReg.

Victoria noted that Michael offered to come present to the group in person if the group has any further interest in MuniReg. Greg suggested that it could be beneficial for the group if Michael came in person. Victoria said she would follow-up with Michael.

4. AK IGC Blight Inventory and Plan

a. Report

Jill provided a brief update on the Alle-Kiski blight inventory project, noting that since the last time the group met, the Planning Division was able to complete data collection in East Vandergrift, Vandergrift, West Leechburg, and Allegheny Township. Jill informed the group that preliminary online mapping tools were created for the four completed communities, which were distributed to the respective communities. Jill showed the group the preliminary online mapping examples.

Victoria reminded the group that data was collected using a good, fair, and poor property rating system based on a property conditions assessment guide, and pictures were taken of all the properties rated as poor. Victoria mentioned that there is potential to add other data, such as police incidents, building permits, and code violations, to the mapping tools using additional data sets that communities may have available.

Jill updated the group on the communities from which the Planning Division has received additional data sets. She noted that building permit data has been received from East Vandergrift, and code violation data has been received from West Leechburg.

Adam and Tom said that they would inquire about contacts that can provide potential code violations or police incident reports for Arnold and New Kensington. Adam asked if the data needed to be geocoded, and Victoria confirmed that the data is useful for analysis if it has an address or parcel number. Victoria further explained that data is more beneficial for the project if code violations are organized according to violation categories. Mike mentioned that he is still determining whether Allegheny Township would provide additional data sets.

Victoria asked if members had any comments, questions, or reactions to preliminary mapping tools that had been distributed. Kristen and Barb said that the mapping tools confirmed locations of blight in the borough. Michael agreed that the mapping tool aligned with Allegheny Township's general understanding of where blight was occurring, and the mapping tool was helpful to visualize where the blight was centralized. Marilee said Vandergrift found merit in the project by being able to meet Planning Division staff and see them conduct fieldwork in their community.

Victoria said the Planning Division would be reaching out for a combined meeting with Arnold and New Kensington to discuss safety protocols, communications, and planning for fieldwork in those communities in the spring.

5. Shared code enforcement

a. Discuss subcommittee status/report

b. Follow-up on third party providers

Victoria asked about the status of the shared code enforcement subcommittee. She mentioned that an objective for the subcommittee was to explore which code enforcement companies might be beneficial for the group, and they had made progress on this goal by having code enforcement companies present and some communities subscribed to needed services.

Tom mentioned that while some communities have had discussions with the companies about their needs, the group hiring a shared code enforcement officer was still an item of discussion. Victoria reminded the group that the AK IGC cannot directly hire a shared code enforcement officer, but, a municipality can choose to be the lead community in the hiring process.

Tom suggested that we keep the subcommittee active in case members want to continue discussing. The group agreed with Tom to continue pursuing the shared code enforcement subcommittee. Victoria asked the group if anyone else would like to join the shared code enforcement subcommittee, and Adam said he possibly would in the future.

Kristen asked Victoria if she knew of a program that trains code enforcement officers in Westmoreland County. Victoria mentioned that the Redevelopment Authority has discussed this and that the Local Government Academy has a program in the works. She said she would check on these programs.

6. Shared fire service subcommittee

a. Discuss subcommittee status/report

Michael reminded the group that shared fire service was discussed at the last meeting, including opportunities to share staff and equipment. Michael said the central area of discussion revolved around developing reciprocal agreements for municipalities participating in the tax incentive program for firefighters.

Michael suggested that reciprocal agreements should continue to be a point of discussion and recommended that each community speak to their council's to gauge interest. The group agreed to continue pursuing reciprocal agreements.

Tom suggested that the group take the initiative to start a project or program that attracts new volunteer firefighters. Tom explained that the number of firefighters in Alle-Kiski communities has decreased dramatically.

George told the group that New Kensington-Arnold High School is working with Highland Hose. Highland Hose is a program that helps juniors and seniors become involved in the fire academy. George informed the group that Highland has seen success with the program, and it has resulted in ten to fifteen students becoming involved in the fire academy per year.

Tom and George suggested that contacts from Highland Hose and WCCC, along with local fire chiefs from New Kensington and Arnold, be invited to a meeting to discuss the feasibility of pursuing the Highland Hose program or another recruitment program. The group agreed it would organize this meeting and suggested that superintendents or leaders from school districts also be invited.

Victoria reminded the group that the fire service subcommittee only has one member and asked the group to consider joining Michael on the subcommittee.

7. Next AK IGC meeting date: Thursday, February 15th 2024 @ 5PM (online via Google Meet)

a. Discuss agenda items

Victoria stressed that agenda items should be sent to the secretary monthly before the group meets. She reminded the group of its online project management tracker resource and said to reflect on past priorities and project ideas. Victoria urged the group to consider what projects and areas of discussion should be acted upon or revisited in future meetings. She noted that the project management tracker is available online on the [Reimaging Our Westmoreland](#) website.

Chris asked the group if they had ever discussed EMS funding and if everyone would be interested in discussing it in future meetings. The group agreed that they would be willing to discuss EMS funding. Chris and Greg offered to present to the group on EMS funding needs at the March meeting.

Greg stressed that EMS funding is a challenge for communities everywhere. He further mentioned that even if the group cannot assist in finding funding, the group has the power to talk to legislators about finding ways to raise money for EMS groups - using the AK IGC as a collective voice. George noted that volunteer fire tax credit extends to EMS providers as well. George said the credit does not extend to for-profit companies. Greg mentioned that Lower Burrell sees more conflict with retaining EMS staff than recruiting EMS staff.

Greg explained that funding for EMS has become a significant problem because communities do not always consider its urgency until it is needed. George mentioned that EMS funding is available through Homeland Security grants if the group is interested in researching how the funding is accessed. George noted that the size of communities can impede this funding, but applying for it as a group may increase the possibility of accessing it.

8. Public comment

George reminded the group that Harshman CE Group offered a retainer to communities for code enforcement services after they came to present. George suggested that the group consider coming up with their own retainer number based on the group's needs and with the help of an attorney.

Other Discussion

Tom briefly summarized the group's recent activity, including the group's involvement in a blight inventory, recent presentations from shared code enforcement companies, discussion surrounding shared fire service, the use of shared drones, joint purchasing of equipment, and a recent presentation from MuniReg. Tom mentioned that adding more communities to the blight inventory project can be discussed if any communities that chose to opt-out decide they want to participate.

Greg asked Victoria if the county still contributed yearly funds to the Local Government Academy. Victoria was unsure but mentioned that they contributed funds towards the blight inventory project.

9. Adjournment

A motion was made by Tom and seconded by Missy to adjourn the meeting. The meeting ended at 6:01 PM.