

Alle-Kiski Intergovernmental Council
Regular Meeting Minutes
Meeting #7 March 21st, 2024
New Kensington City Hall

Attendees (D-Delegate, A-Alternate)

AK IGC: Aaron Moore (A-Arnold), Jody Sarno (D-Vandergrift), Matt Grantz (D-West Leechburg), Kristen Sarno (A-East Vandergrift), Tom Guzzo (D-New Kensington), Dennis Scarpiniti (A-New Kensington), Greg Primm (D-Lower Burrell), Melissa Cortilesio (D-Upper Burrell)

Westmoreland County Planning: Jillian Caswell, Victoria Baur

Guests: N/A **Public:** None

Meeting started at 5:04 PM.

1. Review/approve minutes from Meeting 6

A revision was made to the minutes by Kristen Sarno, correcting KHL to KLH on page 3. A motion was made by Greg and seconded by Missy to approve the Meeting 6 minutes with the revision. The Meeting 6 minutes were approved.

2. Discuss EMS funding/support

Greg provided an introduction to the EMS crisis in Pennsylvania. He noted that this is something all communities are struggling with - citing difficulties with staffing, funding, equipment, and response times. He said that although grant funds are beneficial, a more permanent and sustainable funding source needs to be identified for communities. Greg added that third class cities, such as Lower Burrell, aren't able to tax to fund EMS, which puts communities in a difficult position. He suggested that the AK IGC can be utilized to help address the EMS crisis by providing a unified voice to approach legislators.

Greg provided a 12-page white paper to members summarizing the EMS Crisis in Pennsylvania. He asked members to review the white paper and share with their respective councils and boards to consider adopting by resolution as the AK IGC's formal stance on the crisis. He said to send any additions, revisions, suggestions, or questions to him by the next meeting - taking one month to review the document. Once revisions are made to the white paper, he asked for member communities to consider adopting the document by resolution or issuing a statement showing support for the AK IGC's stance on the EMS crisis.

Members discussed and acknowledged the EMS crisis. Missy asked if paid and volunteer services were addressed in the document. Greg said both types of staffing models as well as equipment, facilities, urban and rural perspectives, possible solutions, etc. are all address in the white paper. Jody suggested to add data to show EMS statistics, helping to make the case in the final document. Greg agreed and said that data could be added to the document. Dennis suggested a possible solution would be to create a capital line item at the state level.

Once the finalized white paper is adopted by interested member communities, Greg suggested that the next step would be to prepare an AK IGC letter, referencing the white paper, to send to state legislators. The letter would call attention to the EMS crisis and implore legislators to work to find a more permanent funding solution. Members discussed that an additional step could be to invite legislators to an AK IGC meeting to discuss the crisis and possible solutions in person.

Members agreed to review the document and provide any feedback directly to Greg before the April meeting. Greg said that the white paper provides the base of information that everyone needs and that tapping into everyone's collective voice through the AK IGC doesn't cost anything.

3. AK Blight Inventory and Plan

a. Report

Jill provided a status update on the Blight Inventory project. She informed the group that the Planning Division met with New Kensington and Arnold virtually this week to provide an overview of the project and discuss safety considerations. Jill and Victoria summarized the blight inventory process and noted that the Planning Division will be resuming fieldwork next month. Victoria added that data collection may take a few full-days in Arnold and New Kensington, but that this will be spread out over weeks as the density and degree of blight conditions, as well as the weather, will impact data collection.

Jill shared that the Planning Division will be meeting with the Local Government Academy (LGA) to review the data collected for the four completed communities and to also discuss market analysis findings in April. She added that after the meeting, LGA will likely be reaching out to the communities where data collection is complete to meet and conduct their own engagement. Victoria added that once all of the data collection is completed ideally by July, the Planning Division will kick-off the blight plan process in late summer or early fall. The blight plan process will involve engagement with the six participating communities to determine blight mitigation tools to include in the final plan.

Victoria reiterated points from the meeting with New Kensington and Arnold, noting that coordination with the two communities police departments will be needed to ensure safe working conditions. Tom expressed that the City of New Kensington's police would be available to provide support. Victoria also reminded that the Planning Division is invoicing quarterly for the project. She said all payments were received for the first quarter and that the next invoices would be distributed soon.

4. Shared code enforcement

a. Subcommittee report

Victoria asked Kristen if any additional communication was made with LGA regarding their municipal intern program. Kristen said no additional communication was made, but that LGA was interested learning about code enforcement in a small borough, such as East Vandergrift, since they previously did not have a permanent code enforcement program in place.

Kristen said LGA hopes to start their municipal intern program this summer. The 6-month-long program will place college students in municipalities to learn alongside classroom instruction. She

noted that LGA indicated there may be PA DCED funds to potentially provide the AK IGC an intern. Victoria asked if Kristen could maintain a line of communication with LGA regarding this.

Victoria asked if Kristen could provide an update on East Vandergrift's experience so far with Strategic Solutions as their code enforcement provider. Kristen said the Borough has had a positive experience so far but that they have hit their monthly cap (hours and cost) already for March. She noted that East Vandergrift is paying the full rate since the negotiated rate was only offered if more than one AK IGC community subscribed to the company's services. Kristen said that although Strategic Solutions has been expensive, they have helped setup a system in place using Excel and formal letters to issue code violations. Kristen noted that this may not be a long-term solution to code enforcement, but they will at least have a system in place.

5. Shared fire service

a. Subcommittee report

b. Discuss/plan volunteer fire service meeting

Victoria noted that Mike Kornis was away so there wouldn't be a subcommittee report.

Victoria reminded members that the group discussed having a round-table discussion on supporting fire services at the May 16th meeting, extending an invitation to the Highland School District's fire training class instructor, Highland Hose Fire Company representative, New Kensington-Arnold School District superintendent, and local fire chiefs. She noted that the purpose of the meeting would be to specifically talk about the Highland School District's fire training class to consider replicating the program at the New Kensington-Arnold School District.

Victoria provided an overview of the [Highlands High School Fire Service Training class](#), noting that it is an elective year-long course that provides 10th-12th grade students with entry level training and hands-on learning covering topics such as fire training, first aid, and CPR. She noted that Mr. Michael Krzeminski was listed as the fire service training instructor and added that the class is made possible through the [Highlands Emergency Services Alliance \(HESA\)](#). HESA is an alliance representing several fire companies across four municipalities that collaborate with Highlands School District to keep volunteer emergency service providers in business by recruiting and training new and young members.

Victoria shared that the Planning Division offered support to Mike to help coordinate the meeting by reaching out to possible attendees. She said the Planning Division would be reaching out at the end of March to prepare for the May meeting. Victoria noted that there may be a time conflict at the May meeting as Michael Halpern of MuniReg was originally scheduled to return in-person. She proposed that the group reschedule Michael Halpern for a different in-person meeting to allow the full time for the fire discussion. Members agreed to cancel Michael Halpern for the May 16th meeting.

Tom said the City's fire chief would be willing to attend the meeting. He added that the New Kensington-Arnold SD may have a class to build off of already. Victoria asked if the group should invite the teacher of the existing class or the superintendant to come to the meeting. Tom said he wasn't sure and that he could find out.

6. Next AK IGC meeting date: Thursday, April 18th, 2024 @ 5PM (virtual via Google Meet)

a. Discuss agenda items

Tom reminded members to review the [Alle-Kiski Planning District plan](#) before the next meeting to consider potential items for the AK IGC to accomplish, including short-term projects that benefit many communities.

7. Public comment

None.

Other Discussion

Tom introduced newly elected councilman Aaron Moore of the City of Arnold to the AK IGC. Aaron noted that he would be the alternate delegate for Arnold. Members welcomed Aaron.

Tom shared that the New Kensington-Arnold School District has had recent success with a therapy/comfort dog for students. He noted that the dog, Macey, is handled by the school's SRO and that they kids responded very positively.

Greg shared that the [Community Foundation of Westmoreland County](#) (CFWC) is working with a team of Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) graduate students to study how the organization can work and partner more directly with communities. He noted that McCrea Martino, Executive Director of the CFWC, is looking for community leaders to interview to gain insight. Greg noted that he had just completed his interview with one of the graduate students and they were intrigued to learn about the AK IGC. He said that at the end of this, their study will identify ways the CFWC can better partner with communities, beyond just providing funding. Greg said anyone that is interested in providing input to help with the study can reach out to CMU graduate student, Layla Bera at lbera@andrew.cmu.edu.

Victoria announced that Westmoreland County Planning will be starting the next Planning Districts process soon, working with eight communities in the Mon-Yough area. She said the Planning Division may be reaching out to ask someone from the Alle-Kiski Planning District and Central Planning District to be at the kick-off meeting to speak about their experience. Victoria provided an update on the status of the Central Planning District, noting that the group continues to meet and has intentions of formalizing by creating a Council of Government, but that nothing official has been completed.

Victoria reminded members of the Redevelopment Authority of Westmoreland County's third annual [Blight Remediation Summit](#) at the Westmoreland County Community College in Youngwood on April 19th. She said the event will feature information sessions and resources on topics of blight, housing, code enforcement, and more. Victoria noted the Planning Division will be present and encouraged members to attend.

Victoria shared that the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission submitted an application to the EPA for funding to create a regional [Climate Pollution Reduction Program](#). The program will provide funding for projects such as solar panel installations and fleet vehicle electrification. She

noted that the County's interest was included in the application, but that funds have not yet been awarded. She said to keep this program in-mind for potential projects in the future.

Members discussed solar and fleet vehicle electrification projects already completed in communities. Representatives of West Leechburg and East Vandergrift both noted that solar panels have been installed at their municipal buildings utilizing ARPA funds or local grant funding. Greg indicated that Allegheny Township had incorporated hybrid police vehicles and that Ford may be switching solely to hybrid police cruisers in the future. Greg cautioned that the Climate Pollution Reduction Program may face some political pushback and that education is the best way to combat this. Jody noted the maintenance of electric vehicles, specifically replacing batteries, may be a cost barrier for some communities.

Adjournment

A motion was made by Tom and seconded by Jody to adjourn the meeting. The meeting ended at 5:50 PM.