

Alle-Kiski Intergovernmental Council Meeting Minutes

Meeting #8

April 21, 2022

New Kensington City Hall

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

AK IGC: Kristen Sarno (A-East Vandergrift), Melissa Cortileso (D-Upper Burrell Township), Michael Conley (A-Upper Burrell Township), George Hawdon (D-Arnold), Tom Guzzo (D-New Kensington), Dennis Scarpiniti (A-New Kensington), Ren Steele (D-Allegheny Township), Michael Kornis (A-Allegheny Township), Matt Grantz (D-West Leechburg), John Andrejcik (D-Lower Burrell)

Westmoreland County Planning: Corey Block, Victoria Baur

Public: Jody Sarno (Vandergrift), Marilee Kessler (Vandergrift), John Turack (Smart Growth Partnership of Westmoreland County/Penn State Extension)

Meeting started at 5:01 PM.

Tom called the meeting to order, confirmed that everyone had a chance to review the meeting #7 minutes, and asked if there were any questions or concerns. A motion was made by Melissa to approve the minutes and it was seconded by George. The meeting #7 minutes were approved.

Tom updated the group on the letter to COSTARS regarding the AK IGC's complaints with Compass Minerals. He confirmed that he sent the letter on behalf of the AK IGC communities.

Tom transitioned to follow-up on ideas of items to be considered for joint purchase. At the last meeting, Tom asked the group to seriously consider items to jointly purchase together - as this was indicated as a priority of the group and could be easily accomplished. Tom urged the group that purchasing something jointly would be a great way to show others the value in working together. He asked the group to share their ideas.

Victoria asked if any communities were in need of a piece of equipment or were looking to purchase something on their own. She asked if discussions regarding items to jointly purchase had occurred outside via email or phone since the last meeting.

John said that Lower Burrell's budget was already allocated for 2022 and that they were not planning on making any additional equipment purchases. Tom noted that although this hadn't been discussed in great detail previously, he asked if there was any interest in jointly purchasing a drone. John and Tom added that there is a local Alle-Kiski-based drone company, Eye-bot, the group could work with.

The group discussed the benefits of having access to a drone noting it could be used in emergency response situations, for property condition analyses, and for capturing aerial

imagery of communities for use in marketing, etc. Tom added that a drone could be used to assist with policing, for example, as a number of the Alle-Kiski communities are already members of the Westmoreland SWAT team. Tom suggested that the group could either pursue purchasing a drone, identifying key staff from code enforcement or police to be trained and certified to fly the drone, OR the group could pursue jointly purchasing drone service through Eye-bot or another company via some type of a group contract.

Jody added that the group should consider the legal ramifications of using a drone for property condition analyses, noting that there may be limitations on where and what images can be taken with a drone. Tom suggested that perhaps the drone company could provide guidance on the legal limitations of drone images.

Melissa asked about how the group could ensure the drone would be made accessible to other departments and other communities if perhaps it is held or kept with one community's police department, for example. Tom said that the purpose of the drone's joint-use would be explained and made clear to staff upfront and that this could be incorporated into the drone training. George added that the group could develop a written protocol on how the drone should be shared and used amongst participating municipalities.

Tom noted that further exploration and discussions would be needed to determine the cost and arrangement to either jointly purchase a drone for the IGC to own or to purchase a drone service through a company. Tom added that he could reach out directly to Jake Lydick with Eye-bot to see if he could attend the May AK IGC meeting and discuss options with the group. The group agreed that they would like Jake to be invited to the next meeting.

Tom transitioned to follow-up on ideas for the blight mapping/developable properties project - as this was indicated as a priority for the group. At the last meeting, Tom asked the group to review the example blight inventories (of [Monessen](#), [Greensburg](#), and [Latrobe](#)) and think of ideas and questions to bounce off of Planning Division staff. Victoria asked the group to share their questions, comments, or ideas regarding the blight project, based on what was discussed and shared at the last meeting.

Jody asked if the blight inventory could include code enforcement violation details in a pop-up window for each parcel. Victoria noted that this is possible but depends on the availability, accessibility, and format of current code enforcement violation records for each community. If records aren't in a spreadsheet or online software that can be exported already, this information may not be easily added to the inventory.

Melissa asked if the inventory could be built to incorporate code enforcement violation details moving forward, allowing code enforcement officers to add information to the map-based inventory. Corey added that this idea would be more along the lines of a regional code enforcement program, not part of the blight inventory. She echoed that if past code enforcement records are already digitized, they can be easily added to the map.

Victoria added that the blight inventory data is just a point-in-time snapshot of property conditions. This information can be built upon in the future, adding additional datasets, and can be tied into a community's code enforcement program. She added that the Westmoreland County Redevelopment Authority (RACW) is looking into developing code enforcement software to deploy in communities in the future that could easily incorporate the data from the blight inventory.

Dennis noted that it would be valuable to see crime incidents alongside the blight grades to make decisions about where additional cameras could be installed throughout New Kensington to reduce and respond to crime. George said that depending on the organization and availability of code violations, tax delinquency data might be more valuable to include on the blight inventory to see overlaid with crime incidents.

Corey noted that depending on the organization and availability of code violation data, less severe violations (like high grass) could be excluded from the data. This would show the more severe code violations alongside the blight grades. George agreed that this would be valuable. Victoria pointed out that in the Greensburg example, the City realized the way that they were organizing their violations didn't make sense because they couldn't separate out the less severe violations from the more severe violations - they were all lumped together.

John asked about what the end product would look like - if there would be one blight inventory or multiple individual inventories. The group expressed the desire to have separate blight inventories. Corey added that because there may be different data collected for each community, having separate maps might make more sense. She noted that there might be value in creating one map, in addition to the separate ones, to show the vastness of the blight inventory project. George brought up that once communities have removed or redeveloped the worst of the blight, having a regional map to show the location of available properties to market would be useful.

Dennis pointed out the value of conducting a joint blight inventory when applying for grant funding to address blight. Having all of this information in one place could help advocate for more resources or investment in the region.

John asked how the different inventories would be paced out. Victoria said that the Planning Division isn't sure how long this project will take yet. She noted that past blight inventories have taken between three and four months to complete but that the time to complete each community's inventory will look different for this project. She added the Planning Division envisions inventorying all parcels in the cities and boroughs, but only doing portions (certain streets or corridors) of the townships. Victoria said that this will likely be a phased project because of the amount of data collection needed. Matt suggested starting with the smallest communities first and working up to the largest communities.

Melissa asked if there would be a cost to conduct the blight inventory. Victoria said that there will be a cost to complete the joint inventory and that the cost may be based on the number of parcels inventoried for each community. She added that based on the feedback and information provided from each community, the Planning Division plans to create a proposal including a scope of work, timeline, costs, etc. to present to the group to review in the next few months. Once the proposal is reviewed and additional details are figured out, an agreement would need to be executed between the interested communities and the County to conduct the work. Victoria said that the project wouldn't likely be started until next year at the earliest.

Corey suggested that the townships should provide the general area (streets or corridors) they think should be inventoried so that the Planning Division can get a better understanding of the work involved. Victoria noted that the Planning Division will reach out directly to the townships for this information. She added that the Planning Division would be able to figure out the number of parcels in each of the cities and boroughs with existing County information.

Melissa said that Upper Burrell doesn't have blight in the same way that other communities have blight as it's not concentrated - structures are miles and miles apart. She asked about the definition of blight and how to determine which areas to include in the inventory. She added that it would be useful to know a property's vacancy and land use status (whether it's commercial, industrial, residential, agricultural, etc.) to help market the property.

Victoria said that there isn't really a clear way to determine vacancy. For land use status, she suggested one option would be to use L-Codes (land use codes) to identify a property's use, as the County already has access to this information from the Tax Assessment Office. Alternatively, she added that a side project could include digitizing Upper Burrell's zoning map to add to the blight inventory, but that this is typically not a part of a blight inventory process. Victoria and Corey noted that the Planning Division has digitized other communities' zoning maps but that this is a standalone project. Corey cautioned against using the L-Code data, as this information is not based on zoning and may conflict in areas that do have zoning.

Melissa and George expressed interest in pursuing digitization of Upper Burrell's and Arnold's zoning maps as this would be useful to staff, residents, and developers.

Tom asked what the Planning Division needed from the group regarding the blight inventory project for the next meeting. Victoria said she would reach out to the townships to identify the general areas to include in the inventory. The Planning Division will work to prepare a proposal with the information provided.

Michael Korn asked if Allegheny Township should include outlier or standalone properties that they know are in poor condition. The group discussed whether there is value in showing blighted outlier properties if surrounding properties are not graded. Matt suggested that

including all known blighted properties is useful, even if they are outliers, to make it known to property owners that they aren't slipping through the cracks. Victoria said to include the outlier or standalone properties, as more information might be better.

George noted that Arnold recently went through the process of identifying addresses of blighted properties to provide to the RACW. He added that with this information, they can already see trends and concentrations of blight. Corey brought up the value in not only identifying the poor properties but specifically the fair properties too. Matt and George echoed that they want to know where the fair properties are in their communities to better prevent blight from spreading or getting worse.

Tom transitioned the group to discuss the Year 2 cooperation agreement, dues schedule, meeting location/frequency, etc. Victoria brought up that because the agreement process can take additional time to execute, the Planning Division wanted to get the ball rolling as soon as possible.

Victoria noted that the dues schedule presented for Year 2 is a draft, but that it is based on the amount of time and work the Planning Division put in to support/facilitate monthly meetings during Year 1. Victoria added that the Planning Division didn't realize how much time would be needed to support and facilitate the AK IGC when the Year 1 dues were created. She noted that the AK IGC bylaws indicate a minimum of four meetings per year and that monthly meetings were not initially anticipated. The increased dues schedule is reflective of actual costs and time put in to provide support to the group based on Year 1.

Victoria added that the Planning Division is really excited about the continuation of the AK IGC and the commitment the Alle-Kiski communities have made to continue working together. She said that the Planning Division loves working with the Alle-Kiski communities and wants to continue these partnerships to help the AK IGC be successful. She noted that the Planning Division hopes that the participating communities see value in this arrangement and want to continue.

Tom commended the Planning Division for their work in the Alle-Kiski region and noted that the AK IGC's partnership with the County is invaluable. He said that the increase in dues was understandable and that he was supportive and appreciative of the Planning Division. He asked if the other communities would need to review the dues with their respective councils before the IGC could vote to approve them. Kristen and Melissa commented that they wanted to wait until next month to approve the dues. Victoria said that the group has time to reflect on and discuss the draft dues presented before they are voted on at the next meeting.

John echoed Tom's comments stating that the partnership with the County is invaluable and that he sees a lot of value in the AK IGC and the Planning Division's support. Ren commented that Allegheny Township sees value in and is supportive of the AK IGC. Marilee brought up that Vandergrift should have the votes needed to officially join the AK IGC in time for Year 2.

Melissa asked when the dues would need to be paid - in 2022 or 2023. Victoria noted that the dues would need to be paid once the agreement is executed (ideally in August 2022) - the AK IGC's year runs from August to July.

Victoria provided a general timeline leading up to Year 2 beginning in August. She noted that if Vandergrift wants to formally participate in the AK IGC, they would need to become a member community first by adopting a resolution to join the AK IGC (either at their May or June council meeting). After adopting a resolution, the AK IGC member communities would vote to admit Vandergrift into the AK IGC at the next meeting (either in June or July). Victoria noted that template copies of resolutions needed to join the AK IGC were emailed to Daisha Clayton of Vandergrift directly, along with instructions and a general timeline.

Melissa asked when the Year 2 agreement would be distributed and if she could wait to present the dues to council until she has the agreement in hand, as the amount budgeted would need to be increased. Victoria noted that the Planning Division plans to distribute the Year 2 agreement in May. Once the signed agreement pages have been provided back to the Planning Division by all participating member communities, the agreement would be executed at a County Commissioner's meeting (ideally by or before August). Victoria said that the AK IGC Year 2 would begin in August, but that there may be a lag in this start date. She added that the Planning Division is willing to continue meeting monthly even if there is lag, to continue the momentum of the group.

Victoria asked the group to think about if the monthly meeting frequency was working or if this should be changed. She also asked the group to reflect on the AK IGC meeting date (currently the group meets the third Thursday of each month), office positions, and Delegate/Alternate positions for Year 2.

John brought up that the week that the AK IGC currently meets is particularly busy for him and asked if it would be beneficial to push Year 2's meetings to every six weeks. Tom agreed that the group could consider a change in meeting date and frequency. Jody asked if the dues would change if the meetings would be reduced to every six weeks. Victoria noted that the dues would be impacted if the group decided to reduce the meetings to every six weeks.

Melissa asked if the dues would be impacted at all if a participating community wouldn't get approval to participate for Year 2. Victoria said that the dues for each community wouldn't go up or down depending on other communities participating. She noted that the costs for providing support to the group monthly are the same, regardless of the number of communities that participate in the AK IGC. She added again that the draft dues presented for Year 2 were actual costs to provide support to the AK IGC.

George asked if someone from the Planning Division would be willing to come to a council meeting in Arnold to talk about the value of the AK IGC and the need to raise the dues. He

said that the Year 2 dues presented were a substantial increase from Year 1 and that the City of Arnold would not be in a position to make that kind of payment. He added that he sees a great deal of value in the AK IGC and believes working together is important for the future of the Alle-Kiski. He noted that he makes a report to Arnold's council about the AK IGC every month. Victoria and Corey agreed that someone would be available to attend a council meeting to talk about the AK IGC if needed.

Jody brought up that it would be a challenge to convince other Vandergrift council members to join the AK IGC at such an increased cost when they already talked to council members and gained support citing the affordable Year 1 dues. He added that there was already apprehension amongst some council members about the value of the AK IGC because of past experiences with WEDIG.

Marilee noted that Vandergrift had not previously participated in WEDIG, but they had explored joining at one point in time. Jody added that the reason Vandergrift didn't join WEDIG previously was because council members were concerned that there wouldn't be return value. Marilee brought up that some Vandergrift council members think the AK IGC exists only for the purpose of sharing equipment. She added that they may not realize the additional planning and opportunities that result from working collaboratively. She asked if it would be possible to have someone from the Planning Division come and talk to Vandergrift council about joining the AK IGC. Corey and Victoria noted that someone could talk to council if a meeting is needed.

Tom brought up that the flat fee to join WEDIG was around \$10,000 for New Kensington and suggested that the Year 2 dues for the AK IGC were more affordable in comparison. Jody said he would use this information to help talk to Vandergrift council members about joining the AK IGC.

Kristen brought up that East Vandergrift had already budgeted for the AK IGC dues using Year 1 as a guide - they didn't anticipate a large increase. She asked if it would be possible to break up the due payments - paying a just portion of the amount due for Year 2 to be able to participate and then paying more the following year, and so on. John and George asked if dues payments could be broken up quarterly or in half payments. Victoria said she wasn't sure if payments could be broken apart over time and noted that she would have to look into this.

Corey transitioned to update the group on the County's broadband initiative that's moving forward. She said that the County will have a consultant on board by the end of the next month to help move the initiative forward. She noted that one of the next steps in this initiative is to get input from local officials and residents about the needs and gaps related to broadband within communities. She asked the group to start thinking about and keeping track of areas they know need broadband - taking into consideration not only residential

needs but also business, commercial, and industrial needs. She said the County would be reaching out for input.

Victoria reminded the group about the RACW's first annual Blight Remediation Summit on Friday, April 22 at the Westmoreland County Community College in Youngwood.

Tom asked if there were any additional comments or questions. Ren shared that the expansion of the Erie-Pittsburgh trail is making progress and that it's important for communities like New Kensington and Lower Burrell to be connected via the trail. He added that there will be potential to connect multiple trail systems together in the near future in the Alle-Kiski region.

Matt suggested sending a letter (on AK IGC letterhead) to the other non-member Alle-Kiski communities to remind them of the purpose/goal of the AK IGC and invite them to consider attending upcoming meetings and joining in the future. The group agreed that sending a letter would be a good idea. Victoria agreed and suggested she could prepare a draft letter on behalf of the AK IGC.

John shared that he followed-up with Lower Burrell's code enforcement officer regarding whether their code violation filing system was digital or paper-based. He noted that at this time, the City's violations are paper-based. He added that the City does have access to GIS and Geoplan and that they plan on incorporating this software more with the hiring of a new code enforcement officer soon. He also provided an update to the group stating that the City had recently adopted a vacant property registration ordinance. Because of this, the City is working with MuniReg, to help administer their vacant property registration program. John added that he is willing to forward emails related to blight information and training from MuniReg to others if they are interested.

Visitor, John Turack, of the Smart Growth Partnership of Westmoreland County introduced himself to the group. He discussed the value of encouraging trail development and walkability within and between communities. He shared that Smart Growth has been working with communities recently to develop active transportation plans, noting recent success in Smithton and Scottdale Boroughs. He added that Smart Growth is always looking to partner with new communities to help with active transportation planning. He also shared that Penn State Extension is working to share information and training around encouraging intergenerational living in communities.

Tom asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ren made a motion to adjourn the meeting which was seconded by Melissa.

The meeting ended at 6:12 PM.