

Alle-Kiski Intergovernmental Council Meeting Minutes

Meeting #9

May 19, 2022

New Kensington City Hall

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

AK IGC: Kristen Sarno (A-East Vandergrift), Barbara Sharp (D-East Vandergrift), Tom Guzzo (D-New Kensington), Dennis Scarpiniti (A-New Kensington), Matt Grantz (D-West Leechburg), Marcia Cole (A-West Leechburg), Greg Primm (Allegheny Township), Mark Saxon (City of Arnold Redevelopment Authority)

Westmoreland County Planning: Corey Block, Victoria Baur

Public: Jody Sarno (Vandergrift), Marilee Kessler (Vandergrift), Daisha Clayton (Vandergrift) Jake Lydick (eye-bot)

Meeting started at 5:08 PM.

Tom called the meeting to order, confirmed that everyone had a chance to review the meeting #8 minutes, and asked if there were any questions or concerns. A motion was made by Matt to approve the minutes and it was seconded by Tom. The meeting #8 minutes were approved.

Tom introduced visitor, Jake Lydick, from eye-bot, a New Kensington-based drone company. Tom noted that the purpose of Jake's attendance was to provide the group an opportunity to ask Jake questions about how aerial solutions might be used within the Alle-Kiski communities.

Jake introduced himself and provided a brief background on eye-bot. He noted that although his company mainly serves clients in the oil and gas industry and in critical infrastructure, eye-bot is open to exploring opportunities to assist the local community.

Jake provided examples of the types of services available through eye-bot including thermal imaging (ex: to tell where hot spots are occurring in building fires), microphones that triangulate sounds and trigger drones to record video (ex: to be used when a gunshot goes off), aerial imagery capture (ex: to inspect the roofs of structures), and collision tolerant drones (ex: to inspect the interior of condemned or unsafe structures). He added that eye-bot also uses mobile mapping systems to capture photo-realistic images and creates 3D replicas of an area.

Tom asked the group to think about how drone services might be useful in the joint blight inventory project, for example. Corey provided a background on what a blight inventory is and how the Planning Division has traditionally collected property condition data. Victoria added that the Planning Division hadn't previously considered the use of a drone for this work.

Jake noted that eye-bot is able to capture photo-realistic images to create 3D replicas of specific streets or corridors to help with blight inventory data collection. Eye-bot could provide a link to this data to Planning Division staff to review for property condition assessment. Corey brought up that the link to the data could also be handed over to participating communities to use for other purposes as well.

Marcia asked if there were any legal ramifications for taking images of people's properties via a drone for the blight inventory. Jody echoed this concern and said that he thought data could only be collected from within the public right-of-way, and not beyond this.

Jake clarified that just like with Google, eye-bot would be legally permitted to capture images of people's property using drones (est. 300' in the air). He noted that there aren't privacy rights that would limit this data collection but that eye-bot is mindful and careful to follow all regulations. Jake added that a disclaimer could be prepared to indicate that data collected would be used for a specific purpose, and not be available for public viewing, etc.

Jody brought up that he thought Code Enforcement Officers could only cite violations visible from the public right-of-way unless a neighboring property owner submits images visible from their property to the borough. He added that neighboring property owners often don't want to submit documentation visible from their property, for fear that the offending property owner will retaliate. Jody suggested that perhaps the drone images would be impartial and could be used for code enforcement.

Victoria asked about the quality of the images captured from the drone for use in the blight inventory. She noted that staff would need to be able to see property details equivalent to images captured directly in front of a property to accurately provide an assessment. Jake added that data collected can be quite detailed and that eye-bot could provide sample data for the group to review.

Victoria asked the group to share other ideas or suggestions on how the application of a drone might be useful in their communities. She noted that the group previously discussed the application of a drone in emergency response situations. Dennis brought up that New Kensington is interested in using a drone to help with code enforcement and to help determine the condition of repository properties.

Jake noted that if communities have specific properties/structures in mind, one option would be to utilize the confined space/collision tolerant drone to capture footage inside the structure. Corey added that the video link could be shown to potential buyers/developers so they understand the condition of the property too.

Jody suggested that a drone could be useful to help map trees for inventory and plant health purposes. Jake added that eye-bot has the capability to fly multispectral cameras to assess plant health, including trees.

Marcia asked who would fly the drones for the various applications. Jake noted that eye-bot would conduct this work and that they would be willing to provide a discount to do some local, short-term jobs within the communities.

Corey and Jody asked about the difference between purchasing a drone versus contracting for drone service in the various applications discussed. Jake clarified that for the more highly skilled projects like capturing videos of confined spaces at repository properties and for other short-term jobs, it makes more sense to contract with a provider, like eye-bot, rather than purchasing a drone. He said that for future, long-term, use of a drone in emergency or search and rescue applications, a community could purchase a drone and acquire a certificate to be permitted to use drones for emergencies (ex: for police use). He added that if the drone is purchased through eye-bot, they can provide the drone software/platform to consult on and training.

Jake stressed the importance of focusing on high-value applications that will help communities save time and money. He added that if the group has a budget in mind for drone services, he would be mindful of the costs and adjust the service accordingly.

Victoria asked what the next steps look like if the group decides to pursue contracted drone services. She said that if eye-bot is a willing partner, and if participating communities are interested in drone service, this might be the type of "low hanging fruit" the group has been reaching for to show the value in working

together. She suggested that perhaps, purchasing a drone for more serious applications could be jointly pursued down the line.

Jake suggested that the group should discuss the complexities of executing a joint contract. He added that eye-bot is willing to be flexible to meet the group's needs. Tom suggested that the group compile a rough list of items/applications to use the drone service for and share this with Jake . Eye-bot could then provide the group with some samples of work to review.

Circling back to the use of drones in the blight inventory project, Tom noted that having an additional tool for this work might be useful. Victoria and Corey agreed and said that perhaps a separate meeting would be needed between the County Planning Division and eye-bot to explore working together for this project. Victoria added that the Planning Division is still working on a proposal and is unsure exactly how this project will be executed.

Marcia asked if the county could apply for grants to help acquire drone service for this project. Corey clarified that grants could be pursued by local communities to help pay eye-bot for drone service and the county for the blight inventory work. The group discussed if ARPA funds could be used for this work. Jake shared that he has worked with several organizations that have had success tying COVID-19 funds to drone service for projects.

Marcia suggested that it makes more sense for the county to work directly with eye-bot for the blight inventory project. Jake echoed this. Corey noted that the Planning Division intends to continue conducting blight inventories in communities and is willing to be flexible in its approach.

Jake noted that eye-bot doesn't normally pursue opportunities with local, state, or federal government. He added that although working with private entities or individuals is a quicker and easier process, he'd be willing to work with the local communities because this is his community too.

Tom summarized that Victoria would compile a list of short-term applications of drones for communities and provide this list to him to forward to Jake. Jake confirmed that he would prepare sample data and visuals for a future meeting with the group.

Greg brought up that any success of the AK IGC will help show value to the county's other Planning Districts. He brought up the importance of partnerships and said that any data collected at the local level could be useful to the county and vice versa. Corey echoed this. Greg added that he has an interest in using the drone service to acquire footage of the Tredway Trail for marketing.

Tom asked if there were any other ideas or questions for Jake. Jake summarized that the group has an interest in exploring drone service in the following applications: blight inventory, code enforcement, confined space footage (repository properties), tree inventory/plant health data, and marketing. The group thanked Jake for attending the meeting.

Tom transitioned the group to review and approve the draft AK IGC letter to non-member Alle-Kiski communities. He asked if anyone had any comments or questions about the letter. Victoria reminded the group that the purpose of the letter is to provide a brief overview of the AK IGC, its priorities, and meeting details to the four non-member communities. The letter serves to invite non-member communities to learn more about the AK IGC, which could lead to the group's growth. Victoria added that she would work with Tom to get the letters signed and mailed out as soon as possible. A motion to approve the letter was made by Mark and seconded by Dennis. The draft AK IGC letter to non-member Alle-Kiski communities was approved.

Tom transitioned the group to review and approve the proposed Year 2 Dues Schedule. He noted that a previous draft of the Year 2 Dues was reviewed at the last meeting and that after feedback was provided to the Planning Division, the dues were reduced. Victoria said that although the Year 2 Dues are still an increase from the original Year 1 Dues, the Planning Division reduced the dues by about half from the previously proposed amount. This was a good-faith move to retain full participation and show communities that the county is absorbing some of the administrative costs to support the IGC monthly.

Victoria reminded the group that the previously proposed Year 2 Dues represented an accurate accounting of the cost to provide administrative support to the IGC. With the revised proposed Year 2 Dues, the new amount would not cover the Planning Division's costs accrued to support the IGC, but the Planning Division is willing to continue supporting the IGC because they see value in it. Victoria noted that she received some feedback and questions via email since the last meeting. She asked if the group had any other feedback or questions. Tom thanked the Planning Division for reducing the proposed dues and asked if the group had any questions or concerns.

Kristen and Barbara brought up that East Vandergrift's council is still on the fence about participating in Year 2. She added that after they reviewed the IGC bylaws, they noticed that the IGC is supposed to prepare an annual budget - their council would like to see the budget. Barbara added that ultimately, their council is the deciding entity and they need as much information as possible to make a good decision. She noted that they need to be able to see funds going in and out of the IGC, if people are being paid, if the county is putting any funds into the IGC, etc.

Victoria noted that she understood East Vandergrift's concerns. She clarified that the bylaws include language on an annual budget, so that the AK IGC can one day function on its own and be self-sufficient with its own budget, paid staff, etc. She added that because the IGC is not self-sufficient yet and does not have its own paid staff, the Planning Division is acting as the paid staff to keep the group going. Because of this, she noted that there isn't a budget and that the yearly dues paid by each member government helps cover administrative costs which are provided by the Planning Division.

Victoria noted that based on initial conversations with member communities, the IGC does not have a strong interest in being self-sufficient yet and wants the county to provide support. She added that if a breakdown of costs accrued, staff time, and dues received would be needed, the Planning Division could provide this information.

Barbara brought up that the IGC bylaws indicate that the IGC should meet a minimum of four times a year. She asked if meeting monthly contributes to the additional costs. Victoria and Corey noted that the demand to meet monthly influenced the increase in yearly dues and that the Planning Division did not anticipate the amount of time and costs needed to support the IGC.

Jody asked if annual dues are to be paid at once or if they could be broken down into several payments. Victoria clarified that annual dues are to be paid at one time, upon execution of the Year 2 agreement. She noted that the Planning Division discussed breaking payments up over time but that this was not recommended as it takes more administrative time away from other needs.

Marilee brought up the importance of showing the value received (results) from joining the IGC and that it is not just a club. Jody agreed but pointed out that council members are going to want to see actual results to justify the costs. He added that he has enjoyed coming to the IGC meetings and that he sees value in the IGC, but that he anticipates additional questions from fellow council members and noted that it can be tough to get others to see the value the IGC.

Kristen echoed these comments and added that East Vandergrift doesn't have any interest in drone services because their community is so small. She noted that because drones have been a topic of conversation a lot lately, their council doesn't see the value.

Marilee brought up that Vandergrift saw the previous iteration of the IGC, WEDIG, only as an equipment sharing group and didn't see the potential for other projects like the blight inventory. She added that the value of the IGC lies in its collaboration and in having access to the county's Planning Division. Corey agreed that it can be difficult to see the tangible "results" from the AK IGC, but reminded the group that this was just the first year. She and Victoria noted that it will take time to take on the larger priorities but that this group is working towards its priorities by continuing to meet.

Jody asked if the IGC decides to become more self-sufficient, would the Planning Division no longer be needed. He also asked if costs would continue to rise each year with the Planning Division's administrative support. Victoria noted that if the IGC decides to be self-sufficient, the county will no longer provide administrative support. She added that dues may continue to go up depending on the amount of time and materials needed to support the IGC.

Tom brought up that once the IGC is producing tangible results, costs won't be as big of a hurdle because the group will be able to show value beyond intangible collaboration. Marcia shared that it's important to have a unified voice and agreed that the collaboration with each other and the county is valuable. Greg echoed this and noted that there are intangible as well as tangible results to gain from participating in the IGC.

Greg shared that based on Allegheny Township's past experience with WEDIG, he believes that the county needs to stay involved with the IGC in order for it to be successful and to keep things moving forward. He noted that WEDIG lasted for ten years because each participating community was investing their own staff (and therefore money) to try to keep the regional group going. He noted that it was a challenge to hold volunteers accountable and that's why it's important to have paid staff, like the Planning Division. He said that over the years, the group realized success, beyond equipment sharing, and was able to acquire grants to accomplish community projects. Greg added that just as much as participating communities benefit from the IGC, the county equally benefits as this helps implement the county's comprehensive plan. He said that this is a good partnership.

Jody and Marilee asked if someone from the Planning Division could come to Vandergrift's next council meeting on June 6th to help answer questions about joining the IGC. Victoria said that someone could be available. She noted that she attended Arnold's May council meeting to provide an overview of the IGC and answer questions. Daisha confirmed that she thinks Vandergrift has enough votes to make joining the IGC official and that she would like to accomplish this at the upcoming council meeting, alongside the presentation from Planning Division staff.

Victoria brought up that the drafting of the Year 2 agreement hinges on Vandergrift's, and other communities, participation in the IGC. She noted that the group needs to formally vote to approve the Year 2 Dues and that the Planning Division needs to know which communities are continuing to participate in the IGC before the agreement is distributed.

Kristen asked if someone from the Planning Division would also be able to attend East Vandergrift's June council meeting (on the same night as Vandergrift's council meeting). Victoria and Corey noted that they might have to split up to make it to both meetings on the same night.

Jody asked if the county could calculate the monetary value of participating in the IGC - to show council members, for example, that they are saving money by collaborating with other communities. Corey said

that it is difficult to fully add up the monetary value gained by participating in the IGC. She said it makes more sense to look at the project level and cited New Kensington's success on a number of projects, thanks to maintaining a strong partnership with the county.

Corey added that the Planning Division regularly communicates transportation priorities on behalf of municipalities by attending Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission meetings. She noted that a big benefit of the IGC is that participating communities can bring their ideas for projects to the table to collaborate and make the county aware. Corey added that hopefully by collaborating with each other through the IGC, communities will realize time and/or money savings.

Dennis shared that New Kensington doesn't have a planning department, but through the AK IGC, the city feels like they might have access to one through the county. He said he knows the Planning Division will respond right away if the city has a planning-related question and that this is an invaluable resource.

Victoria asked if the approval of the Year 2 Dues should be pushed to the June meeting to allow for additional presentation and reflection for council members. The group agreed that pushing this until June would be best. Victoria added that Vandergrift's admission to the IGC would also have to be pushed and that the group could continue the discussion around the operation of Year 2 at the next meeting if needed.

Tom transitioned the group to discuss the interim project to create a list of developable/vacant properties to market. Victoria brought up that when the group initially identified priorities for Year 1, creating a list of developable/vacant properties to market was separate from the blight inventory project. She noted that at some point, these two projects melded together. She asked the group if they had any interest in separating this project to complete in the interim, while the Planning Division continues to iron out the details of the proposed joint blight inventory project.

Victoria shared that the Westmoreland County Industrial Development Corporation maintains a commercial/industrial (nonresidential) real estate site (<http://www.westmorelandsites.com/>). On this site, the IDC helps promote/market commercial or industrial properties that are already listed for sale within Westmoreland County. Permission is needed by both the property owner and real estate agent to add listings to the site. Victoria shared printed out examples of the Westmorelandsites page and a fillable Westmorelandsites form, where property information can be submitted to the IDC to include on the site.

Victoria said that the Planning Division can work with communities to obtain this information to help create listings for properties that are already for sale. The benefit of the site is that the IDC generates email campaigns and featured listings to help market. She added that the Planning Division may also be able to help take photos of properties and create "drop-sheets", with information on properties. She asked the group if the developable/vacant properties that have come up in discussions are actually for sale. She noted that there are limitations to what marketing communities can do to promote properties that aren't actually for sale.

Matt shared that West Leechburg's biggest developable property is actually occupied by a large company, but that it's a rundown warehouse. He said that West Leechburg is looking for assistance to leverage this company out of their community, because they refuse to invest any money to improve the property. Marcia and Matt noted that although this is prime industrial property, they can't do anything to market it because it's occupied and not for sale.

Marilee asked if properties need to be listed by a real estate agent or if they could be for sale by owner. Victoria said that she wasn't sure about for sale by owner properties, but that actual listed properties could be included on the site. Corey asked if the group knew if available properties needing marketing are

commercial/industrial or if they are residential. She added that if properties are residential, the Planning Division could look into how the county's Land Bank might be able to assist.

Victoria shared that if properties aren't for sale, but are known to be unoccupied, the Planning Division could help create a Google My Map (embedded into ReimaginingOurWestmoreland.org) listing these properties with corresponding information, as an alternative option for this interim project. She summarized that there might be interest in this project, but that the group should continue the discussion at the next meeting with more community representatives present.

Tom transitioned to discuss the blight inventory project. Victoria provided an update and said that the Planning Division is still working on a proposal for this project. She distributed printed maps to Allegheny Township, Lower Burrell, and Upper Burrell Township to identify areas to be included in the blight inventory. Victoria provided instructions to the three communities and noted that maps are to be returned at the next AK IGC meeting on June 16th. Victoria said that the information gathered from this exercise will help the Planning Division better understand the project's scope of work for the more rural communities in the Alle-Kiski. Tom asked if there were any additional comments or public comments.

Kristen asked what the group's next steps were for shared code enforcement. Victoria noted that there is a real opportunity to work with the county's Redevelopment Authority (RACW) on a regionalized code enforcement program. She noted that the Planning Division has had discussions with the RACW to ensure the blight inventory project can be easily incorporated into a community's code enforcement program and property condition monitoring moving forward. She noted that the RACW is already starting to pilot this code enforcement software in certain communities. Corey added that if communities share or plan to share code enforcement officers, using the same software across communities will make this easier. They both noted that the software is spreadsheet-based and accessible, so additional information can be incorporated if needed.

Kristen asked specifically about the status of code enforcement officers. She noted that East Vandergrift just recently hired a code enforcement officer, but that they have been without one for a while. She asked how the communities could work together both on code enforcement procedures and sharing code enforcement officers because lack of code enforcement is a recurring issue in their community.

Greg shared that Allegheny Township has executed intergovernmental cooperation agreements with Washington Township and Oklahoma Borough in the past to provide code enforcement services at a cost. Washington Township didn't continue this arrangement last year and instead decided police would handle code enforcement. He said that Allegheny Township currently provides code enforcement services to Oklahoma one day each week and that the township invoices the borough for this service. Greg suggested that East Vandergrift should contact Oklahoma to hear their first-hand experience with the shared code enforcement officer arrangement.

Matt and Greg noted that they shared the same code enforcement officer, Lee Schumaker, at one time, but that he had to discontinue providing services to West Leechburg because he was stretched too thin. Marcia shared that West Leechburg now uses the company, BIU, and that their code enforcement officer conveniently lives within the borough and has a vested interest in the community.

Tom said that no matter what position a community is in, they can always use more code enforcement help. He suggested that the group could look into sharing a code enforcement officer, and that each community would pay a percent based on usage.

Tom asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. A motion was made by Marcia and seconded by Greg. The meeting ended at 6:32 PM.