

Alle-Kiski Intergovernmental Council
Regular Meeting Minutes
Meeting #9 - May 18th 2023
New Kensington City Hall

Attendees (D-Delegate, A-Alternate)

AK IGC: Tom Guzzo (D-New Kensington), John Andrejczik (D-Lower Burrell), Dennis Scarpiniti (A-New Kensington), Matt Grantz (D-West Leechburg Borough), Barbara Sharp (D-East Vandergrift Borough), Mike Korn (A-Allegheny Township), George Hawdon (D-Arnold), Jody Sarno (D-Vandergrift Borough), Marilee Kessler (A-Vandergrift Borough)

Westmoreland County Planning: Jason Rigone, Bella Fiume, Jillian Caswell, Victoria Baur
Guests: None **Public:** None

Meeting started at 5:02 PM.

1. Review/approve minutes from Meeting 8

A motion was made by Barbara and seconded by Mike to approve the Meeting 8 minutes. The Meeting 8 minutes were approved.

2. AK IGC Blight Inventory and Plan

Victoria noted the agreement for the blight inventory and plan project is still in the works at the County solicitor level. She said the agreement will be distributed soon to each community for comments or questions before executing. Victoria said at the current pace, communities could be kicking off the project in July or August.

John said he advocated for the project but wasn't able to get buy in to participate. Victoria thanked John and the other members for continuing to advocate for the project. Jason thanked members for their interest in participating in the regional project. Jason also reminded members of the project's importance because it can be a proactive solution and inspire further partnership between the Alle-Kiski communities.

Mike asked what happens if a community's board changes in the middle of the project and they no longer want to participate. Jason said once an agreement is signed, its expected that participating communities follow through with the project because of the fixed costs and impact on other communities. Jason said this could be discussed further should the situation arise.

3. AK IGC shared code enforcement

a. Subcommittee

i. Discuss CEO needs survey results

Victoria reminded the group that the shared Code Enforcement Officer (CEO) subcommittee prepared a CEO needs survey. Victoria noted she only received one response. She said Kristen

prepared a summary. Victoria asked George if the subcommittee had anything additional to report out or next steps.

George suggested communities who are interested in sharing CEO services should either utilize CEOs from another municipality through an agreement or seek out services from a third party provider. He added that it would be good if the County could one day provide a CEO program where communities can subscribe. Jason and Victoria said this is a long term goal of the Redevelopment Authority of Westmoreland County.

The group discussed the pros and cons of the different arrangements - tapping into existing CEO capacity, asking a lead municipality to hire an additional CEO to provide shared services, or pursuing third party services.

Marilee said Vandergrift needs additional CEO support seasonally in the summer. Mike said Allegheny Township's CEO may not be able to provide services to other communities. Victoria said tapping into existing capacity might stretch current CEOs too thin. John echoed these comments and asked if the AK IGC could hire their own CEO. Victoria noted the AK IGC, as a volunteer membership council, isn't in a position to hire a CEO. A lead municipality would have to take this on and execute an intergovernmental cooperation agreement (ICA) with interested communities.

Victoria said based on the survey responses, it sounds like East Vandergrift and Vandergrift currently have the most need. Tom said New Kensington recently lost one of their CEOs and that the City would be interested in adding capacity. Mike noted that Allegheny Township doesn't currently have a need for added capacity, but this could change at any point. George echoed these comments.

George suggested instead of tapping into existing capacity or asking a lead community to hire an additional CEO, the AK IGC should look into subscribing to a third party company. Jody suggested there could be a group rate if multiple communities subscribe. Victoria asked if anyone knew of companies that provide this service. George mentioned Professional Code Services (PCS) and Building Inspection Underwriters of PA (BIU).

The group discussed the pros and cons of working with a third party service, noting added convenience and capacity but also issues with control, responsiveness, and communication.

Victoria said she would work with the subcommittee to prepare a list of possible third party companies to reach out to and invite to a future meeting. Jason suggested the subcommittee prepare a clear scope for the third party companies to respond to - so they know the needs, interests, and questions of the AK IGC ahead of time.

- 4. Joint purchasing equipment**
 - a. Review & discuss wish-list items**

Victoria reminded the group that they were asked to think of up to five equipment items to consider jointly purchasing. She compiled feedback in a wish list. Victoria said responses were still needed from some communities. She noted Upper Burrell and West Leechburg indicated they currently aren't interested in jointly purchasing items. Victoria asked if communities had additional items to add to the wish list.

John said he had a list of potential items from his police and fire contacts to forward on. Victoria reminded the group that not every community has to agree on the same item. She said if two communities overlap in their interests, then those two communities can take the next step.

Victoria asked if members have talked with their councils to determine real interest. She noted purchasing equipment can take a long time when considering budgeting, advertising, bid notices, etc. Jason echoed this and said the Planning Division can't be responsive without input and feedback from communities. Jason suggested talking with public works officials to determine if there are items that never make the budget but are still a need.

Members discussed the purpose of the wish list and noted an analysis and matchmaking would be needed after more responses are received. Victoria said she would follow-up with communities and carry over this item for further discussion.

Victoria suggested the group consider leaning on Allegheny Township and Lower Burrell to share how they successfully jointly purchased equipment in the past. Victoria asked if Mike and John could share their experience with the rest of the group. Jason and Victoria said it might be helpful to see the agreement or understand the terms and conditions of the arrangement such as equipment storage, use, insurance, payment, etc. Mike and John said they would look into the details of this and share information with the group.

Dennis asked if members would be jointly purchasing items through the state's CoStars program. Victoria said members would likely use the CoStars program or whichever path to purchasing communities already use.

5. Municipal Fire Departments

a. Discuss regionalizing, sharing resources & volunteers

Victoria noted Mike suggested this agenda item and asked for Mike to lead the discussion.

Mike distributed a handout prepared by volunteer firefighter, Matt Johnston. He said the handout includes a summary and links to resources on the benefits of regionalizing and consolidating fire services. Mike noted local fire departments are struggling with resources, people, equipment, etc. and that the AK IGC is a good place to talk about these issues regionally. He said this is a topic at the state level at PA State Association of Township Supervisors (PSTATS) meetings and that there may be opportunities to look at additional resources and programs to recruit and support firefighters.

Mike clarified he didn't want members to think having a conversation about regionalizing or consolidating fire services automatically means closing down fire departments. He suggested similar to the benefits of the AK IGC, if there was a way to get representatives from Alle-Kiski fire departments in one room, they could come up with great ideas to solve common challenges.

Mike said creating a subcommittee is perhaps the next step for this topic. He said this isn't a novel idea, but could be good for the Alle-Kiski region, and there are resources out there to follow. Mike said volunteer firefighters are very passionate and that he could think of a few people to be involved on a subcommittee to push this topic along.

Tom thanked Mike for suggesting this topic and compiling information. He said New Kensington is trying to acquire the needed funds to purchase a new fire truck (as theirs is currently 27 years old) - and that other communities rely on this truck. He said the cost of vehicles is exorbitant and the wait time can be one year or more. George echoed these comments.

Tom pointed out that even the City of Pittsburgh, who has a paid fire department, is struggling with resources. He said sustaining volunteer fire services is going to be a bigger crisis than what people realize and that communities need to be planning now.

John asked for a letter from AK IGC members summarizing the need to discuss this topic regionally, to help broach this conversation with fellow council members. He added that Lower Burrell's recent decision to not adopt the volunteer firefighter and EMS incentive program was largely influenced by input from the City's firefighters.

Jason said having a letter from member communities saying they support the exploration of this topic would help solidify consensus among the AK IGC, push this topic along, and gain additional support. Victoria echoed these comments.

Dennis suggested that anytime a member community goes after a grant that will benefit neighboring communities, the AK IGC could provide a letter of support highlighting the intergovernmental benefits. Victoria said the IGC should be doing this regularly.

Victoria and members thanked Mike for bringing this topic up and providing additional information. Mike asked Victoria to circulate the summary to the group. Victoria said she would circulate the information and assist with drafting a letter for members to use.

6. Next AK IGC meeting date: Thursday, June 15th, 2023 @5PM

a. Discuss agenda items

b. Reminder - two meetings remain for AK IGC Year 2

Jason brought up that members should be thinking about what year three looks like for the AK IGC, as the end of this contract is approaching. He said if the group is still interested in working on

blight, shared code enforcement, joint purchasing, regionalizing fire service, etc. members have to start thinking about and planning for what the third year scope looks like. Jason specified that AK IGC members need to drive the scope and details of what they want to work on, and the County will determine the best way to support this through facilitation and administration.

7. **Public comment**

None

Other Discussion

Victoria introduced Bella and Jillian. Bella and Jillian are graduates of the University of Pittsburgh and have recently joined the Westmoreland Planning Division as Planners. Victoria said an additional planner will be joining the Planning Division this spring.

Tom brought up that Governor Shapiro recently announced additional funding to the Pennsylvania Municipal Assistance Program (MAP). He said there may be opportunities to apply for the MAP to support AK IGC projects and initiatives.

Tom shared that Westmoreland County Planning recently completed their second Planning District process. Victoria provided an update, noting the Planning Division worked with 15 communities at the center of the County which includes Greensburg, Hempfield Township, Jeannette, Unity Township, and others. She said the Central Planning District followed a similar process as the Alle-Kiski Planning District.

Jason and Victoria shared that several communities from the Central Planning District are considering creating a Council of Governments (COG) to continue working together. Victoria said Westmoreland County Planning won't be providing support in the same manor to this group, as they do to the AK IGC.

Victoria thanked members for being leaders to the rest of the County, in regards to their interest and commitment to working together. Jason echoed these comments and thanked members for their buy-in and support for the IGC thus far.

Mike suggested the AK IGC put out a press release to acknowledge the group's unique working relationship and draw positive attention to the efforts of the AK IGC. Victoria noted this is important and suggested the group pursue a press release when the regional blight inventory and plan agreement is executed to have a project to announce.

8. **Adjournment**

A motion was made by John and seconded by Barbara to adjourn the meeting. The meeting ended at 6:00 PM.