Town Council of Merrillville
7820 Broadway Ave - Merrillville, IN 46410
Town Council Meeting Minutes of the Regular Meeting of
March 12, 2024 - 6:30 P.M.

CALL TO ORDER: Councilor Bella called the meeting to order at 6:30 P.M.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: The Pledge of Allegiance to the United States Flag was led by Councilor Bella.

INVOCATION/MOMENT OF SILENCE: A brief invocation was given along with a moment of silence by Pastor Robert Szoke of Impact Church.

ROLL CALL of COUNCIL – Present at the meeting were Councilors Rhonda Neal, Shauna Haynes-Edwards, Leona Chandler-Felton, Margaret Uzelac, Shawn Pettit, Keesha Hardway, and Rick Bella. Clerk-Treasurer Eric January was present to memorialize the proceedings. A quorum was attained.

PETITIONS, COMMUNICATIONS, ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS, AND REMONSTRATIONS

- *None*

PUBLIC HEARINGS

1) **a) Town Attorney review of Proof of Publication(s)** Proof of Publication date of February 23rd, 2024 in the NWI Times

   Attorney Svetanoff reported that he had reviewed the Proof of Publication, and it was in order and conforms to Indiana law. The council may proceed with the public hearing for Ordinance 24-03.

   b) Public Hearing: Re ORD 24-03 Appropriating Additional Money in the budget for the Parks Department of the General Fund.

   Taxpayers appearing at the hearing will have a right to be heard on these proposed additional appropriations.

   Public Comment:
   There were no comments from the public. The hearing was closed.

   c) Action on Proposed Ordinance:
   Ordinance 24-03 would be taken up under item twelve (General Ordinances) on the agenda.

2) **a) Town Attorney review of Proof of Publication(s):** Colum Add Proof Publication date of March 1st. 2024 in the Chicago Tribune.

   Attorney Svetanoff reported that he had reviewed the Proof of Publication, it was in order and conforms to Indiana law. The council may proceed with the public hearing for Ordnance 24-04.

   b) Public Hearing: Re ORD 24-04 Authorizing Additional Appropriations In the 2024 Budget Motor Vehicle Highway – Restricted Fund.

Taxpayers appearing at the hearing will have a right to be heard on these proposed additional appropriations.

Public Comment:
There were no comments from the public.

c) **Action on Proposed Ordinance:**
Ordinance 24-04 will be taken up under item twelve (General Ordinances) on the agenda.

CONSENT AGENDA

- Accts. Payable Register Voucher Approval for Approval for March 12th, 2024
- AP Voucher Register Summary for ARP Purchases for March 12th, 2024
- Approval of Town Council Meeting Minutes of February 27th, 2024
- FOP Event Center Request for a discounted rate.

It was moved by Councilor Pettit and seconded by Councilor Uzelac to approve the consent agenda.

Upon a question from President Bella regarding the removal of TIFF District entries from the AP Voucher Register, Clerk-Treasurer Eric January responded that to his knowledge nothing has been removed from the register.

President Bella requested that Councilor Pettit amend his motion to include removing Butler Fairman expenses of $9,240.00, First Group Engineering expenses of $2,398.24, and Traffic Management Program expenses of $18,000.00 because they need to be paid by the proper entities.

Upon a question from President Bella, Councilor Pettit responded that the payments listed using TIFF District must be approved by the Redevelopment Commission. In addition to the ones mentioned, there are several others on the Accounts Payable Register Voucher that need to be removed. Councilor Pettit reported that he discussed with staff that the 4th Tuesday of the month is the Redevelopment Commission (RDC) meeting.

Councilor Pettit also reported that the RDC had a finding in a past audit by the State Board of Account for not having a separate claim list. Councilor Pettit also requested that the consent agenda be presented again at the council meeting on Tuesday, March 26th, 2024.

Attorney Svetanoff reported that this situation can be handing in one or two ways:

1. The council can defer action on the Accounts Payable Voucher Summary or
2. The council can allow the Clerk-Treasurer Eric January to remove all entries that are using Tiff District funds. Recalculate the amount of APVs owed and issue payments to those vendors.

Attorney Svetanoff's recommendation to the council is to allow Clerk-Treasurer Eric January to proceed forward with the caveat that his office remove any APV entries that have to do with TIFF District. The entries removed will be included on the RDC claims list for March 26th, 2024

Upon a question from President Bella regarding his amended motion, Councilor Pettit responded that his motion was modified according to legal counsel's recommendation.

Upon a question from President Bella regarding her second, Councilor Uzelac seconded the amended motion of Councilor Pettit.

Upon a voice vote, the motion passed. The Consent Agenda was approved with the recommendations from Attorney Svetanoff for the Accounts Payable Register Voucher.

PRESENTATION of DECLARATIONS

- *None*

STANDING & SPECIAL COMMITTEES REPORTS

BUDGET & FINANCE - NEAL – Councilor Neal had nothing to report at this time.

COUNCIL AFFAIRS- PETTIT – Councilor Pettit reported that he needs to call a committee meeting,

Attorney Svetanoff reported that a representative from his firm will be coming to the next workshop on March 20th, 2024 to present the ordinances under review to the full Town Council. Upon a question by Councilor Pettit regarding recommendations for the Town Council meeting on March 26th, Attorney Svetanoff responded that recommendations may be presented under the section General Ordinances first reading.

STREET DEPARTMENT- UZELAC– Councilor Uzelac reported that the Street Department has been cleaning up tree branches and also replaced a mailbox in Crescent Lake that was knocked down by Waste Management.

ELECTIONS, PUBLIC RELATIONS, & TOWN BEAUTIFICATION - NEAL- Councilor Neal reported that the committee has been negotiating with Hubinger Landscaping on the Town's beautification services (hanging baskets, flowers, and shrubs maintenance) for Spring 2024. Hubinger's current quote is for $56,000.00 which is high, and the committee wasn't pleased with the beautification services that were done last year. Instead of going with Hubinger, the committee has decided to go with Zandstra this year for $3,000.00 which is a vast difference in the price. The Street Department will provide the upkeep of 93rd Avenue.

It was moved by Councilor Neal and seconded by Councilor Hardaway to approve Zandstra for Town beautification (plants, shrubs, and hanging baskets maintenance) including the Dean and Barbara White Community Center for hanging baskets and planters

Upon a voice vote, the motion passed. Zandstra was approved as the vendor for the Town's beautification services.

Councilor Neal also reported that a meeting is forthcoming to go over designs for the new Town slogan and entryways.

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS- PETTIT – Councilor Pettit reported that a meeting did occur with Waste Management regarding the delinquent accounts in the Town.

PERSONNEL POLICY & EMPLOYEE BENEFITS – HARDAWAY- Councilor Hardaway reported that updates for the Personnel Manual have been adopted by referencing MMC section 2-87 that establish revised guidelines for a travel policy, CDL Training Tenure, Tuition Reimbursement Requirements, and Receipt of Personnel Policy Manual.

Councilor Hardaway also reported that David Byers has been selected by the committee to be hired as the new Director of Parks and Recreation.

It was moved by Councilor Hardaway and seconded by Councilor Uzelac to hire David Byers as the new Director of Parks and Recreation.

Upon a question from President Bella regarding the salary for Mr. Byers per the salary ordinance, Councilor Hardaway responded that Mr. Byers's salary would be paid per the current salary ordinance.

Upon a roll call vote, there were seven affirmatives and no negatives. Councilors Neal, Haynes-Edwards, Chandler-Felton, Uzelac, Pettit, Hardaway, and Bella voted in the affirmative. No one voted in the negative. The motion passed. David Byers was approved to be hired as the Director of Parks and Recreation

PUBLIC SAFETY- HARDWAY- Councilor Hardaway reported that she will request a meeting with the Fire Chief, Police Chief, and other Department Heads to update the Emergency Action Plan.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT-PETTIT – Councilor Pettit reported that Redevelopment in concert with the Economic Development Director is working with Interim Town Manager Griffin on an interlocal cooperative agreement that will permit continued participation with Gary Public Transportation Corporation and our support of service along the Boardway Avenue Corridor.

The Interim Town Manager is also working with Redevelopment staff to explore ways and means of tuning up the use of allocation area resources for façade and interior grants and a need for a Community Redevelopment Corporation.

Councilor Pettit elaborated on several Redevelopment Commission projects and mentioned several meetings in the works. The first meeting will be on March 19th before the Plan Commission Public Hearing. The next one will be March 26th

PARKS & RECREATION- UZELAC - Councilor Uzelac reported that she contacted Director Lake on March 6th regarding construction that is supposed to be going on 7456 Wilson Street, but the developer Mr. Rodriguez has done nothing but store his concrete structures in the area where children play. Director Lake contacted Mr. Rodriguez regarding the concrete structures.

Upon a question from Councilor Uzelac, Director Shine responded that Director Lake has given the developer a deadline to bring in the plans for the housing he is going to build. If the deadline isn't met, Mr. Rodriguez will have to move the concrete structures.

Councilor Uzelac also updated the council on the Kizer Ditch Projects.

Councilor Pettit reported that the Parks and Recreation committee needs to meet to discuss some outstanding capital projects such as the parking lot, doors, and other punch list items at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center.

Clerk-Treasurer Eric January reported that Boys and Girls Club hasn't paid any rent per the lease agreement with the Town of Merrillville for 2022 and 2023. Attorney Svetanoff will look into this with Chris Campbell from the Boys and Girls Club.

UTILITY LIAISON – CHANDLER-FELTON – Councilor Chandler-Felton reported that she received correspondence from Interim Town Manager Griffin and the support staff committee regarding making arrangements with Indiana American Water, Merrillville Conservatory District, and possibly NIPSCO to meet.

SPECIAL COMMITTEES

ABANDONED-BLIGHTED PROPERTIES - HAYNES-EDWARDS & CHANDLER-FELTON– Councilor Haynes-Edwards reported she also spoke to Interim Town Manager Griffin who is going to set meetings with Indiana American Water, Merrillville Conservatory District, Independence Hill Conservancy District, and NIPSCO.

SEMI-QUINCENTENNIAL COMMITTEE - HAYNES-EDWARDS – Councilor Haynes-Edwards reported that she will be meeting with Interim Town Manager Griffin regarding the committee.

SPECIAL TOWN PROJECTS - NEAL – Councilor Neal reported on the following upcoming events that are listed on the Town's website merrillville.in.gov:

- The Spring Newsletter will be going out soon in the mail.
- The annual Juneteenth Celebration will be on Juneteenth and will include a movie night and some other events are in the works for this day.
- The annual July 4th Fireworks will be on July 3rd at Merrillville High School similar to last year's fireworks event. The event will start at 9:00 pm. The flyer for this event is already out.

- The annual July 4th parade will be held on July 4th and the committee is meeting on March 18th to discuss the details. The parade will start at 11:00 am until 1:00 pm.
- The annual Job Fair is coming up on July 24th at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center from 11:00 am until 2:30 pm,
- The annual National Night Out is in the planning stage

DEPARTMENT & COMMISSION REPORTS

LAKE COUNTY SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT-NEAL– Councilor Neal reported that she has a meeting scheduled later this month where she will be doing one-on-one special training for new members. Lake County Solid Waste Management has started household hazardous waste collections. Councilor Neal further reported that residents can bring their items to Lake County Fairgrounds in Crown Point on March 23rd from 9:00 am until 2:00 pm.

Councilor Uzelac reported that paint and paint cans are included in the hazardous waste collections.

NORTHWESTERN INDIANA REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION-HARDAWAY – Councilor Hardaway reported that the meeting is next month.

STORMWATER MANAGEMENT RESOURCES-LAKE – Director Lake wasn't present at the meeting.

SOUTHSHORE VISITORS AND CONVENTION AUTHORITY-PATENA – Councilor Bella reported that a shakeup has happened by state legislators to have qualifications for board members and nine or ten members may have to come off the board. The board members not only have to be involved and know the hospitality industry but must have as well worked as a manager or general manager of a restaurant, hotel, or casino.

Attorney Svetanoff added that the budget allocation process is also changing.

FIRE TERRITORY BOARD - NEAL & HARDAWAY – Councilor Hardaway reported that a meeting will be held on March 19th.

DEPARTMENT REPORTS/INTERIM TOWN MANAGER

Chief Nuses – Police Department
Chief Nuses reported that the Women's Self-Defense Class is full and there will be another class in early to mid-summer.

Director Shine - Building and Planning
Director Shine reported that her department is getting ready for the building season.

Director King – Street Department
Direct King reported that his department has been busy picking up trash and branches around the Town. His department has also been doing shoulder work throughout the Town.

Director King reported that the Town did receive $250,000,00 from the Northwest Indiana Regional Planning Commission for the development of the new Town Center.

Upon a question from Councilor Uzelac regarding street paving, Director King responded he has Robinson Engineering working on the ones and two streets gathering information to present to the council at a later date.

GENERAL ORDERS

A. Ordinances:

First Readings:

None

Second Readings:

1. **Ordinance 24-03 (Discussion and Roll Call Vote)**

An Ordinance Appropriating Additional Money in the Annual Budget for the Park Department (006) of the Corporation General Fund (1101), all Under I.C. 36-5-3-5, et seq.

It was moved by Councilor Uzelac and seconded by Councilor Hardaway to approve Ordinance 24-03 on the second and final reading.

Upon a roll call vote, there were seven affirmatives and no negatives. Councilors Neal, Haynes-Edwards, Chandler-Felton, Uzelac, Pettit, Hardaway, and Bella voted in the affirmative. There were no negatives. The motion passed. The ordinance was approved on the second and final reading.

The original is on file in the Office of the Clerk-Treasurer.

2. **Ordinance 24-04 (Discussion and Roll Call Vote)**

An Ordinance of the Town of Merrillville, Lake County, Indiana, Authorizing Additional Appropriations In the 2024 Budget Motor Vehicle Highway – Restricted Fund (Streets)

It was moved by Councilor Pettit and seconded by Councilor Uzelac to approve Ordinance 24-04 on the second and final reading.

Upon a roll call vote, there were seven affirmatives and no negatives. Councilors Neal, Haynes-Edwards, Chandler-Felton, Uzelac, Pettit, Hardaway, and Bella voted in the affirmative. There were no negatives. The motion passed. The ordinance was approved on the second and final reading.

The original is on file in the Office of the Clerk-Treasurer.

B. Resolutions:

None

C. BZA & LARGE GATHERING ACTIONS

None

OLD BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

None

SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS

None

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no comments from the public.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Town Council President announced the following:

- Redevelopment Commission Meeting March 26th at 6:15 p.m.
- The Town Council's next regular meeting is on March 26th at 6:30 p.m.
- Planning Commission meeting is on March 19th at 6:30 p.m.
- The Town Council Workshop is on March 20th at 6:30 p.m.
- The Redevelopment Commission Workshop is on March 19th at 5:00 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

Having completed all items on the agenda, the President declared the meeting adjourned at 7:17 pm

Rick Bella, Town Council President

Eric O. January, Clerk-Treasurer

Respectfully Submitted By Angela Lewis