Town Council of Merrillville
7820 Broadway Ave - Merrillville, IN 46410
Town Council Meeting Minutes of the Regular Meeting of
March 24, 2026, 6:30 P.M.

CALL TO ORDER: Acting Madam President Rhonda Neal 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 Acting Madam President Rhonda Neal.

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

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

Absent were Councilors Rick Bella and Shauna Haynes-Edwards

Town Attorney Svetanoff was present to provide legal advice.

PETITIONS, COMMUNICATIONS, ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS, AND REMONSTRATIONS*: NONE*

PUBLIC COMMENTS:
Several public comments were made. A copy of the video from the Town Council Meeting held on March 24, 2026, has been uploaded to the Town's website at:
https://www.merrillville.in.gov/government/town_council/town_council_meetings.php.

MOTIONS ON THE TABLE: *NONE*

CONSENT AGENDA:

- Accounts Payable Register Voucher Approval for March 24, 2026.
- ARPA Accounts Payable Register Voucher Approval for March 24, 2026.
- Approval of Town Council Meeting Minutes of March 10, 2026.
- Approval of Budget & Finance Meeting Minutes of March 16, 2026.

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

Upon a voice vote, the motion passed. The consent agenda was approved.

SPECIAL ORDERS:

a) A Public Hearing on Matters which require Notice Uploaded to Gateway: RE: Ord 26-01 - Additional Appropriation:

i. Verification by Town Attorney of the validity of proof of Gateway additional appropriation notice:

Attorney Svetanoff reported that he has reviewed the Proof of Gateway Additional Appropriation Notice and that everything is in order and conforms with the Indiana Code. The council may proceed with the public hearing.

ii. **Public Hearing Open:**
Acting Madam President Neal opened the hearing for Ordinance 26-01

- Town Manager Griffin explained Ordinance 26-01

Public Comment

- Bryon Mesarch of Merrillville, Indiana, asked for clarity on Ordinance 26-01.

iii. **Public Hearing Closed:**
Acting Madam President Neal closed the public hearing for Ordinance 26-01 and stated that action will be taken up under General Orders for this ordinance.

b) Core Presentation:
Gise Vanbaren of Core Construction gave an overview of the construction of the new Town of Merrillville Fire Station.

BZA & LARGE GATHERING ACTIONS*: NONE*

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS:

***BUDGET & FINANCE*—NEAL—** Acting Madam President Neal reported that the next budget and finance meeting will be on Monday, April 20, 2026, at 5:00 p.m. The meetings are scheduled on the third Monday of every month for the 2026 calendar year.

***STREET DEPARTMENT & PARK MAINTENANCE - UZELAC*–** Councilor Uzelac reported that the Street Department is picking up branches and sweeping streets throughout the Town of Merrillville. The paving project in the Town of Merrillville will begin sometime during the Spring.

COUNCIL AFFAIRS—PETTIT—Councilor Pettit had nothing to report.

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE- HARDAWAY- Councilor Hardaway had nothing to report.

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS- UZELAC – Councilor Uzelac passed out some pictures to the council regarding a beaver in the Providence Home subdivision. Director Mathew Lake of Stormwater Management went out to the subdivision, and the beaver was captured. Director Lake added that the department has a certified beaver trapper.

In response to a question from Councilor Uzelac regarding an update for the Kaizer Ditch Project, Director Lake responded that the project would go out for bid in late Spring. Stormwater Management had to work with Lake County Parks regarding the wetland mitigation. He also had correspondence with the Lake County Surveyor, William Emerson, regarding Phase 1 of the ditch maintenance, which will begin in the Spring from US 30 to 73rd Avenue.

PUBLIC SAFETY—HARDAWAY—Councilor Hardway had nothing to report.

ELECTIONS, PUBLIC RELATIONS, & TOWN BEAUTIFICATION - NEAL- Acting Madam President Neal had nothing to report.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT-PETTIT – Councilor Pettit reported that a Redevelopment Commission (RDC) workshop and regular schedule meeting were held right before tonight's Town Council Meeting. At the workshop, Deputy Chief Lilley presented a memo on staffing for the new fire station. Bob Swintz and Financial Advisor Trista Hudson were also in attendance. We are looking at staffing alternatives that will need to be discussed with the full council. The next RDC workshop will be held on April 28, 2026, at 5:00 p.m., before the regular scheduled RDC meeting at 6:00 p.m.

UTILITY LIAISON –CHANDLER-FELTON – Councilor Chandler-Felton had nothing to report.

PARKS AND DEAN & BARBARA WHITE COMMUNITY CENTER - PETTIT – Councilor Pettit reported that he would defer to Superintendent of Parks and Recreation Jerry McCartney's report.

The regular fourth Thursday of the monthly committee meeting will resume on March 26th at 5:00 p.m. Councilor Pettit encouraged President Bell and Acting Madam President Neal, as well as other council members, to attend this meeting. The following agenda items will be discussed:

- The Parks and Recreation's Master Plan
- Park Board
- Parks Department's Future

Councilor Pettit also added that the council will have to make some challenging decisions as we move forward on finances for the parks department, redevelopment, and allocation areas.

Jerry McCartney, Superintendent of Parks and Recreation, added that all parks and recreation activities can be found at: https://merrillvilleparks.recdesk.com, the Facebook Page, and the mymerrillville app. The Senior Social Club is an addition to our series of programs. We have activities for seniors throughout the week.

SPECIAL COMMITTEES

ABANDONED-BLIGHTED PROPERTIES - HAYNES-EDWARDS & CHANDLER-FELTON– Councilor Haynes-Edwards was absent.

In response to a question from Acting Madam Vice President Neal about a report, Town Manager Griffin stated that an agreement has been reached with Barnes and Thornburg to conduct training on the unsafe building fund. We will have two presentations by the Attorney from Barnes & Thornburg to refresh our recollection of the changes in the law regarding enforcement under the unsafe building law. The committee and Code Enforcement will be at the presentation. Council members and Town Attorney Svetanoff are also welcome to attend.

SPECIAL TOWN PROJECTS – HAYNES-EDWARDS – Councilor Haynes-Edwards was absent.

SEMI-QUINCENTENNIAL COMMITTEE - HAYNES-EDWARDS – Councilor Haynes-Edwards was absent.

DEPARTMENT & COMMISSION REPORTS:

NORTHERN INDIANA REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION-HARDAWAY – Councilor Hardaway reported that the NIRPC has a meeting on Thursday, February 19th. The following items were discussed:

- Meeting Attendance
- INDOT presentation for reporting all potholes. You can call 855INDOT4U.
- The next NIRPC meeting will be on April 16, 2026

LAKE COUNTY SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT – HARDAWAY (TEMP) - Acting Madam President Neal reported that a meeting was scheduled for last week, but due to the lack of a quorum, no action was taken. The alternate for Lake County Solid Waste Management (LCSWM) is Councilor Keesha Hardaway for the Town of Merrillville. The next two meetings have been scheduled for April and May. The Household Hazardous Waste 2026 schedule from LCSWM has been uploaded to the Town website and on the mymerrillville app, along with information regarding the Town's participation in bottle top collections by Chas Riley, Media Officer.

THE SHARED ETHICS ENTITY-HARDAWAY – Councilor Hardaway had nothing to report.

FIRE TERRITORY BOARD - NEAL & HARDAWAY – Acting Madam President Neal and Councilor Hardaway had nothing to report.

CLERK-TREASURER OFFICE - JANUARY – Clerk-Treasurer Eric February reporting on the following:

- **Cash Balances - $77,456,557.81** (Obligated and Unobligated Funds) Town Court, Fire Department, General Fund, Police Department, RDA, Stormwater, etc.

- **Food and Beverage Tax** – We received another **$120,743.69** check**,** which brings the balance to **$2, 621,724.84** that was collected from 114 businesses.

- **Payees** – 235 Payees were paid in February.

SSCVA – DEANN PATENA - No Report

DEPARTMENT REPORTS/ TOWN MANAGER:

Superintendent Jerry McCartney – Parks and Recreation
Superintendent McCartney gave his report under Parks, Recreation & Dean and Barbara White Community Center.

Director Matthew Lake – Stormwater Management
Director Matthew reported on the following:

- **Jet Vac Trunk** – Best Equipment has delivered the new Jet Vac Truck and provided the staff training. The vehicle was paid for in full, and there were no interest payments. We are strategically updating our fleet.
- **Drainage Projects** – The Stormwater Management Department is working on several drainage projects throughout the Town of Merrillville.
- **Mowing** – We have obtained our final quote for landscaping residential detention basins.
- **Demo RC Mower** – RC Mower gave a demonstration of autonomous robotic mowers. We may add one of their mowers to our fleet because of safety and to reduce labor costs.
- **Kaiser Ditch** – The maintenance will be done by the Lake County Surveyor, Creekwood Crossing, HOA, and Providence Homes.
- **Cleveland Street at 55th Incident** – An INDOT culvert was failing, and the Merrillville Police blocked the road so Stormwater Management could assist until INDOT's arrival on the scene. The issue was resolved, and traffic flow resumed.

- **MS Annual Report** – The report will be completed in a couple of days and ready for Councilor Rick Bella's signature.

Police Chief Nuses– Police Department
Chief Nuses reported the following statistics for February 2026:

- **Traffic Stops** – 449 traffic stops, which resulted in over 400 citations.
- **OWI Arrest** – 4
- **Traffic Warning** – 307

- **Adult Arrest** – 107
- **Juvenile Arrest** – 3
- **Calls for Service** – 2,154, which resulted in 3,692 officers' responses.
- **Community Policing Assignments** – 13
- **Extra Patrol Assignments** – 122
- **Homicide and Suicide** – 1
- **Domestic Battery Charges** – 15
- **Thefts**– 27

Chief Nuses also reported that tickets are being issued for false alarms and excessive police calls not included in the February report.

In response to a question from Councilor Pettit regarding the Clark Gas Station on US 30 and Rhode Island default judgment tally, Chief Nuses responded that there are nineteen totaling $142,500.00.

Town Attorney Svetanoff added that the default judgment goes as a lien against the property. The Town of Merrillville will be contacted by the current owner or the new owner regarding the lien before the sale of the property.

Chief Nuses added that there is another $100,000.00 coming in fines because the owner of the gas station is being fined daily.

In response to a question from Councilor Pettit regarding Amazon pulling a $35,000,000.00 interior remodel permit, Director Sheila Shine responded that the value was $35,000,000.00, and the permit fee was $346,000.00.

Director Shine – Building and Planning
Director Sheila Shine had nothing to report.

Director King - Street Department
Director Steve King was absent.
Town Manager Griffin – Town Administration
Town Manager Griffin reported on the following:

- **Monthly Reports** – Town Manager Griffin reported that the Department Heads' reports compiled by Town Administrative and Building Manager Linda Rosas have been given to the council members and Clerk-Treasurer Eric January.

GENERAL ORDERS

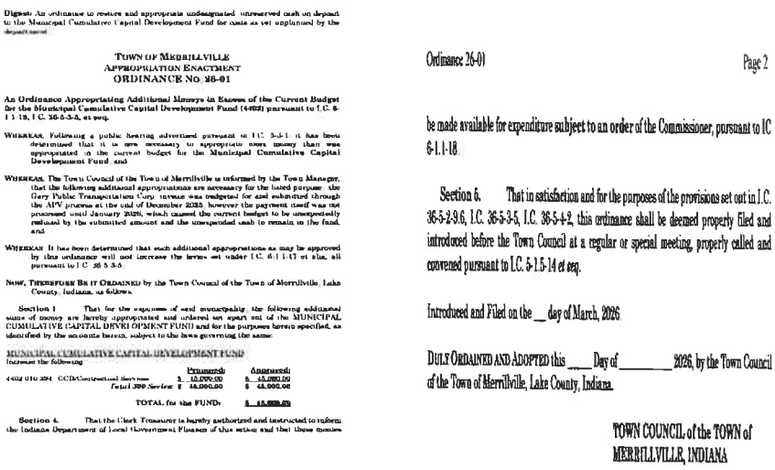
A. Ordinances: (Discussion and Roll Call Vote):

Zoning: (Motion to adopt or reject; confer IC 36-5-2-10(d): ***NONE***

First Reading: **Ordinance (Discussion and Roll Call Vote): *NONE***

Second Reading: (Discussion, Public Comments Only If Required & Roll Call Vote):

Ordinance 26-01 (Discussion & Roll Call Vote)
An Ordinance Appropriating Additional Money in Excess of the Current Budget for the Municipal Cumulative Capital Development Fund (4402) pursuant to I.C. 6-1.1-18, I.C. 36-5-3-5, et seq.



Digest An ordinance to restore and appropriate undesignated unreserved cash on deposit to the Municipal Cumulative Capital Development Fund for costs as set unplanned by the

TOWN OF MERRILLVILLE
APPROPRIATION ENACTMENT
ORDINANCE No. 26-01

An Ordinance Appropriating Additional Moneys in Excess of the Current Budget for the Municipal Cumulative Capital Development Fund (4402) pursuant to I.C. 6-1.1-18, I.C. 36-5-3-5, et seq.

WHEREAS, Following a public hearing advertised pursuant to I.C. 5-3-1 it has been determined that it is now necessary to appropriate more money than was appropriated in the current budget for the Municipal Cumulative Capital Development Fund; and

WHEREAS, The Town Council of the Town of Merrillville is informed by the Town Manager, that the following additional appropriations are necessary for the listed purpose: the Gary Public Transportation Corp invoice was budgeted for and submitted through the APV process at the end of December 2025, however the payment itself was not processed until January 2026, which caused the current budget to be unexpectedly reduced by the submitted amount and the unexpended cash to remain in the fund; and

WHEREAS It has been determined that such additional appropriations as may be approved by this ordinance will not increase the levies set under I.C. 6-1.1-17 et seq., all pursuant to I.C. 36-5-3-5.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT ORDAINED by the Town Council of the Town of Merrillville, Lake County, Indiana, as follows:

Section 1 That for the expenses of said municipality, the following additional sums of money are hereby appropriated and ordered set apart out of the MUNICIPAL CUMULATIVE CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT FUND and for the purposes hereto specified, as identified by the accounts herein, subject to the laws governing the same:

MUNICIPAL CUMULATIVE CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT FUND
Increase the following

		Presently	Appropriated
4402 010 304	CCD/Contractual Services	$ 15,000.00	$ 43,000.00
	Total 300 Services	$ 58,000.00	$ 68,000.00
	TOTAL for the FUND:		$ 68,000.00

Section 4. That the Clerk Treasurer is hereby authorized and instructed to inform the Indiana Department of Local Government Finance of this action and that these monies

Ordinance 26-01 Page 2

be made available for expenditure subject to an order of the Commissioner, pursuant to IC 6-1.1-18.

Section 6. That in satisfaction and for the purposes of the provisions set out in I.C. 36-5-2-9.6, I.C. 36-5-3-5, I.C. 36-5-4-2, this ordinance shall be deemed properly filed and introduced before the Town Council at a regular or special meeting, properly called and convened pursuant to I.C. 5-1.5-14 *et seq.*

Introduced and Filed on the __ day of March, 2026.

DULY ORDAINED AND ADOPTED this ____ Day of _____ 2026, by the Town Council of the Town of Merrillville, Lake County, Indiana.

TOWN COUNCIL of the TOWN of
MERRILLVILLE, INDIANA

It was moved by Councilor Pettit and seconded by Councilor Uzelac to approve Ordinance 26-01.

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

B. **Resolutions (Discussion and Voice Vote):**

Resolution 26-08 (Discussion & Voice Vote)
A Resolution of the Town of Merrillville, Lake County, Indiana, Authorizing a Transfer of Monies Within the Fund of the Town.

RESOLUTION NO. 26-08, *as amended*
TOWN OF MERRILLVILLE, INDIANA

A RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN OF MERRILLVILLE, LAKE COUNTY, INDIANA, AUTHORIZING A TRANSFER OF MONIES WITHIN THE FUNDS OF THE TOWN

WHEREAS, the Town issued a General Obligation Bond in 2021 in two Series and created Funds 3377 and 3378 from which debt service was to be paid for Series A and Series B, respectively; and

WHEREAS, the Town Council has been made aware that while ALL debt service payments had been made timely, there was an error in the December 2025 payments in that the principal and interest payments for both funds were paid from one fund instead of from each; and

WHEREAS, it is appropriate to return the equivalent cash to the fund from which both payments were made in order to restore the over-paying fund's cash balance; and

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, BY THE TOWN COUNCIL OF THE TOWN OF MERRILLVILLE, LAKE COUNTY, INDIANA, that the following Transfer occur:

	Decrease	Increase
Fund 3378: Sinking(B) 2021 GO Bond Debt Srvc	$ *78,650*	
Fund 3377: Sinking(A) 2021 GO Bond Debt Srvc		$ *78,650*

This Resolution shall be in full force and effect from and after its passage. DULY ADOPTED BY THE TOWN COUNCIL OF THE TOWN OF MERRILLVILLE, LAKE COUNTY, INDIANA, this ___ day of March, 2026.

TOWN COUNCIL of the TOWN of MERRILLVILLE, INDIANA

It was moved by Councilor Pettit and seconded by Councilor Uzelac to approve Resolution 26-08.

Upon a voice vote, the motion passed. The resolution was approved.

Resolution 26-09 (Discussion & Voice Vote)

A Resolution Authorizing a Transfer to the Park Non-Reverting Operating Fund.

TOWN of MERRILLVILLE, INDIANA
RESOLUTION NO. 26-09

A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING A TRANSFER TO THE PARK NON-REVERTING OPERATING FUND

WHEREAS, The Town of Merrillville by proper legislative action has established a Park Non-Reverting Operating Fund, pursuant to IC 36-10 et seq.;

WHEREAS, The Town of Merrillville, by proper legislative action did establish a Merrillville Food and Beverage Tax and a Food and Beverage Tax Receipts Fund all pursuant to IC 6-9-54.5 et seq.;

WHEREAS, IC 6-9-54.5-9 provides that among the uses for the revenue received is for parks and recreation purposes;

WHEREAS, The Town Manager and Fiscal Advisor have advised that the Town Council favor the fiscal management outlined in this resolution, which recommendation the Town Council now desires to enacts; and

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the Town Council of the Town of Merrillville, Lake County, Indiana as follows:

Section 1. That the amount of Three Hundred Thousand Dollars ($300,000) be transferred from the cash balance on deposit to the Food and Beverage Tax Receipts Fund (4439) and be deposited to the credit of the Parks Non-Reverting Operating Fund (2211);

Section 2. That, pursuant to the foregoing, the Clerk-Treasurer be authorized and is hereby requested to transfer the amount identified herein;

Section 3. That the Clerk-Treasurer as the disbursing and fiscal officer of the Municipality, is hereby instructed, and authorized to take such steps as necessary to carry out the purposes of this resolution.

DULY RESOLVED and ADOPTED this ____ day of March, 2026, by the Town Council of the Town of Merrillville, Lake County, Indiana.

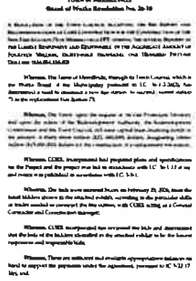
TOWN COUNCIL, of the TOWN of MERRILLVILLE, INDIANA

Town Manager Griffin explained the resolution.

It was moved by Councilor Uzelac and seconded by Councilor Chandler-Felton to approve Resolution 26-09.

Upon a voice vote, the motion passed. The resolution was approved.

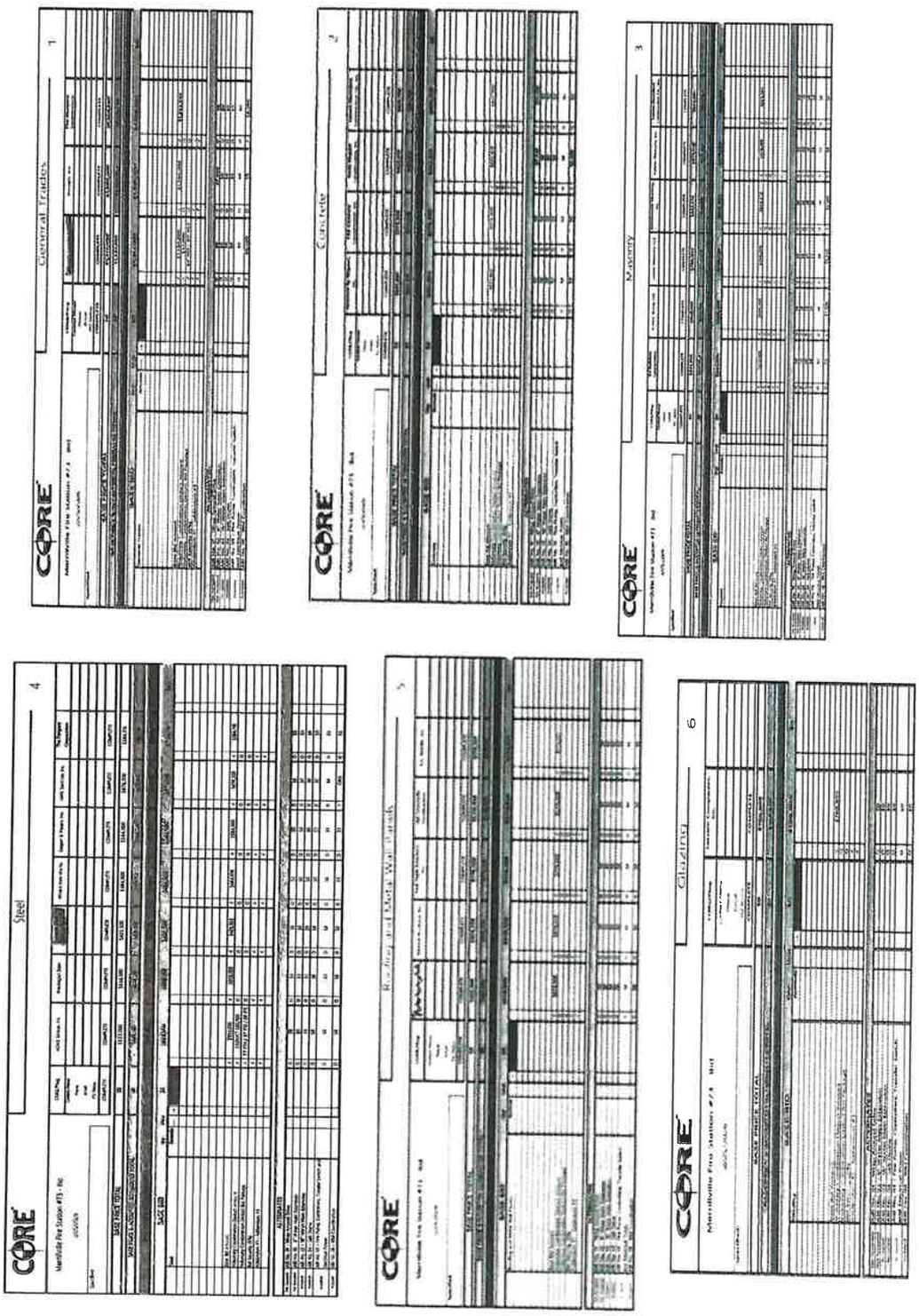
Resolution 26-10 (Discussion & Voice Vote)
A Resolution of the Town Council Accepting the Bid Report and Recommendations of Core Construction for the Construction of the New Fire Station 73 of Merrillville FPT. Finding the several Bidders as the Lowest Responsive and Responsible in the Aggregate of Fourteen Million,

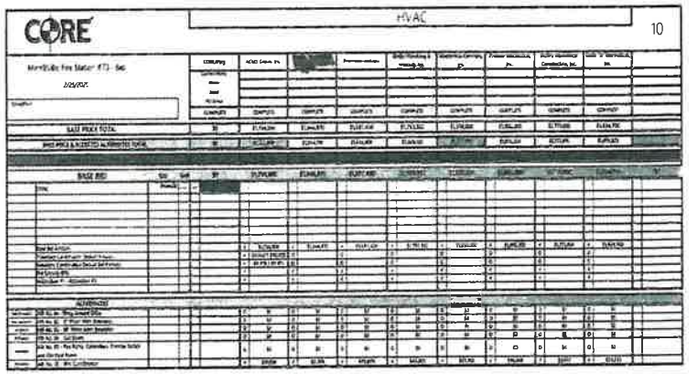


Eighty-Four Thousand, One Hundred Fifty-Six Dollars ($14,084,156.00



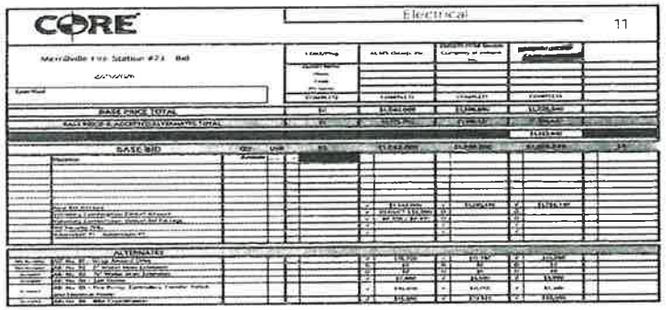





CORE

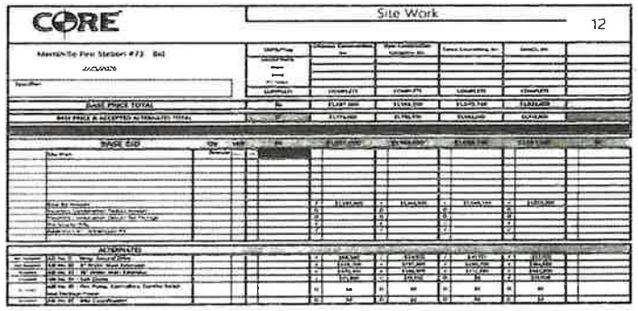
HVAC

10


CORE

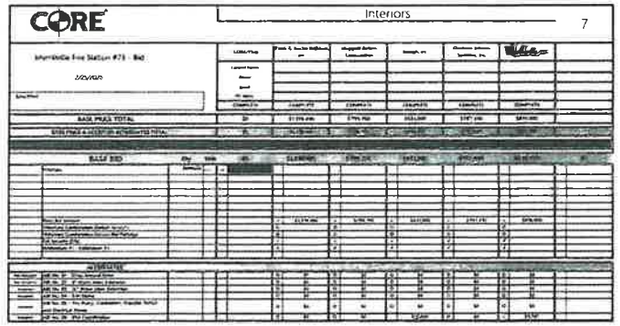
Electrical

11


CORE

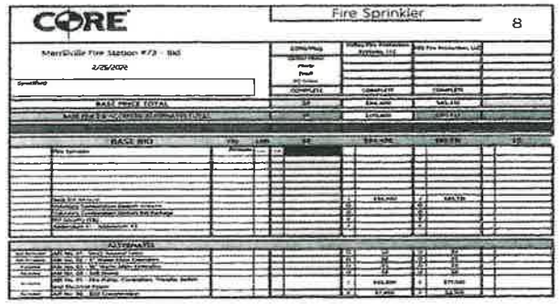
Site Work

12


CORE

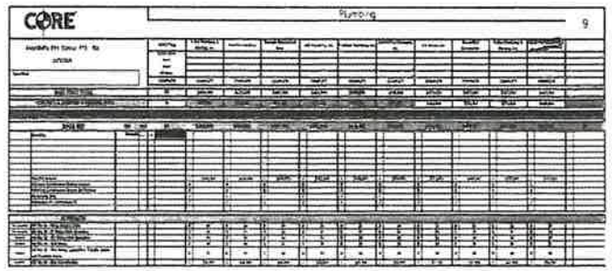
Interiors

7


CORE

Fire Sprinkler

8


CORE

Plumbing

9

Town Manager Griffin explained the resolution.

Councilor Pettit added that Core is using all union contractors, and this is part of the $14,000,000.00 that was commented on earlier in this meeting. The funding for the fire station is part of the $33,000,000.00 bond that we issued last year for the fire station, Whitcomb Street, and local road & street paving. All of which is being paid for by the allocation areas of the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts, which include businesses.

Clerk-Treasurer Eric January added that the Fire Department is understaffed and submitting a lot of overtime. Considering Senate Bill One and the decrease in funding being projected for 2026 to be $831,000.00, the 2027 projection is $956,000.00, and the 2028 projection is 1,300,000.00. Clerk-Treasurer Eric January recommended delaying the fire station even though TIF Districts are funding the project and hiring more Firefighters.

It was moved by Councilor Uzelac and seconded by Councilor Pettit to approve Resolution 26-10.

Upon a voice vote, the motion passed. The resolution was approved.

OLD BUSINESS: ***NONE***

NEW BUSINESS: ***NONE***

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

The Town Council President announced the following:

- Town Council Meeting April 14, 2026, at 6:30 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT:
Having completed all items on the agenda, the Town Council Acting Madam President announced the meeting had adjourned at 7:13 p.m.

Rick Bella, Town Council President

Eric O. January, Clerk-Treasurer

Respectfully Submitted By Angela Lewis