Town Council of Merrillville
7820 Broadway Ave - Merrillville, IN 46410
Town Council Meeting Minutes of the Regular Meeting of
June 9, 2026, 6:30 P.M.

CALL TO ORDER: President Rick 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 President Rick Bella.

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, Shauna Haynes-Edwards, Margaret Uzelac, Keesha Hardaway, Shawn Pettit, and Rick Bella. Clerk-Treasurer Eric January was present to memorialize the proceedings. A quorum was attained.

Councilor Leona Chandler-Felton was absent from the roll call.

Town Attorney Svetanoff was present to provide legal advice.

Councilor Leona Chandler-Felton came into the meeting at 6:40 p.m.

PETITIONS, COMMUNICATIONS, ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS, AND REMONSTRATIONS:

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Several public comments were made regarding the Dean and Barbara White Community Center Meeting held on May 28, 2026, Community Services at Liberty House Recovery Café, the finances of Town Court, Gas Stations in the Town of Merrillville, and the Railroad Crossing on 62nd & Taft Street. The video from the Town Council Meeting held on June 9, 2026, can be viewed here:
https://www.merrillville.in.gov/our-government/meeting-calendar-minutes-and-video

MOTIONS ON THE TABLE: ***NONE***

CONSENT AGENDA:

- Accounts Payable Register Voucher Approval for June 29, 2026. ***(The actual date is June 9, 2026)***
- Approval of Town Council Meeting Minutes of May 26, 2026.
- ARPA Accounts Payable Register Voucher Approval for June 29, 2026 ***(The actual date is June 9, 2026)***

It was moved by Councilor Pettit and seconded by Vice President Neal to approve the Consent Agenda.

In response to a question from President Bella regarding clarification on the ARP Accounts Payable Voucher 162209 for vendor 41 RDG Planning & Design Inc, Financial Advisor Hudson responded that the expense was approved in 2023, with the majority of payments on the contract occurring in 2023 and 2024. This is the small final invoice that was only recently received.

Upon a voice vote, with seven affirmatives and no negatives, the motion passed. The Consent Agenda was approved.

SPECIAL ORDERS:

a) A Public Hearing of Matters which require Notice Upload to Gateway: Re 26-04 - Additional Appropriation:

i. Verification by Town Attorney Svetanoff of the validity of proof of Gateway's 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:**
President Rick Bella opened the hearing for Ordinance 26-04. Financial Advisor Hudson explained Ordinance 26-04.

Councilor Pettit added that the Parks, Recreation & D&BWCC reviewed the details listed on Ordinance 26-04.

Public Comment

- There were no public comments.

iii. **Public Hearing Closed:**
President Rick Bella closed the public hearing for Ordinance 26-04 and stated that action on this ordinance will be taken under General Orders.

BZA & LARGE GATHERING ACTIONS:

1) **Applicant**: Prince Singh
Owner: Smoke Stop Inc.
Request: Special Exception Approval
Purpose: To Allow a Fueling Station with a Convenience Store
Location: 6096 Broadway
Zoning: C-2 Community Commercial Zoning District

Planning and Building Director Sheila Shine explained the Special Exception Approval. The Board of Zoning Appeal vote was four in favor and one absent.

Attorney Riley Lubbert for the Petitioner Prince Singh explained the nature of the business and the positive impact it will have on the Town of Merrillville.

Councilor Hardaway voiced her opposition to the Special Exception Approval for Petitioner Prince Singh because she would like to see a development that offers a different type of service or amenity that better meets the needs and interests of the community.

Councilor Pettit added that the council may want to consider a moratorium on gas stations in the Town of Merrillville, similar to what was done for duplexes.

In response to a question by Councilor Pettit regarding the council's right to issue a moratorium on gas stations, Town Attorney Svetanoff responded that the council is within its rights because of the precedent set by the moratorium on Data Centers.

In response to a question from Town Attorney Svetanoff regarding requirements, Director Sheila Shine responded that the code for parking and setbacks must be met. She also stated that the Town

Council has the final say regarding Special Exception Approvals after Board of Zoning approval. She further explained the Special Exception Approval process.

Attorney Lubbert further explained the position of the Petitioner Singh regarding the business.

Town Attorney Svetanoff clarified for the record with Councilor Hardaway her comments regarding the proposed Special Exception being injurious to the use and enjoyment of other property in the immediate vicinity for the purposes already permitted, substantially and substantially diminished, or impair the value within the neighborhood?

Councilor Hardaway confirmed that the clarification is correct.

Attorney Svetanoff presented three options to the council: approve, defer, or deny.

In response to a question from the Clerk-Treasurer Eric January regarding Petitioner Singh closing one of his other gas stations, Petitioner Singh stated no.

After much dialogue between Attorney Lubbert, Petitioner Singh, and the Council, a motion was made.

It was moved by Councilor Hardaway and seconded by Councilor Haynes-Edwards to deny the Board of Zoning Appeals' (BZA) Action for the Special Exception Approval.

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 BZA action was denied for the Special Exception Approval.

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS:

***BUDGET & FINANCE*—NEAL**— Vice President Neal reported that the Budget and Finance meeting scheduled for Monday, June 15, 2026, has been cancelled.

STREET DEPARTMENT & PARK MAINTENANCE - UZELAC– Councilor Uzelac reported that the Street Department is still cleaning up streets, picking up branches, and performing roadside maintenance all over the Town of Merrillville.

COUNCIL AFFAIRS—PETTIT—Councilor Pettit reported that a committee will be held Tuesday June 16th at 5:00 p.m. in the conference room at Town Hall to review ordinances for recommendations.

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE- HARDAWAY- Councilor Hardaway reported that a Recreation Attendant position in the Parks Department is currently posted on the Town's website at https://www.merrillville.in.gov/our-government/job-opportunities/ and on the mymerrillville app (Apple and Google Play Stores). This position was posted on Friday and will close in fourteen

business days from Friday. If anyone is interested and has the qualifications, please do not hesitate to apply.

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS- UZELAC – Councilor Uzelac reported that she had a question for Director Matthew Lake regarding Kaiser Ditch. In response to a question from Councilor Uzelac to Director Lake about the project's completion, Director Lake stated that the Lake County Surveyor has begun Phase 1 of the work. Director Lake explained Phase 1.

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

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

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT-PETTIT – Councilor Pettit reported that the time of the Redevelopment Commission (RDC) regular standing meeting on June 23rd will be moved from 6:00 p.m. to 6:15 p.m. The RDC Workshop will be held on June 23, 2026, at 5:30 p.m. to meet with Mr. Bob Swintz and review with us our bonds and allocation area funding. This will be a six-month review of our finances.

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

PARKS AND DEAN & BARBARA WHITE COMMUNITY CENTER - PETTIT – Councilor Pettit reported that at the April 23, 2026, committee meeting, a conceptual design proposal by American Structure Point, the designers of the Dean and Barbara White Community Center, was presented for discussion and review.

Councilor Pettit explained the design for the new Community Center and the May 28th meeting regarding the proposal for the Dean and Barbara White Foundation to purchase the Dean and Barbara White Community Center (D&BWCC) located on 6600 Broadway in Merrillville, Indiana, for $23,000,000.00. Food and Beverage Tax Funding will be used to pay for the design, not to exceed $43,000.00, contingent upon the sale of the D&BWCC.

In response to a question regarding the motion being proper, Town Attorney Svetanoff responded that the motion was proper.

It was moved by Councilor Pettit and seconded by Councilor Uzelac to approve the American Structure Point contract for approximately $43,000.00, contingent on the sale of the Dean and Barbara White Community Center.

President Bella clarified that the D&BWCC is not being sold because the Town of Merrillville has financial problems, but to bring a YMCA to Merrillville, Indiana.

Upon a roll call vote, there were five affirmatives and two negatives. Councilors Neal, Chandler-Felton, Uzelac, Pettit, and Bella voted in the affirmative. Councilors Haynes-Edward and Hardaway voted in the negative. The motion passed. The contract was approved.

Councilor Pettit added that the committee meeting will resume on the fourth Thursday of the month.

SPECIAL COMMITTEES

ABANDONED-BLIGHTED PROPERTIES - HAYNES-EDWARDS & CHANDLER-FELTON – Councilor Haynes-Edwards had nothing to report.

SPECIAL TOWN PROJECTS – HAYNES-EDWARDS – Councilor Haynes-Edwards reported that residents, families, and visitors are invited to participate in all of our upcoming community events throughout this summer season. Parks Superintendent Jerry McCartney will expound more on the summer events. The Father's Day cookoff has been cancelled.

SEMI-QUINCENTENNIAL COMMITTEE - HAYNES-EDWARDS – Councilor Haynes-Edwards reported that the kick-off will be July 4th. The parade will start at 11:00 a.m., followed by festivities at Hidden Lake and other activities including painting a mural. The fireworks at Hidden Lake will start at dusk. We are looking for residents, businesses, and Town Council members to lead this celebration of the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4th.

DEPARTMENT & COMMISSION REPORTS:

NORTHERN INDIANA REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION-HARDAWAY – Councilor Hardaway reported that the next meeting will July 16, 2026

LAKE COUNTY SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT – NEAL - Vice President Neal reported that the next Lake County Solid Waste Management District Hazardous Waste (LCSWMD) Collection is on Wednesday, June 16th at the Lowell Middle School, located on 19250 Cline Avenue, Lowell, Indiana from 9:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. Paper shredding will be available for up to four grocery brown paper bags at every hazardous collection site this year. This information is available on the Town's website, the mymerrillville app, and LCSWMD's website, www.lcswmd.com.

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

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

CLERK-TREASURER OFFICE - JANUARY – Clerk-Treasurer Eric January reported that he would like to apologize for any inconvenience due to the training of staff on the new accounting software.

Clerk-Treasurer Eric January reported the following:

- **Food and Beverage Tax –** The balance in the fund is $2,225,855.74.

SSCVA – DEANN PATENA - No Report

DEPARTMENT REPORTS/ TOWN MANAGER:

Superintendent Jerry McCartney – Parks and Recreation
Superintendent Jerry McCartney reported the following updates regarding the D&BWCC:

- The Volleyball post hole are fixed.
- The Landscaping is scheduled for July 8th
- The movie night event scheduled for June 10th is postponed until August 5th . The next one is June 24th.

Superintendent McCartney went over several of the upcoming activities and events at the D&BWCC. These activities are listed on the Town's website and mymerrillville app under Park and Recreation.

Director Matthew Lake – Stormwater Management
Director Matthew Lake reported on activities at Stormwater Management:

- Hickory Ridge - We evaluated the pumps and everything is working great.
- 97th and Grant – A pre-construction meeting will be held on Thursday for the two-stage vision roadway safety project.
- Little Calumet River Basin – Stormwater will be applying for cost-sharing funding for some of the stormwater projects in the Town of Merrillville

Director Lake mentioned additional updates to keep the council informed.

Assistant Police Chief Vasel – Police Department
Assistant Chief Vasel reported the following updates regarding the Police Department:

- Vehicles – Over 30 cars were broken into in our area district. Several law enforcements officers are working on the cases. Residents and visitors should lock their cars and not leave valuables in your cars.

- Security System – Assistant Chief Vasel requested that residents check their security system and report any suspicious activities related to the break-in of cars.

- Therapy Dog – Assistant Chief Vasel introduced Officer Ryan who manages Randy the therapy dog to the audience and council. Officer Ryan and Randy will be a Chick-Fil-A on June 15th in front of the mall for a fundraiser from 5:00 p.m. until 8:00 p.m. Officer Evan explained the purpose of the fundraiser.

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 was absent.

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):**

Ordinance 26-04 (Discussion & Roll Call Vote)
An Ordinance Of The Town Of Merrillville, Lake County, Indiana, Authorizing Additional Appropriations In The 2026 Budget For Parks Non-Reverting Operating and Capital Funds

It was moved by Councilor Pettit and seconded by Councilor Uzelac to approve Ordinance 26-04 on first 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 first reading.

Ordinance 26-14 (Discussion & Roll Call Vote)
An Ordinance Of The Town Of Merrillville, Lake County, Indiana, Authorizing Additional Appropriations In The 2026 Budget For The Redevelopment General Fund and The Park Non-Reverting Fund.

It was moved by Vice President Neal and seconded by Councilor Uzelac to approve Ordinance 26-14 on first 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 first reading.

Second Reading: (Discussion, Public Comments Only If Required & Roll Call Vote): ***NONE***

Resolutions (Discussion and Voice Vote):

Resolution 26-27 (Discussion & Voice Vote)
An Exigent Resolution Providing For The Transfer Of Appropriation Balances From And Among Major Budget Classification In The Fire & Hazmat Fund As Requested By The Proper Officer And Forward To The Town Council For Its Action Pursuant To I.C. 6-1.1-18-6

It was moved by Vice President Neal and seconded by Councilor Pettit to approve Resolution 26-27.

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 June 23, 2026, at 6:30 p.m.
- RDC Meeting June 23, 2026, at 6:15 p.m.
- Northwest Indiana Forum Date Center Educational Workshop June 11, 2026, 5:30 p.m. at DBWCC Event Center.

ADJOURNMENT:
Having completed all items on the agenda, the Town Council President, Rick Bella, announced the meeting had adjourned at 7:50 p.m.

Rick Bella, Town Council President

Eric O. January, Clerk-Treasurer

Respectfully Submitted By Angela Lewis