Town Council of Merrillville
7820 Broadway Ave - Merrillville, IN 46410
Town Council Meeting Minutes of the Regular Meeting of
April 22, 2025, 2025 - 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 Christian Church.

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

PETITIONS, COMMUNICATIONS, ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS, AND REMONSTRATIONS:

- **Swearing in of Officer Ryan O'Hern:**
  Officer Ryan O'Hern was sworn in by Clerk-Treasurer Eric January. Chief Nuses gave a brief overview regarding Officer Ryan O'Hern's background.

- **Employee of the Month: April 2025:**
  Town Manager Michael Griffin and Parks Director Jerry McCartney presented Aaliyah Wright, who serves at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center, as April's Employee of the Month for the Town of Merrillville to the council and audience. Ms. Wright received a certificate of recognition and a gift card. Parks Director Jerry McCartney expounded on Ms. Wright's exemplary work at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center.

PUBLIC HEARING: ***NONE***

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

CONSENT AGENDA:

- Accounts Payable Register Voucher Approval for April 22nd, 2025
- ARPA Accts. Payable Register Voucher Approval for April 22nd, 2025
- Approval of Town Council Meeting Minutes April 8th, 2025

It was moved by Councilor Uzelac and seconded by Councilor Chandler-Felton to approve the consent agenda.

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

PRESENTATION OF DECLARATIONS:

- **Arbor Day Declaration:**

Rashana Richardson of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Gamma Rho Omega Chapter read the following declaration into the record:

Town of Merrillville
PROCLAMATION
State of Indiana

ARBOR DAY 2025

WHEREAS: In 1872, J. Sterling Morton proposed to the Nebraska Board of Agriculture that a special day be set aside for the planting of trees, and,

WHEREAS: This holiday, called Arbor Day, was first observed with the planting of a million trees in Nebraska; and,

WHEREAS: Arbor Day is now observed throughout the nation and the world; and,

WHEREAS: Trees can reduce the erosion of our precious topsoil by wind and water, cut heating and cooling costs, moderate the temperature, clean the air, produce life-giving oxygen, and provide habitat for wildlife; and,

WHEREAS: Trees are a renewable resource giving us paper, wood for our homes, fuel for our fires, and countless other wood products; and,

WHEREAS: Trees in our town increase property values, enhance the economic vitality of business areas, and beautify our community; and,

WHEREAS: Trees, wherever they are planted, are a source of joy and spiritual renewal.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT PROCLAIMED by the Town Council of the Town of Merrillville that **Tuesday, April 22nd, 2025, be designated as "Arbor Day"** in the Town of Merrillville, Indiana, and call upon the citizens of Merrillville to dedicate this day to the importance of health, safety and environmental issues affecting our community and the children who reside with all of us.

ADOPTED AND PROCLAIMED THIS ____ DAY OF APRIL 2025.

TOWN OF MERRILLVILLE TOWN COUNCIL

Tanya Burns, President of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Gamma Rho Omega Chapter, gave a brief overview of the chapter and its environmental initiative. The chapter will donate twenty trees to the Town of Merrillville.

It was moved by Councilor Chandler-Felton and seconded by Councilor Haynes-Edwards to approve the Arbor Day declaration.

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

STANDING & SPECIAL COMMITTEES REPORTS:

***BUDGET & FINANCE*—NEAL**—Vice-President Neal reported the following:

- **Grant Match Program**—The program has officially closed. This program was funded by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to provide a grant match for homeowners and businesses to rehabilitate or restore existing structures on their property. Over $210,000.00 awarded as matching funds to assist thirty-eight homeowners and ten businesses in the Town of Merrillville. The last grant match payment has been made.

STREET DEPARTMENT & PARK MAINTENANCE - UZELAC– Councilor Uzelac reported the following:

- **Trash** – Director King informed Councilor Uzelac that the Street Department has been picking up a lot of garbage that falls off the Waste Management trucks.
- **Street Sweeping**– Street Sweepers are still cleaning the main roads and subdivisions.
- **Speed Bumps** – Heritage Subdivision contacted Councilor Uzelac regarding speed bumps. All speed bumps should be installed by April 23rd.

Upon a question from President Bella regarding all speed bumps being installed by April 23rd, Director Steve King responded that the project should be completed by April 23rd, but the department is waiting on one location.

COUNCIL AFFAIRS- PETTIT– Councilor Pettit reported that a Council Affairs meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 6, 2025, at 5:30 p.m., where several proposed ordinances regarding the Police Department and Dean & Barbara White Community Center will be on the agenda.

PERSONNEL POLICY & EMPLOYEE BENEFITS – HARDAWAY- Councilor Hardaway was absent.

Upon a question from President Bella regarding a report, Town Manager Griffin responded that there is nothing to report for the committee.

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS- UZELAC – Councilor Uzelac had nothing to report.

PUBLIC SAFETY- HARDAWAY- Councilor Hardaway was absent.

Upon a question from President Bella regarding a report, Town Manager Griffin responded that there is nothing to report for the committee.

ELECTIONS, PUBLIC RELATIONS, & TOWN BEAUTIFICATION - NEAL- Vice-President Neal had nothing to report and referred to Director Steve King regarding beautification.

- **Moe's Building** – The plants are still growing.
- **Planters** – The planters are being prepped for planting, and some existing Hydrangeas were moved to the planters. Hanging baskets were ordered.

Upon a question from President Bella regarding the Gateway signs being ordered and the council's action being taken, Councilor Pettit responded that they were ordered. Town Manager Griffin added that action was taken by the Redevelopment Commission, and the cost of the two signs was split between the Redevelopment Commissio and Town Administration. The invoices for sample signs will be processed after this meeting or were processe after the last meeting on April 8th.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT-PETTIT – Councilor Pettit reported that a Redevelopment Commission (RDC) meeting was held before the Town Council meeting early tonight. At the RDC meeting, a resolution was approved that established a timetable for a proposed Redevelopment Authority Bond Issue for the second phase of local roads & street pavement in the Town of Merrillville, the Fire Station on the south side of Colorado, and the Reconstruction of Whitcomb Street.

Councilor Pettit also reported that the total cost for road resurfacing for local & frontage roads and streets is about $12,200,000.00.

UTILITY LIAISON –CHANDLER-FELTON – Councilor Chandler-Felton reported that she has reached out to Alexius Barber, Public Affairs and Economic Development Manager for NIPSCO,

PARKS AND DEAN & BARBARA WHITE COMMUNITY CENTER - PETTIT – Councilor Pettit reported that a committee meeting will be held on Thursday, April 24th at 4:00 p.m. The following items will be on the agenda:

- Rock Climbing Wall
- Flooring
- Review the Project List in the Adopted 5-Year Master Plan
- Park Board
- Sponsorships – The current sponsors have made a five-year commitment and are paid up until February 28, 2026. Two of the current sponsors will be going out of business, and there is a change in ownership.

SPECIAL COMMITTEES

ABANDONED-BLIGHTED PROPERTIES - HAYNES-EDWARDS & CHANDLER-FELTON– Councilor Haynes-Edwards reported that Code Enforcement has been going around issuing tickets and warnings for non-compliance. The court date for Abandoned and Blighted properties was rescheduled due to Good Friday, and that date is fast approaching.

SPECIAL TOWN PROJECTS - NEAL – Vice-President Neal reported on the following events:

- **July 4th** – Fourth of July details are posted on the Town's website at merrillville.in.gov under Town Events.
    - The parade is going to take place on Friday, July 4th. This year's parade will have a Sensory Sensitivity Zone (SSZ) where no sirens, loud noises, or other high-volume effects will be prohibited to

accommodate residents who are sensitive to loud sounds. The SSZ is going to start on 80th Place between Madison and Broadway. Once the parade passes the SSZ, the parade will commence as usual with high-volume noises. This non-SSZ parade will start at 80th Place, head north to 66th Place on Broadway.

- **Juneteenth Celebration** – The Juneteenth Sneaker Ball will be held at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center.

Vice-President Neal also stated that more information will be forthcoming regarding these two events.

SEMI-QUINCENTENNIAL COMMITTEE - HAYNES-EDWARDS – Councilor Haynes-Edwards reported that starting in June, a committee will be forming for the nation's 250th Anniversary. The committee will be looking for residents and volunteers who would like to serve on the committee.

DEPARTMENT & COMMISSION REPORTS:

STORMWATER MANAGEMENT RESOURCES-LAKE – Director Matthew Lake reported on the following:

- **Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM)** – Stormwater had an MS4 program compliance audit with Rob Beck, Stormwater Specialist with IDEM. The audit went well.

- **Pruning Workshop** - A pruning workshop will be held for the Community Orchard Maintenance and Care that relates to Stormwater's US Forest Service Grant. The workshop will be held at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center on May 15th from 9:00 a.m. until 11:00 a.m. Central Time. The workshop is open to the public, and this information will be posted on the Town's website.

- **Arbor Day Foundation** – The Town of Merrillville has been designated a Tree City USA. This marks the fifteenth year, and we also have a growth award.

- **Arbor Day** – Friday, April 25th, is Arbor Day, as mentioned earlier by the Alpha Kappa Alpha Gamma Rho Omega Chapter sorority. The sorority will be helping to plant trees at Rosenbaum Park on Friday at 10:00 a.m.

- **Little Calumet River Basin Development Commission Board** – The board approved $39,265.00 for the Stormwater Master Plan Update.

- **69th Connecticut** - Grimmer Construction will resume the project to finish spot areas and site restoration.

NORTHERN INDIANA REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION-HARDAWAY – Councilor Hardaway was absent.

LAKE COUNTY SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT-NEAL– Vice-President Neal reported on the following:

- **Latex Paint Collections** – May 10th from 9:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. at Lake County Solid Waste Management District (LCSWMD) located at 8695 Broadway in Merrillville

- **Residential Compost** – Compost will be available to residents. You must call LCSWMD for an appointment to pick up the compost at (219) 337-8341. You can receive 1 cubic foot.
- **Household Waste Collections** – Saturday, May 14th at Hobar Public Works from 3:00 p.m. until 7:00 p.m. The next one will be held on May 31st at Hudson Campbell, located in Gary, Indiana from 9:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m.

Vice-President Neal also reported that the next meeting was scheduled for the third Thursday in May.

THE SHARED ETHICS ENTITY-HARDAWAY – Councilor Hardaway was absent.

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

CLERK-TREASURER OFFICE - JANUARY – Clerk-Treasurer Eric January reported on the following financial statistics for March:

- **Payroll Month of March 2025** – The payroll for March was $931,729.28.
- **Payroll 1st Quarter of 2025** – The payroll expenditures were $3,400,281.26.
- **Revenue for 1st Quarter of 2025 (Deposits)** – The deposits were 10,288,767.19.
- **Disbursements for 1st Quarter of 2025** – The expenditures were $16,746,030.51.
- **Ending Balance as of March 31st** (Comprises of Court, Fire Department, General Fund, Obligated & Non-Obligated Funds, Police Department, RDA, Stormwater, etc. Funds) - $42,044,068.30
- **Fraud** – There was no fraudulent activity on checks, thanks to our Positive Pay System, where all checks issued must be approved before they are cashed at the bank. The internal controls are working.

Clerk-Treasurer Eric January also reported that the Town of Merrillville is financially in good shape.

SSCVA – DEANN PATENA - Deann Patena, Crossroads Chamber CEO/President and the Town of Merrillville's Representative on the Southshore Convention and Visitors Authority Tourism (Southshore CVA) Board, reported on the following statistics for 2024:

- **Sporting Events (Amateur, Collegiate, and Professional) -** The Southshore CVA hosted 75 events fc over 64,000 participants that generated more than $41,000,000.00 in Economic Impact for the regio Between October 1, 2023, through September 30, 2024, the Town of Merrillville had 2,323,155 trips (when a family comes to the area). The total number of visitors was 5,531,000 days at an average length of 2.4 days.

- **Tourism Tax Revenue in Lake County** – The Southshore CVA generated $131,000,000.00.
- **Visitor Spending in Lake County**- $1,240,000,000.00 in 2022
- **Jobs Supported Tourism** – 16.551 jobs supported by tourism.
- **Economic Impact in Lake County** - $848,000,000 of total economic impact of tourism in Lake County,
- **Additional Room Demands in Lake County** – 52,643 from 2019 to 2023.

Upon a question from Clerk-Treasurer Eric January regarding the number one draw to Lake County, Deann Patena responded, sporting centers including the Dean & Barbara White Community Center, Lake, and the Dunes.

DEPARTMENT REPORTS/ TOWN MANAGER:

Director McCartney – Parks Department
Director McCartney reported on the following:

- **Flooring** – ICC Floors Plus has measured the Flex Room, Community Room, and two other rooms. We will be picking out flooring on Friday, April 25th.
- **5-Year Master Parks Plan** – The plan has been submitted.
- **Youth Football and Basketball** – Registration is still open for these programs under the activity section at merrillvilleparks.recdesk.com.
- **Adult and Youth Yoga & Dance Programs** – Registration is still open for these programs under the activity section at merrillvilleparks.recdesk.com.
- **Volleyball** – Registration is closed, but any team that comes as a full team can sign up starting May 2nd.
- **Painting Ceramics Class** – The class will be held on April 26th for two groups, ages 5 through 8 and ages 9 through 13.

Director McCartney also reported he will attend a meeting on Thursday, April 24th, regarding a Rock Wall with Core Construction.

Upon a question from President Bella regarding registration on the Town's website, Director McCartney responded that people could register for open programs on the Town's website at merrillvilleparks.recdesk.com.

Upon a question from Council Chandler-Felton regarding all-male volleyball teams, Director McCarney responded that the teams are all co-ed.

Chief Nuses– Police Department
Chief Nuses also reported on the following statistics for March 2025:

- **Calls for Service** – 2,731, which resulted in 4,615 Officer Responses.
- **Traffic Stops** – 468, which resulted in 352 citations issued.
- **Operating While Intoxicated (OWI)** – 10 arrests.
- **Adult Arrest** – 101
- **Juvenile Arrest** – 1

- **Coffee with A Cop** - Chief Nuses thanked everyone who attended this event held at Panera Bread located at 303 East 81st Avenue on April 17th. The Community was invited to talk and interact with the Chief of Police Nuses and local officers.

- **Community Night Chat with Merrillville Police Department** – The event will be held at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center on May 22nd from 6:00 p.m. until 8:00 p.m. The Community is invited to this event, and officers from different specialties will be in attendance. There will also be a question-and-answer session at 7:00 p.m.

- **Indiana General Assembly (2025 Senate Bill One - Capping and Cutting Property Taxes)** - Chief Nuses reported that the bill was signed by Governor Braun, and the Merrillville Police Department is preparing for the effects of this law to continue to provide safety and services to the public.

At the request of President Bella, Chief Nuses also explained why more than one officer is needed for Service Calls.

Director Shine – Building and Planning
Director Shine reported that residents and businesses should check with the Building and Planning Department to ensure that contractors hired to do indoor and outdoor work for them are licensed by the Town of Merrillville. Three residents have already been swindled out of money for work that was not completed.

Clerk-Treasurer Eric January also added that the due diligence approach should be applied when hiring contractors.

Director, King Street Department
Director King had nothing to add to the Streets' report.

Town Manager Griffin – Town Administration
Town Manager Griffin reported that the two reports, including the staff report, have been given to the council members and Clerk-Treasurer Eric January in accordance with section 2-339.1 of the municipal code.

Town Manager Griffin highlighted some of the following updates:

- **Staff Meeting** – The staff meeting is moving to Thursday, April 24th at 12:30 p.m., instead of Wednesday, April 24th at 12:30 p.m., to accommodate another meeting where a briefing regarding Senate Bill 1 will be given by AIM. Town Manager Griffin briefly explained the concerns regarding the execution of Senate Bill 1.

  At the request of President Bella regarding explaining AIM, Town Manager Griffin responded that Accelerate Indiana Municipalities (AIM) is the advocacy for municipalities in the state of Indiana and gave an explanation on AIM's purpose. The Town of Merrillville is a member of AIM.

GENERAL ORDERS

A. **Ordinances: (Discussion and Roll Call Vote):** ***NONE***

Zoning: (motion to adopt or reject; confer IC 36-5-2-10(d)

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

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

B. **Resolutions:**

1. **Resolution 25-21 (Discussion & Voice Vote)**
   An Exigent Resolution Providing for the Transfer Of Appropriation Balances From and Among Major Budget Classifications in the Office of the Town Court (Department) In The General Fund as Requested By The Proper Officer And Forwarded to The Town Council for Its Action Pursuant To I.C. 6-1.1-18-6.

RESOLUTION No. 25- 21
TOWN OF MERRILLVILLE, INDIANA

AN EXIGENT RESOLUTION PROVIDING for the TRANSFER of APPROPRIATION BALANCES from and AMONG MAJOR BUDGET CLASSIFICATIONS in the OFFICE of the TOWN COURT (DEPARTMENT) in the GENERAL FUND as REQUESTED BY THE PROPER OFFICER AND FORWARDED to the TOWN COUNCIL for its ACTION PURSUANT TO I.C. 6-1.1-18-6.

WHEREAS, It has been determined that certain exigent conditions have developed since adoption of the original budget and it is now necessary to transfer certain appropriations into different categories than were initially appropriated for the various functions of the Clerk-Treasurer Office (Department) in the GENERAL Fund;

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED 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 appropriations are hereby transferred and set apart out of the funds hereinafter named for the purposes specified, subject to the laws governing the same, such sums herein transferred unless otherwise stipulated by law;

Section 2. That it has been shown that certain unobligated appropriations exist of the Office of the TOWN COURT (Department) of the GENERAL Fund, which are not needed at this time for the purposes for which originally appropriated, and may be transferred to a newly authorized category of appropriation in order to satisfy an existing need and further that a new a as follows:

Decrease:	
1101 008 126 General/P-T Secretary	$ 5,284.00
Total Decrease:	**$ 5,284.00**
Increase:	
1101.008.394 General/Contractual Svcs	$ 5,284.00
Total Increase:	**$ 5,284.00**

Section 3. That the Clerk-Treasurer shall take steps needed to execute the changes set forth in this appropriation transfer resolution as this change to the budget .

DULY RESOLVED and ADOPTED by the TOWN COUNCIL of the TOWN of MERRILLVILLE, LAKE COUNTY, INDIANA, this 22nd day of APRIL, 2025.

TOWN COUNCIL of the TOWN of MERRILLVILLE, INDIANA

It was moved by Councilor Haynes-Edwards and seconded by Councilors Uzelac to approve Resolution 25-21.

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

C. BZA & LARGE GATHERING ACTIONS:

Petitioner: Tumi 4 Health
Owner: Tumi 4 Health
Request: Variance of Use Approval
Purpose: To Allow A Crematorium
Location: 8560 Broadway
Zoning: C-3, Highway Commercial Zoning District

Planning and Building Director Shine reported that the ABZA was approved.

It was moved by Councilor Pettit and seconded by Councilors Uzelac to defer the ABZA.

Upon a question from President Bella regarding designating the number of days for deferment, Attorney Svetanoff responded that it can be deferred until the next Town Council Meeting or whatever meeting you designate.

Upon a voice vote, the motion passed. The ABZA was deferred.

Petitioner: Lorraine & Nathaniel Jelks
Owner: Lorraine & Nathaniel Jelks
Request: Special Exception Approval
Purpose: To Allow A Daycare Center
Location: 8808 Tyler Street
Zoning: C-3, Highway Commercial Zoning District

Planning and Building Director Shine reported that the ABZA was approved.

Director Shine informed the council that all daycares seek approval from the Town of Merrillville. Once the Petitioner gets approval from the Town, the state will come out and inspect the facility.

It was moved by Councilor Chandler-Felton and seconded by Councilor Uzelac to approve the ABZA.

Upon a question from Councilor Pettit regarding the building that already exists North of Webb Hyundai, the Petitioner responded that the daycare will be in the building North of Webb Hyundai.

Upon a question from Councilor Pettit regarding the camera ordinance for daycares, Director Shine responded that the BZA recommends compliance with the camera ordinance. The camera ordinance is part of the application process for a business license.

Upon a roll call vote, there were six affirmatives and no negatives. Councilors Rhonda Neal, Shauna Haynes-Edwards, Leona Chandler-Felton, Margaret Uzelac, Shawn Pettit, and Rick Bella voted in the affirmative. There were no negatives. The motion passed. The ABZA was approved.

OLD BUSINESS :
NONE

NEW BUSINESS:
NONE

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

There were several public comments, and a copy of the video from the Town Council Meeting, held on April 22, 2025, has been uploaded on the Town's website at
https://www.merrillville.in.gov/government/town_council/town_council_meetings.php

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Town Council President announced the following:

- Town Council Meeting Tuesday, May 13th at 6:30 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

Having completed all items on the agenda, the Town Council President announced the meeting adjourned at 7:48 p.m.

Rick Bella, Town Council President

Eric O. January, Clerk-Treasurer

Respectfully Submitted By Angela Lewis