Town Council of Merrillville
7820 Broadway Ave - Merrillville, IN 46410
Town Council Meeting Minutes of the Regular Meeting of
July 22, 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. Clerk-Treasurer Eric January was present to memorialize the proceedings. A quorum was attained.

Councilor Keesha Hardaway was absent from roll call.

PETITIONS, COMMUNICATIONS, ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS, AND REMONSTRATIONS:

- **Parade Winners Award Presentation:**
  Vice-President Neal announced that Chas Reilly will present the winners of the Town of Merrillville July 4th float contest, decided by online voting, and they are as follows:
  - 1st Place: Tradewinds Services
  - 2nd Place: Merrillville Schools - Book Bus
  - 3rd Place: NuEmage Dance Team

Upon a question from Vice-President Neal regarding the number of online votes, Mr. Reilly responded that there were over 1,700 votes.

PUBLIC HEARING: ***NONE***

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

CONSENT AGENDA:

- Accounts Payable Register Voucher Approval for July 22, 2025
- ARPA Accounts. Payable Register Voucher Approval for July 22, 2025
- Approval of Town Council Meeting Minutes July 8, 2025
- Notice Approval Re: B&G Club
  - The Notice Approval Re: B & G Club: No action was taken at the meeting.
- Donation Agreement: Big Sky & Town of Merrillville
  - Action regarding the Donation Agreement, between Big Sky & Town of Merrillville, will be taken up under Council Affairs.

It was moved by Councilor Uzelac and seconded by Vice-President Neal to approve the consent agenda items: Accounts Payable Register Voucher Approval for July 22, 2025; ARPA Accounts Payable Register Voucher Approval for July 22, 2025; and Town Council Meeting Minutes for July 8, 2025.

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

PRESENTATION OF DECLARATIONS: ***NONE***

STANDING & SPECIAL COMMITTEES REPORTS:

***BUDGET & FINANCE*—NEAL**—Vice President Neal reported that the committee has met with several department heads regarding the 2026 budget, and meetings are scheduled for this week. There will be additional meetings over the next two months regarding the 2026 budget.

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

- **Crack Sealing and Patching** – The Street Department is conducting crack sealing and patching on 73rd Avenue.
- **Branches** - The branches accumulated throughout the Town are being picked up.
- **Local Parks, Bike Tunnel, and Bike Trails** – The local parks and bike trails in the Town of Merrillville are being mowed and maintained. The bike tunnel is being painted.

President Bella added that the lights are going to be repaired in the bike tunnel.

Director Steve King added that the cut sheets for the lighting have been delivered. The outside of the bike tunnel has been painted, and the inside of the tunnel is in the process. The project will be completed by tomorrow.

Councilor Pettit informed Town Manager Griffin to send a letter to the Town Council President of Schererville, Rob Guetzloff, after all the lighting has been installed in the bike tunnel.

COUNCIL AFFAIRS—PETTIT—Councilor Pettit reported that the donation agreement worked on by Attorney Svetanoff and the Attorney for Joe Blitzstein, owner of Polycon Industries, has produced a property donation agreement for the new fire station that will be located on 9100 Colorado Street.

It was moved by Councilor Pettit and seconded by Councilor Uzelac to approve the donation agreement.

President Bella asked Councilor Pettit to amend his motion to include up to $10,000.00 for the donor's attorney fees.

President Bella also inquired of Councilor Uzelac if her second still stood with the amended motion. Councilor Uzelac stated her second still stands.

It was moved by Councilor Pettit and seconded by Councilor Uzelac to approve the donation agreement, with the inclusion of up to $10,000.00 of the donor's attorney fees, as seconded by Councilor Uzelac.

Councilor Pettit reported that the cost savings for the Town of Merrillville are $1,000,000.00.

Councilor Pettit also requested that Town Manager Griffin send a thank-you letter to Joe Blitzstein, the owner of Polycon Industries, for the donation.

Attorney Svetanoff informed the council that after approval of the donation agreement, the parties will move forward with closing on the property.

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 donor agreement was approved with the inclusion of up to $10,000.00 of the donor's attorney fees.

Councilor Pettit also informed the council that he is calling a committee meeting for Wednesday July 6, 2025, at 5:00 p.m.

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE- HARDAWAY- Councilor Hardaway was absent.

Upon a question from President Bella regarding a report, Town Manager Griffin responded that there is no report.

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS- UZELAC – Councilor Uzelac reported that all the ponds in the Town of Merrillville have been cleaned and worked on, and Director Lake will further address this in his department report.

Councilor Uzelac also informed the council that dogs are being abandoned by owners, and two dogs were dropped off in Ward 4. Crown Point's Animal Center did not take the dogs, but Hobart Animals Control took them to their facility.

Councilor Uzelac suggested that the council may need to consider an ordinance regarding dogs in the Town of Merrillville and a dog park.

Councilor Pettit informed the council that the dog park is in the 5-Year Master Plan.

PUBLIC SAFETY—HARDAWAY—Councilor Hardaway was absent.

Upon a question from President Bella regarding a report, Town Manager Griffin responded that there is no report, and the only report he has from Councilor Hardaway is regarding the Shared Ethics Entity Committee.

ELECTIONS, PUBLIC RELATIONS, & TOWN BEAUTIFICATION - NEAL- Vice-President Neal reported that two Gateway signs have been ordered, and the delivery date is not known at this time. Upon delivery of the Gateway sign, we will have a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT-PETTIT – Councilor Pettit reported that the Redevelopment Commission (RDC) was held before the council meeting, where action was taken on the resolution to purchase nine squad cars this year from Curry Motors at a cost $438,212.00. The funding for the purchase will come out of the allocation area.

Councilor Pettit also informed the council that RDC completed a supplement agreement with Wickham Street Engineering to go from the North part of Liberty Estates to the US 30 right-of-way line, which was an additional $60,000.00 to include that section.

Councilor Pettit informed the council that the RDC authorized the disposition of property on the Northwest corner of 73rd and Madison.

Town Manager Griffin explained the process of the disposition of the property.

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

PARKS AND DEAN & BARBARA WHITE COMMUNITY CENTER - PETTIT – Councilor Pettit reported that the next meeting will be held at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center on Thursday, July 24th at 5.00 p.m.

SPECIAL COMMITTEES

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

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

- **Job Fair** – The Job Fair will be held on July 30th from 11:30 a.m. until 2:30 p.m. This is a huge event, and we encourage those who are seeking employment to bring their resumes and come to this event at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center.
- **National Night Out** – This event will be held on August 5th at 5:30 p.m. The event will be held at the Town Hall Parking Lot, hosted by the Merrillville Police Department.

- **Trunk or Treat** – The committee is in the process of preparing for the Trunk or Treat event for October 2025.

SEMI-QUINCENTENNIAL COMMITTEE - HAYNES-EDWARDS – Councilor Haynes-Edwards reported that the semi-quincentennial committee is seeking members for the 4th of July 2026 250th birthday celebration. If anyone is interested in serving on the committee, you can contact Councilor Haynes-Edwards at shedwards@merrillville.in.gov

DEPARTMENT & COMMISSION REPORTS:

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

- **Closing Projects –** We are completing a walk-through with our contractor on projects that are closing out. We are doing the final punch list items that have pending items before we close them out. We are planning for the 2026 projects and plan to seek grants to prepare for those projects.
- **Budget 2026 –** We just drafted the 2026 budget.
- **Calumet River Basin Development Commission's Check –** We just received a check from the Little Calumet River Basin Development Commission for over $600,000.00.
- **Geographic Information System (GIS) Mapping** – We are updating our mapping. As the town and infrastructure grow, we must update our mapping.
- **Apple Orchard** – The apple orchard is doing great. The water well has been installed. We are working on way to obtain a portable generator for watering the trees.
- **Detention Ponds** – Everything is in order with the ponds.
- **Mowing –** The mowing is going well with Josh Landscaping.
- **Sedona Pond –** The pond looks great with the reworking and seeding that took place.
- **Chapel Hill HOA –** We had to help with the retention pond in Chapel Hill because a beaver and an outlet blockage that had to be dislodged.

Upon a question from Councilor Uzelac regarding Kaiser Ditch clean-up, Director Matthew Lake responded that the actual name is Taney Ditch, and the contractor has been selected but has not started the clean-up.

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

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

- **Household Hazardous Waste Collection** – The next Household Hazardous Waste Collection is on Saturday, July 26th, from 9:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. at Highland Public Works located at 8001 Kennedy Avenue in Highland, Indiana. You can bring up to four grocery bags of paper per household for shredding at this location.

- **Next Meeting** – The next meeting is on September 18, 2025

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

FIRE TERRITORY BOARD - NEAL & HARDAWAY – Vice-President Neal had no report.

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

- **Food and Beverage Tax** – The Town received another Food and Beverage Tax check for $ 150,734.00, which brings the total amount to $ 1,920,995.60.
- **Ending Balance as of June 30th** (Comprises of Court, Fire Department, General Fund, Obligated & Non-Obligated Funds, Police Department, RDA, Stormwater, etc. Funds) - $50,655,435.00
- **Redevelopment Authority (RDC) Debt** - One of the debt payments of $578,000.00, which is paid twice a year, will be paid off in 2026.

Upon a question from Councilor Uzelac regarding the food and beverage expenses, Clerk-Treasurer Eric January responded that no funds have been expended but will be expended very soon on the parks and community center.

President Bella explained that most of the ending balances have been obligated in budgets, and Clerk-Treasurer Eric January confirmed the obligations.

Clerk-Treasurer Eric January explained what is included in the ending balances.

SSCVA – DEANN PATENA - No Report

DEPARTMENT REPORTS/ TOWN MANAGER:

Director Gerry McCarney – Parks Department
Director McCarney reported on the following:

- **Flooring at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center (D&BWCC)**– The flooring for the four rooms at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center will be discussed with Core Construction this Thursday.
- **Youth Volleyball** – Registration is open for youth volleyball and closes on September 5th.
- **Adult Volleyball** - Registration is open for adult volleyball and closes on September 2nd.
- **Basketball Training Camp** – We have two more basketball skills training camps on July 23rd and July 30th before the instructor goes overseas. We already have someone to fill in the void.
- **Kids' Mosaic Craft Class** – The class will be on July 26th at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center (D&BWCC).
- **Paint and Sip Class**– The class will be held on August 29th at the D&BWCC.
- **Senior Bingo** – Senior Bingo will be held on July 24 at D&BWCC.

Upon a question from Councilor Pettit regarding the deadline and the number of letters of interest received for the Park Board, Town Manager Griffin responded that we have received nine letters and expect to receive more before the deadline. The deadline for the letters is July 31, 2025

Assistant Chief Vasel– Police Department
Assistant Chief Vasel reported on the following:

- **National Night Out** - The National Night Out will be on Tuesday, August 5, 2025, from 5:30 pm until 8:00 pm at the Merrillville Municipal Complex, 7820 Broadway (front parking lot). There will be fun and food at this event.
- **School Supplies Giveaway** – We received donations of school supplies for up to three hundred kids for this event.

Director Shine – Building and Planning
Director Shine gave an overview of the Planning and Building Department. She also explained that residents need to check whether their contractor is permitted to do work on their home in the Town of Merrillville. The permit must be posted by the contractor. Residents are having issues with contractors taking their money and leaving the work undone.

Director, King Street Department
Director King added the following to the Street Report:

Beautification and Maintenance – The Street Department is busy daily with the beautification and maintenance of the Town of Merrillville.

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 under section 2-339.1 of the municipal code.

Town Manager Griffin also reported that Councilor Hardaway wanted the council to know that one of the recent projects was evaluated, and the committee completed a survey. The hope is that this will inform the speakers and some of the training they have for member communities, and the Shared Ethics Advisory Commission.

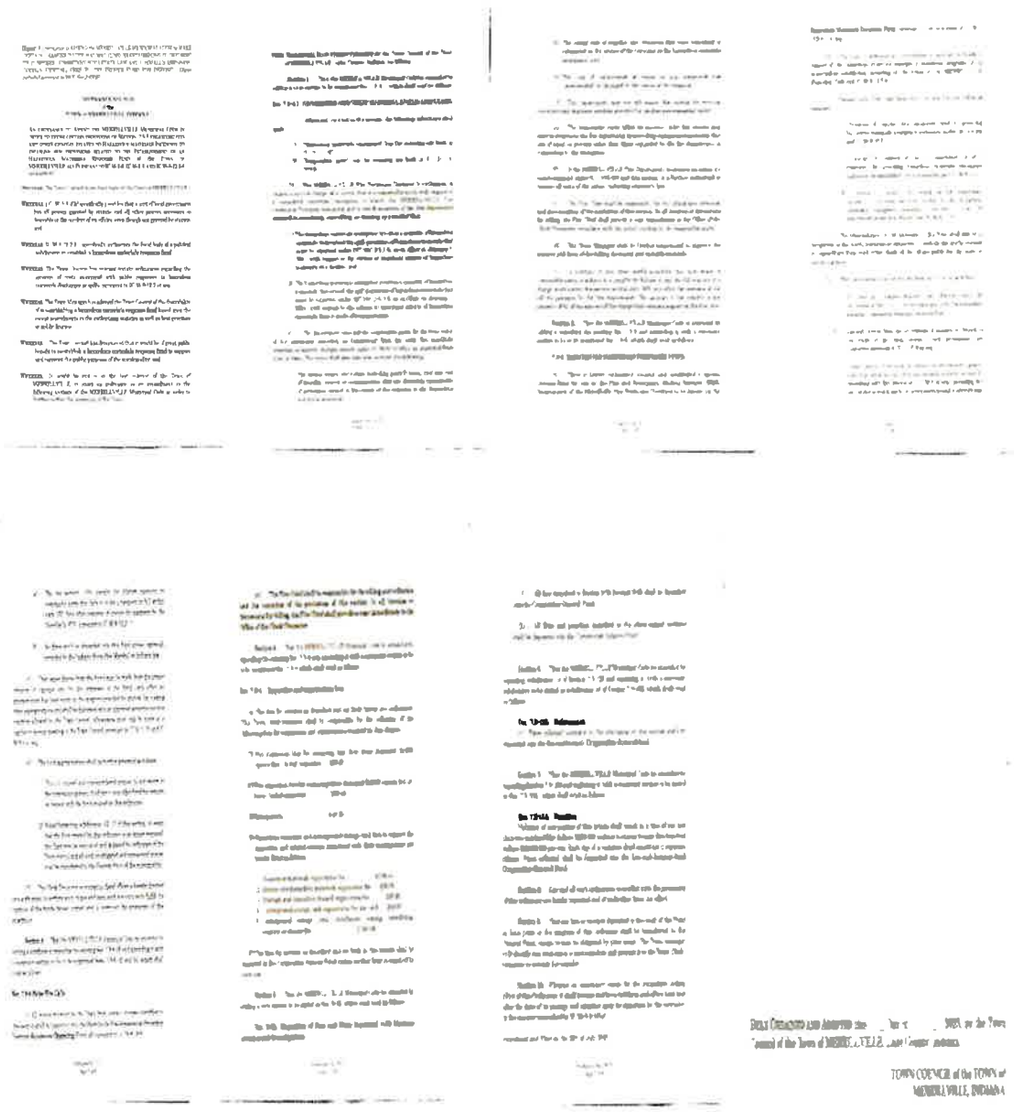
GENERAL ORDERS

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):

1. **Ordinance 25-23 (Discussion & Roll Call Vote)**
   An Ordinance to Amend the Merrillville Municipal Code in Order to Revise Certain Provisions of Section 7.5-5 Regarding Fees and Other Charges Related to Hazardous Materials Incidents to Establish New Provisions Related to the Establishment of a Hazardous Materials Response Fund of the Town of Merrillville, All Pursuant To IC 36-1-8, IC 36-1-3, and IC 36-8-12.2-8 As Amended.

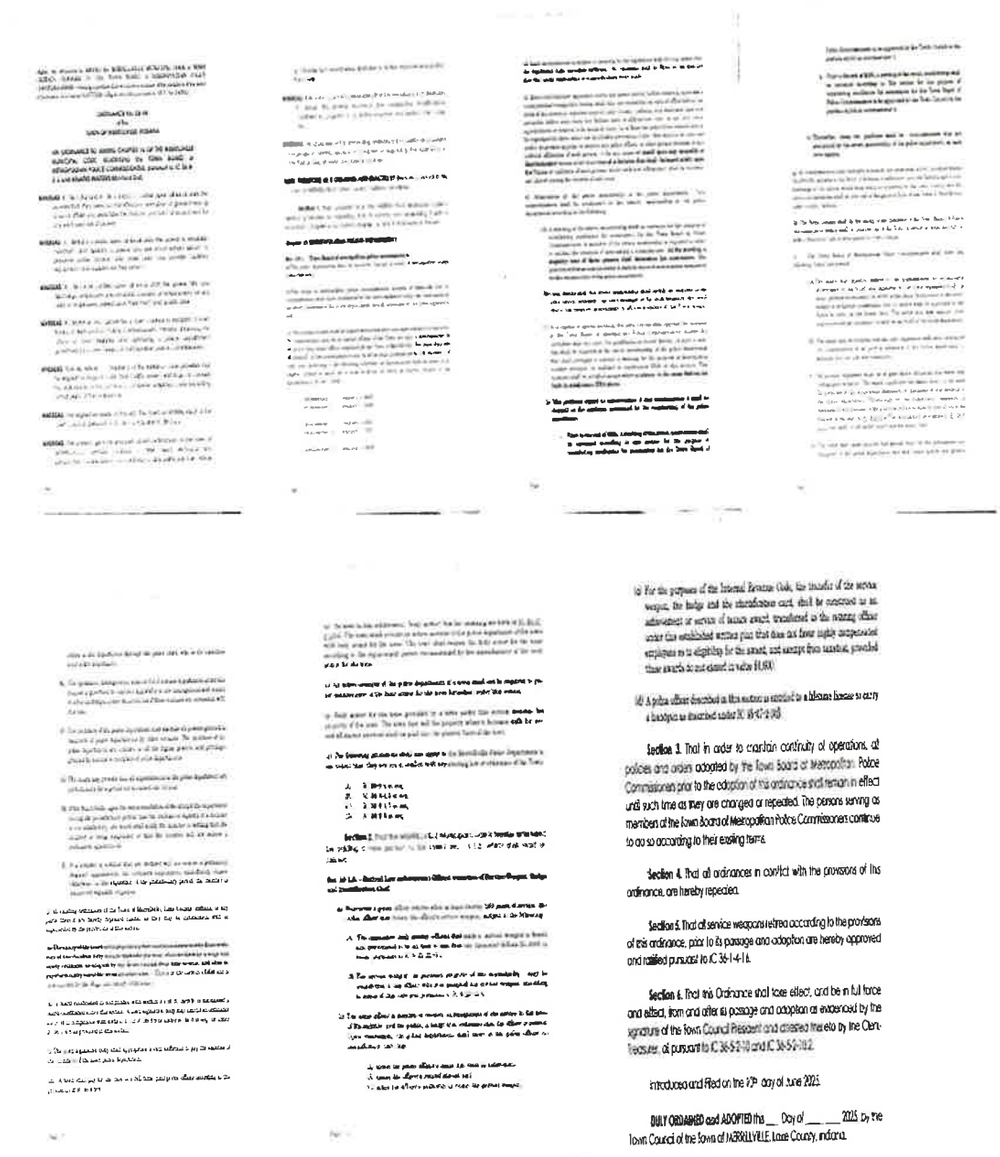


It was moved by Councilor Uzelac and seconded by Councilor Pettit to approve Ordinance 25-23.

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 ordinance was approved on first reading.

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

1. **<u>Ordinance 25-14 (Discussion & Roll Call Vote)</u>**
   An Ordinance to Amend Chapter 16 of the Merrillville Municipal Code, Modifying the Town Board of Metropolitan Police Commissioners, Pursuant to IC 36-8-2-2 and Related Matters (Revised).

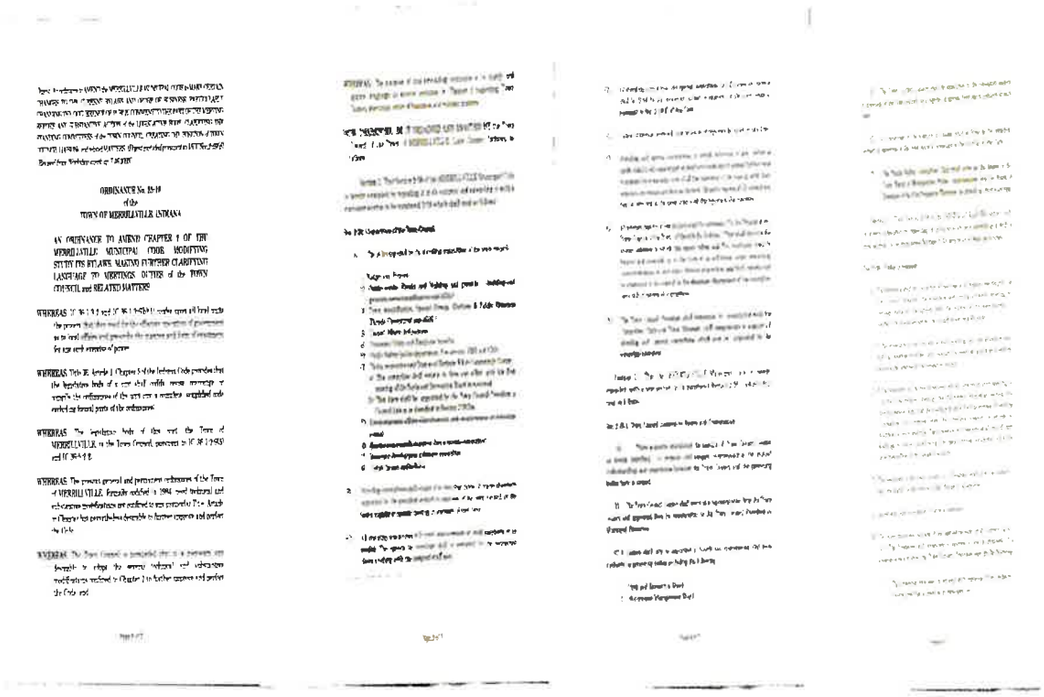


It was moved by Councilor Uzelac and seconded by Councilor Pettit to approve Ordinance 25-14.

Town Manager Griffin explained the ordinance.

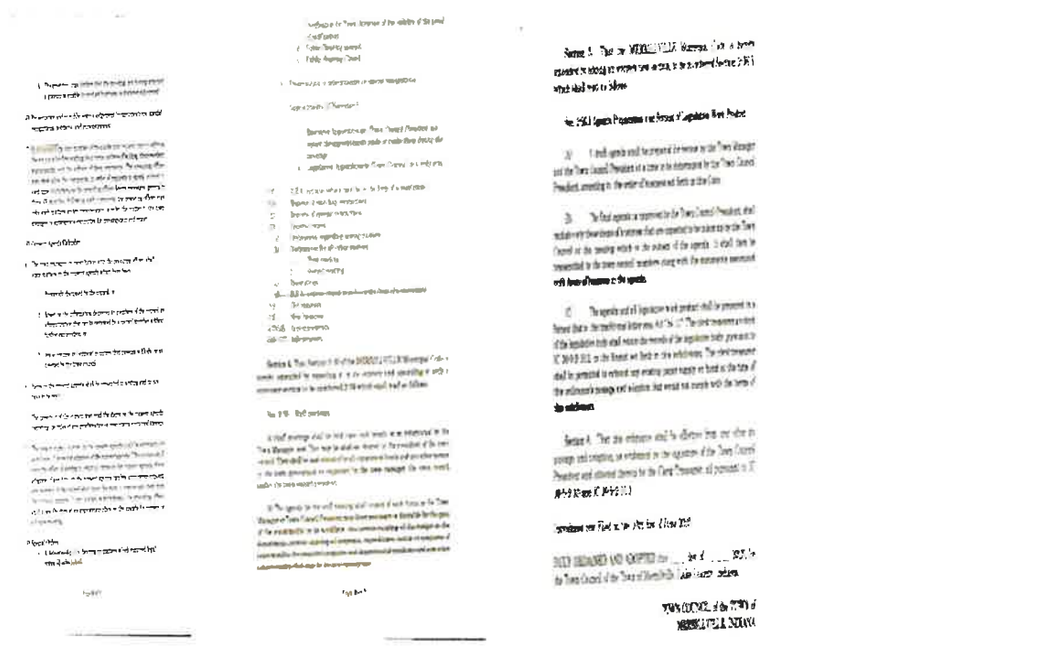
Upon a roll call vote, there were six affirmatives and no negatives. Councilors Rhonda Neal, Shauna Haynes-Edwards, Leona Chandler-Felton, Margaret Uzelac, Shawn Pettit, and Rick Bella voted in the affirmative. There were no negatives. The motion passed. The ordinance was approved on second and final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

2. **Ordinance 25-18 (Discussion & Roll Call Vote)**
An Ordinance to Amend Chapter 2 of the Merrillville Municipal Code, Modifying Study its Bylaws, Making Further Clarifying Language to Meetings, Duties of the Town Council, and Related Matters.



ORDINANCE No. 25-18
of the
TOWN OF MERRILLVILLE, INDIANA

AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND CHAPTER 2 OF THE MERRILLVILLE MUNICIPAL CODE MODIFYING STUDY ITS BYLAWS, MAKING FURTHER CLARIFYING LANGUAGE TO MEETINGS, DUTIES of the TOWN COUNCIL and RELATED MATTERS

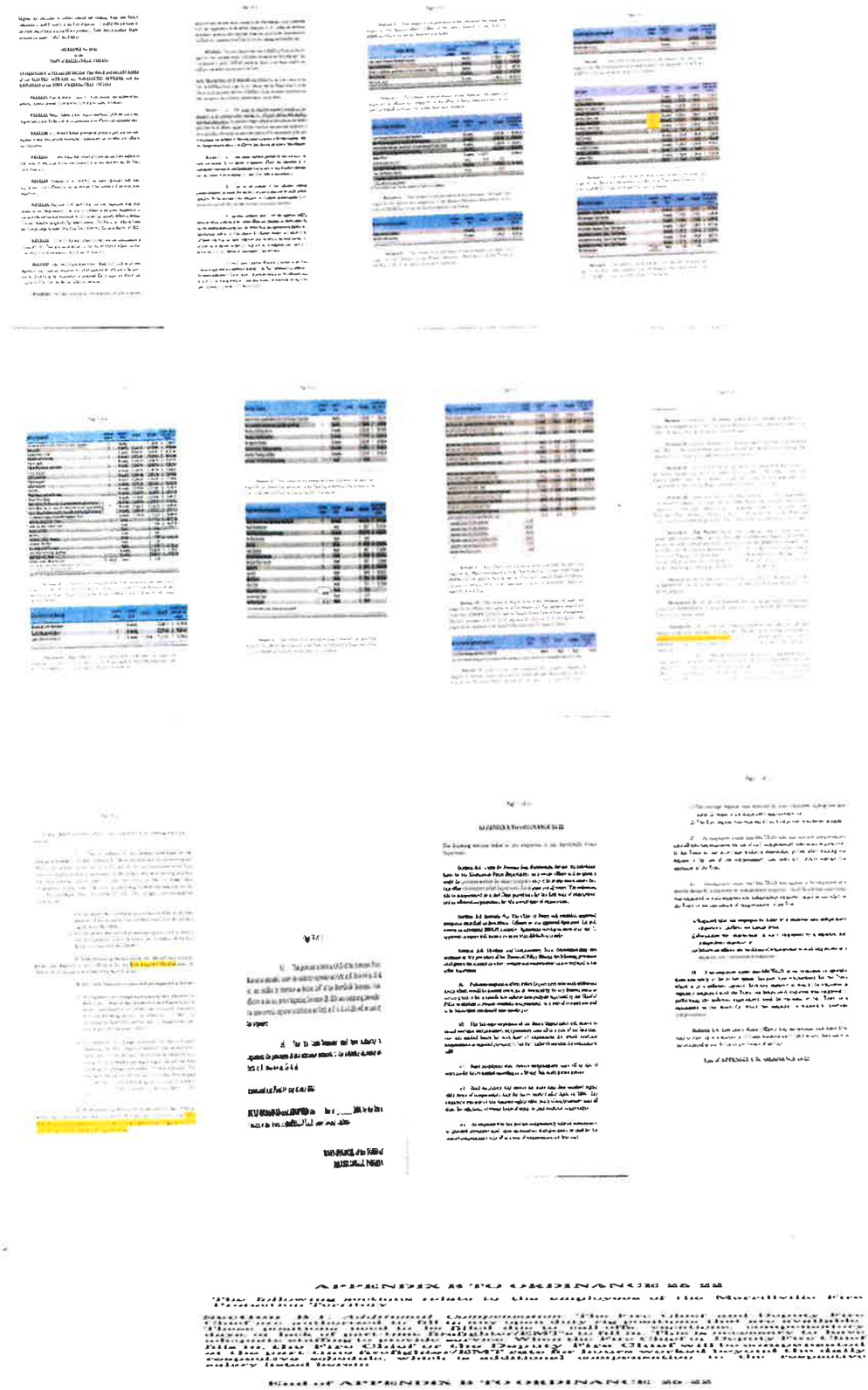


It was moved by Councilor Pettit and seconded by Councilor Haynes-Edwards to approve Ordinance 25-18.

Town Manager Griffin explained the ordinance.

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 ordinance was approved on second and final reading.

3. **Ordinance 25-22 (Discussion & Roll Call Vote)**
An Ordinance to Fix and Establish the New Wage and Salary Rates of the Elected Officers, the Non-Elected Offices, and the Employees of the Town of Merrillville, Indiana.



It was moved by Councilor Uzelac and seconded by Vice-President Neal to approve Ordinance 25-22.

Clerk-Treasurer Eric January informed the council that he may lose some of his key staff to other organizations unless he can be flexible in his budget to increase salaries to keep his key staff. The flexibility would not increase his overall budget.

Upon a question from President Bella regarding comments made about this ordinance being different, Clerk-Treasurer Eric January responded that it is about wages and salary, and we may need to postpone the ordinance, giving him time and flexibility to get the actual numbers for wages and salary changes.

It was moved by Councilor Pettit and seconded by Vice-President Neal to table Ordinance 25-22.

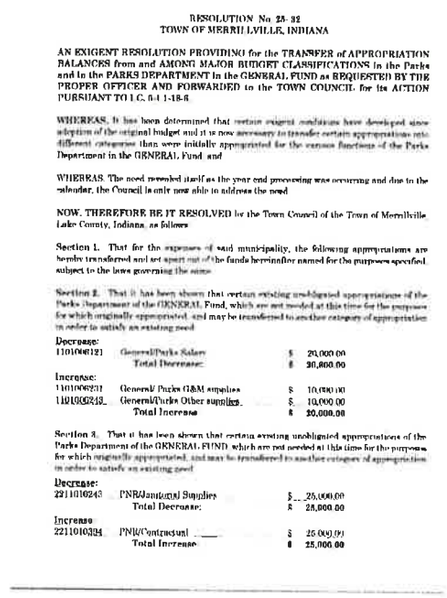
Town Manager Giffin informed the council that the tabling of this ordinance means the language of the effective dates will have to change.

President Bella informed the council that any changes can be made during the mockup.

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 ordinance was tabled on second reading.

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

1. **<u>Resolution 25-32 (Discussion & Voice Vote)</u>**
   An Exigent Resolution Providing for the Transfer of Appropriation Balances from and Among Major Budget Classifications in the Parks and in the Parks 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. 25-32
TOWN OF MERRILLVILLE, INDIANA

AN EXIGENT RESOLUTION PROVIDING for the TRANSFER of APPROPRIATION BALANCES from and AMONG MAJOR BUDGET CLASSIFICATIONS in the Parks and in the PARKS 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 Parks Department in the GENERAL Fund; and

WHEREAS, The need revealed itself as the year end processing was occurring and due to the calendar, the Council is only now able to address the need

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

Section 2. That it has been shown that certain existing unobligated appropriations of the Parks Department of the GENERAL Fund, which are not needed at this time for the purposes for which originally appropriated, and may be transferred to another category of appropriation in order to satisfy an existing need

Decrease:		
1101006121	General/Parks Salary	$ 20,000.00
	Total Decrease:	$ 20,000.00
Increase:		
1101006231	General/ Parks G&M supplies	$ 10,000.00
1101006219	General/Parks Other supplies	$ 10,000.00
	Total Increase	$ 20,000.00

Section 3. That it has been shown that certain existing unobligated appropriations of the Parks Department of the GENERAL FUND, which are not needed at this time for the purposes for which originally appropriated, and may be transferred to another category of appropriation in order to satisfy an existing need

Decrease:		
2211010243	PNR/Janitorial Supplies	$ 25,000.00
	Total Decrease:	$ 25,000.00
Increase		
2211010324	PNR/Contractual	$ 25,000.00
	Total Increase	$ 25,000.00

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

TOWN COUNCIL of the TOWN of MERRILLVILLE, INDIANA

It was moved by Councilor Pettit and seconded by Councilor Haynes-Edwards to approve Resolution 25-32

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

C. **BZA & LARGE GATHERING ACTIONS:**

1) **Applicant**: Michael Pavladakis
   Owner: St. Constantine Greek Orthodox Church

Request: Approval for Large Gathering Permit
Purpose: Food Fest Fundraiser
Location: 8000 Madison Street
Date & Time: 8/22 from 3pm – 10 pm and the 23rd & 24th from 11 am to 10 pm

Planning and Building Director Shine explained the Large Gathering Permit.

It was moved by Councilor Pettit and seconded by the rest of the Councilors to approve the Large Gathering Permit.

Upon a voice vote, the motion passed. The Large Gathering Permit was approved.

2) **Applicant**: Adam Espinoza
Owner: Pepe's Mexican Restaurant
Request: Approval for Large Gathering Permit
Purpose: Mexican Independence Cultural Day
Location: 260 E 84th Drive
Date & Time: 8/30 from 4:30 pm – 9:30 pm

Planning and Building Director Shine explained the Large Gathering Permit.

Upon a question from President Bella regarding any problems at this event in the past, Assistant Chief Vassel responded that no problems have occurred at this event in the past.

It was moved by Councilor Pettit and seconded by the rest of the Councilors to approve the Large Gathering Permit.

Upon a voice vote, the motion passed. The Large Gathering Permit was approved.

OLD BUSINESS :

Councilor Pettit reported that former Councilor David Uzelac provided him and Police Chief Nuses with pictures of the old Clark Station on US 30 that showed the back doors had been broken, abandoned underground gasoline tanks, and garbage was all over the property. Chief Nuses is investigating the property.

Councilor Pettit also requested that Town Manager Griffin and Attorney Svetanoff draft a strongly worded letter to the property owner.

NEW BUSINESS:
NONE

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

There were several public comments, and a copy of the video from the Town Council Meeting held on July 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 August 12th at 6:30 p.m.
- Job Fair July 30th from 11:30 – 2:30 at the D&BWCC.
- National Night Out at Town Hall on August 5th at 5:30 pm.

ADJOURNMENT

Having completed all items on the agenda, the Town Council President announced the meeting had adjourned at 7:41 p.m.

Rick Bella, Town Council President

Eric O. January, Clerk-Treasurer

Respectfully Submitted By Angela Lewis