Town Council of Merrillville
7820 Broadway Ave - Merrillville, IN 46410
Town Council Meeting Minutes of the Regular Meeting of
September 8, 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, Leona Chandler-Felton, Margaret Uzelac, Shawn Pettit, Keesha Hardaway, and Rick Bella. Clerk-Treasurer Eric January was present to memorialize the proceedings. A quorum was attained.

Councilor Shauna Haynes-Edwards was absent at roll call.

Town Attorney Joseph Svetanoff was present to provide legal advice.

PETITIONS, COMMUNICATIONS, ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS, AND REMONSTRATIONS:

- **CN – National See Tracks? Think Train Declaration – Police Chief Nuses**
  Police Chief Nuses read the following declaration into the record:

(remainder intentionally blank)

Town of Merrillville
DECLARATION
State of Indiana

The Town Council of Merrillville Recognizes the National SEE TRACKS? Think Train Week

Whereas, See Tracks? Think Train week is to be held across the United States from September 21 to 27, 2026; and,

Whereas, Two Thousand Two Hundred Fifty-Two (2,273) rail grade crossing collisions resulted in 764 personal injuries and were responsible for 287 fatalities in the United States during 2025; and,

Whereas, educating and informing the public about rail safety (reminding the public that railroad right of ways are private property, enhancing public awareness of the dangers associated with highway/rail grade crossings, ensuring pedestrians and motorists are looking and listening while near railways; and obeying established traffic laws) will reduce the number of avoidable fatalities and injuries caused by incidents involving trains and citizens; and,

Whereas, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, National Operation Lifesaver, Inc., United States Department of Transportation, and all local, state, county, and railroad law enforcement officers, first responders, and railroad corporations commit to partnering together in an effort to educate at a national level all aspects of railroad safety, to enforce applicable laws in support of National See Tracks? Think Train Week; and,

Whereas, train tracks flow throughout the Town of Merrillville and our Police Department and First Responders want to make sure our residents and visitors stay safe when around Train Tracks;

Now, therefore be it resolved, that the Town Council of the Town of Merrillville, Indiana, do hereby attest our full support declaring September 21 through 27, 2026 as, NATIONAL SEE TRACKS? THINK TRAIN WEEK and we encourage all citizens to recognize the importance of rail safety education.

We want everyone to be safe around train tracks and thank CN for this helpful reminder.

Declared and signed by the following Honorable Town of Merrillville Town Councilors and attested to by the Honorable Town Clerk-Treasurer, this 8th day of September, 2026.

It was moved by Councilor Pettit and seconded by Councilor Uzelac to approve the CN Declaration.

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

- **President Rick Bella Statement:**
  President Bella read the following statement into

Support Available for Storm-Affected Residents

Before we move on, I want to make our residents aware of financial assistance now available to those affected by the August 11 storms.

United Way Northwest Indiana has established an initial **$500,000 in disaster relief funds** to help individuals and families who are experiencing financial hardship as a result of the storms.

We know that while insurance, FEMA and other assistance may cover some costs, many families are still dealing with unexpected expenses—such as property damage, temporary housing, disrupted childcare, or missed work.

This program is designed to help bridge those financial gaps, particularly for households that were already working to make ends meet before the storms.

If you or someone you know has experienced financial hardship because of the August 11 storms, I encourage you to visit **United Way Northwest Indiana's Storm Recovery Assistance page at unitedwaynwi.org/storm-recovery-assistance** and complete the eligibility application.

Applications will be reviewed based on program requirements and available funding. And if someone does not qualify, United Way will work to connect them with other resources that may be available.

This is a tremendous example of our region coming together to help our neighbors recover, and I want to thank United Way Northwest Indiana and all of the donors and organizations who have made this assistance possible.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:
Several public comments were made regarding the Empty lots with trucks on the property at 77th Avenue and 77th Place on the 4200 block, Resident's Storm Preparedness Education, Speeding and Running Stop Signs, Speed Bumps, Accountability for the Financial Decisions Made by the Town Council of Merrillville, Safety of Street Department Employees of the Town of Merrillville, Flooding in Basements, Hot Meals and Food Provided by the Congregation of Merrillville Every Saturday(11:30 am – 1:00 pm), Creek: (Rising Water, Fence Line, and Eroding Problem), Trees, Community Center Exercise Machines, and Street Lights.

The video of the Town Council Meeting held on September 8, 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 September 8, 2026.

- Approval of Town Council Meeting Minutes of August 25, 2026.

It was moved by Councilor Uzelac and seconded by Councilor Pettit to approve the Consent Agenda.

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

SPECIAL ORDERS: ***NONE***

BZA & LARGE GATHERING ACTIONS: ***NONE***

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS:

***BUDGET & FINANCE*—NEAL**—Vice President Neal reported that budget season is ongoing and the next standing meeting will be on the third Monday of this month.

STREET DEPARTMENT & PARK MAINTENANCE - UZELAC– Councilor Uzelac reported that she had dinner with Pastor Dennis Walton and 8 Days of Hope, who have made a generous impact on the Town of Merrillville recovery efforts

In response to a question by Councilor Pettit regarding a timetable for paving with Milestone, Town Manager Griffin responded that he is going to meet with the engineering leadership regarding the timetable and several
other issues.

Councilor Uzelac added that the curve- cuts phase of the paving project is being conducted on Whitcomb Street in Ward 4.

COUNCIL AFFAIRS—PETTIT—Councilor Pettit reported that two ordinances regarding signs, sign regulations, and short-term rentals reviewed by the committee are on the agenda for approval of the council.

Councilor Pettit added that there are two additional ordinances he wants the entire council to review with Town Manager Griffin before the September 22, 2026, regular Town Council Meeting. These ordinances pertain to the personnel manual and fiber optics.

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE - HARDAWAY - Councilor Hardaway reported that employment opportunities for the Street Department (until filled) are 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). If anyone is interested and has the qualifications, please do not hesitate to apply.

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS- UZELAC – Councilor Uzelac reported that per her conversation with Director Matt Lake of Stormwater Management, the work will start on October 1, 2026, on Kaizer Ditch.

PUBLIC SAFETY—HARDAWAY—Councilor Hardway reported that a meeting will be held regarding the disasters of June 11th and August 11th. The actual date will be determined shortly and will be open to the public. The committee will focus on strengthening the Town of Merrillville Emergency Preparedness Plan.

ELECTIONS, PUBLIC RELATIONS, & TOWN BEAUTIFICATION - NEAL- Vice President Neal reported that the upcoming ribbon cutting for the Gateways signs has been postponed due to the storms until further notice and hopes to have one before the winter weather starts.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT-PETTIT – Councilor Pettit reported that a Special Redevelopment Commission (RDC) meeting was held right before tonight's Town Council Meeting. Upon advice from Town Manager and Financial Advisor Hudson, the RDC is authorizing the contractors for storm recovery to be paid out of the allocation areas, approximately $1,700,000.00. The contractors are Dyer Construction, Joe's Inc., and several other vendors. We are hoping to be reimbursed by FEMA 75% of the $1,700,000.00 that will go back into the allocation area.

Councilor Petit also addressed one of the questions from Public Comments regarding Andrean High School and Boys and Girls Club gifts that have not been expended.

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

PARKS AND DEAN & BARBARA WHITE COMMUNITY CENTER - PETTIT – Councilor Pettit reported that the regular committee meeting was held on Thursday, August 27, 2026, at 5:00 p.m. The main agenda item was the park fees and adjusting park fees. This would require an ordinance that would have to be discussed by the full council and reviewed by the Council Affairs. This is predicated on whether or not the sale of the Dean and Barbara White Community Center (D&BWCC) goes through with the White Family Foundation. If the sale goes through, there could be one series of rates. If not, we still have to generate revenue by adjusting the current rates.

Councilor Pettit also stated that the standing committee meeting will be on the fourth Thursday in September.

In response to a question from Councilor Uzelac regarding the current debt of D&BWCC, Council Pettit responded that the debt is about $23,000,000.00 with interest, and that is the amount offered by the White Family Foundation.

Clerk-Treasurer Eric January added that a last date needs to be established for residents to put all their storm-damage items on the curb. Town Manager Griffin added that the date is September 18, 2026.

SPECIAL COMMITTEES

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

In response to a question from President Bella regarding a report, Town Manager Griffin responded there is no report and reminded the council there was a training by Barnes and Thornburg on the unsafe building law. Town Manager Griffin explained the training and the impact of June 11th and August 11th storms on unsafe buildings.

Town Manager Griffin also updated the council regarding the June 11th disaster and the response from the federal government. Most of the damage to the Town of Merrillville came from the June 11th tornado.

Town Attorney Svetanoff added that unsafe building training by Barnes and Thornburg was less than adequate and recommended that free additional training by them be made available to the Town of Merrillville.

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

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

DEPARTMENT & COMMISSION REPORTS:

DEPARTMENT REPORTS/ TOWN MANAGER:

Assistant Superintendent Lisa Roberts – Parks and Recreation

Superintendent Jerry McCartney reported the following updates regarding the D&BWCC:

- **Fall Flyer** – The fall flyer is out regarding events for September and October. A new fitness class called Get Fit Cardio Line Dancing is in October.

- **Sunset Market** – Thursday, September 24th from 4:00 p.m. until 9:00 p.m. There will be food truck vendors, merchant vendors, and a live DJ at this community event.

- **Trunk or Treat** – The Town of Merrillville Trunk or Treat annual event will be held on Wednesday, October 21st. As of this meeting, we have fifty-two vendors. We are hoping to get one hundred vendors for this event.

Assistant Superintendent Roberts updated the council on other activities regarding the Parks and Recreation Department.

In response to the report of fencing repair, Councilor Pettit asked that some estimates for repairs be obtained by the next committee meeting.

In response to a question by President Bella regarding the repairs of broken equipment, Assistant Superintendent Roberts responded that the equipment is in the process of being repaired.

Town Manager Griffin added that the deductible may exceed the value of the flagpole cost of repair.

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

- **97th and Grand Boulevard** – The project is finishing. We still have seed blanket and paving left to do. The paving should be done by this week, and roads will be opened back up to traffic.
- **93rd Colorado** – The county bridge project should be completed by mid-fall.
- **Chapel Manor** – Ditch maintenance will be performed on those non-regulated drains

Director Lake updated the council on several other activities and projects.

In response to a question from President Bella regarding the Town of Merrillville losing our Tree City status because of the storms, Director Lake responded that our Tree City status is not in jeopardy because of the storms of June 11th and August 11th.

Police Chief Nuses– Police Department
Chief Nuses reported that the renovation has started at the Police Department, and staff has been moved to the following location:

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- **Records Department** – 5750 Tyler Street. You have to pick up police reports or anything of that nature at this location. There were problems with Comcast and our telephones, but now they are up and running.
- **Telephone Number** – Emergency Calls 911 and Non-Emergency Calls (219) 660-0001

Chief Nuses also stated that Code Enforcement had given residents a break due to the storm to manage storm-related issues. As of today, that break is over; Code Enforcement has resumed issuing tickets for code violations.

Chief Nuses also explained the traffic issues in the Town of Merrillville and the surrounding areas.

Director Shine – Planning and Building
Director Shine reported that the department is still collaborating with the residents on storm-damage repairs to their property, including speaking to their insurance company regarding full-roof repair. Director Shine updated the council regarding demolition and paving projects.

Director Shine also reported that she will meet with developers regarding clearing their property early in the development process.

Clerk-Treasurer Eric January – Clerk-Treasurer Report

Clerk-Treasurer Eric January reported on the following:

- **Town Combined Funds (August 31st)** - $72,105,491.78. It may look like a lot of money, but the majority of the funds are obligated.
- **Food and Beverage Tax (August 31st)**– Since the last meeting, the Town received a check for $140,022,29 which brings the fund total to $2,456,143.73.
- **Businesses Participating in the Food and Beverage Tax** – At the start of this tax, we had 56 businesses. As of this July, we had 109 businesses. This is down from the 115 we had in 2025..

Clerk-Treasurer Eric January explained the reasons for the decline in Food and Beverage Tax Businesses. The solution to the decline in businesses may be a River Front District.

- Budget 2026 – We have expended 63.39% of our 2026 budget as of August 31, 2026, and we are under budget.

Town Manager Griffin – Town Administration
Town Manager Griffin reported on the following:

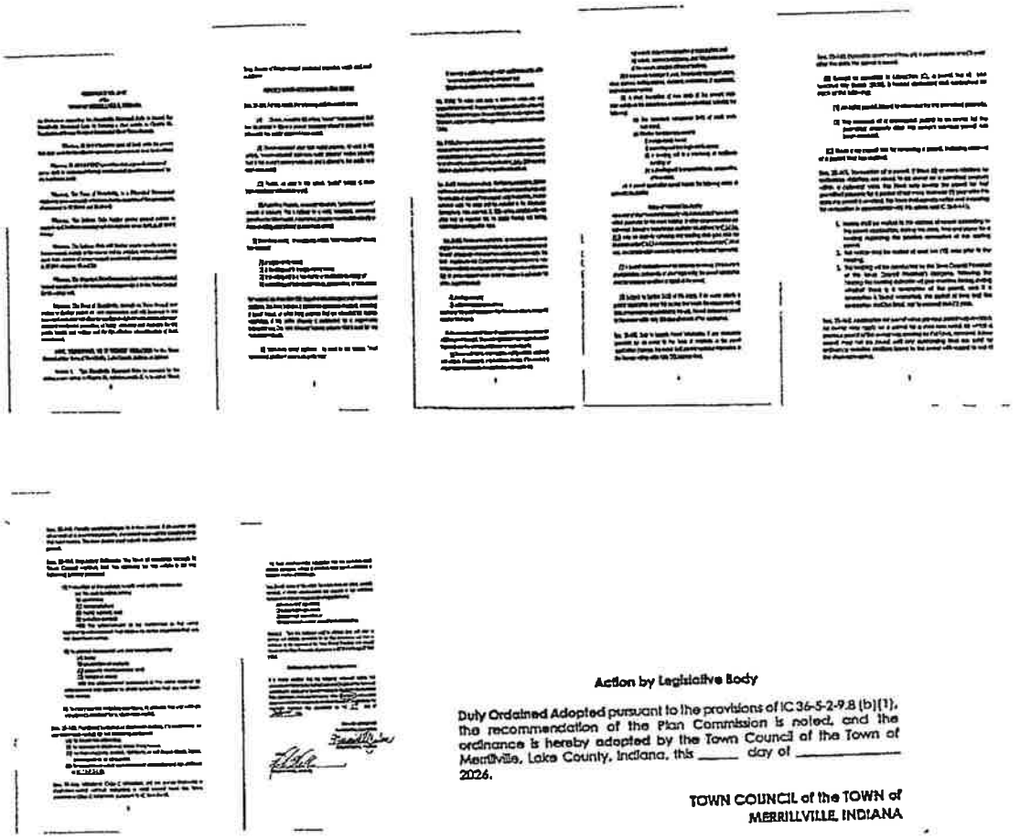
- **Monthly Reports** – Town Manager Griffin reported that his report will be given at a later date due to handling storm-related issues.
- **Street Department** – Town Manager Griffin reported that he is also serving as the Interim Street Director and has qualified for his Employee Responsible in Charge (ERC). With this qualification, I can sign off on the four federal projects we have, which INDOT enforces.

GENERAL ORDERS

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

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

Ordinance 26-17 (Discussion & Roll Call Vote)
An Ordinance Amending the Merrillville Municipal Code to Amend the Merrillville Municipal Code by Creating a New Article in Chapter, Regulation of Owner-Occupied Residential Short - Term Rental.



Action by Legislative Body

Duly Ordained Adopted pursuant to the provisions of IC 36-5-2-9.8 (b)(1), the recommendation of the Plan Commission is noted, and the ordinance is hereby adopted by the Town Council of the Town of Merrillville, Lake County, Indiana, this _____ day of _____ 2026.

TOWN COUNCIL of the TOWN of MERRILLVILLE, INDIANA

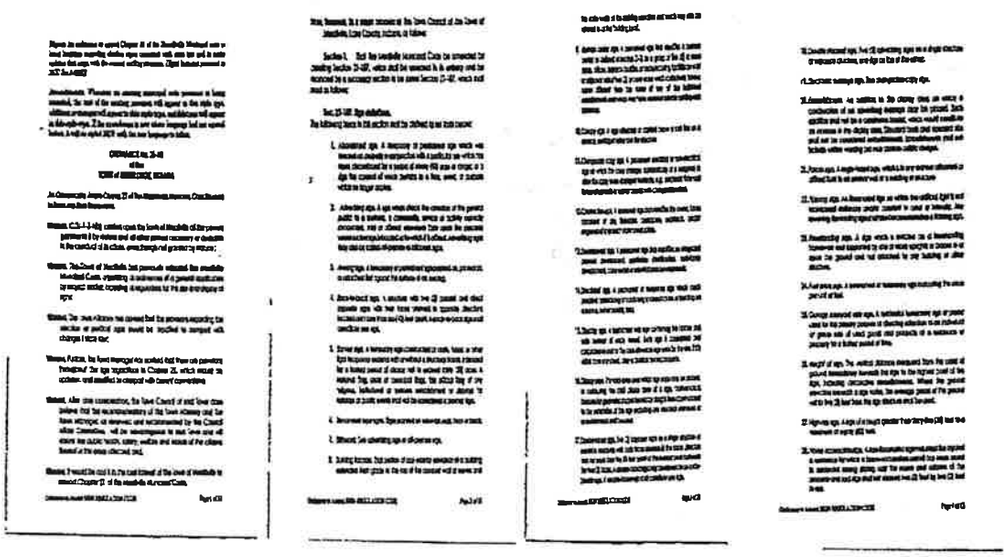
It was moved by Councilor Pettit and seconded by Councilor Uzelac to approve Ordinance 26-17 on the first and final reading.

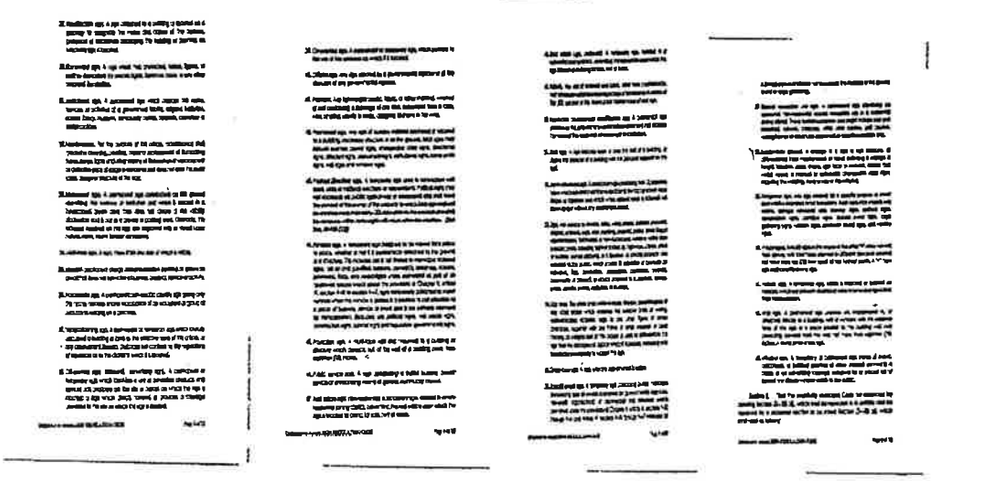
Councilor Pettit explained the ordinance.

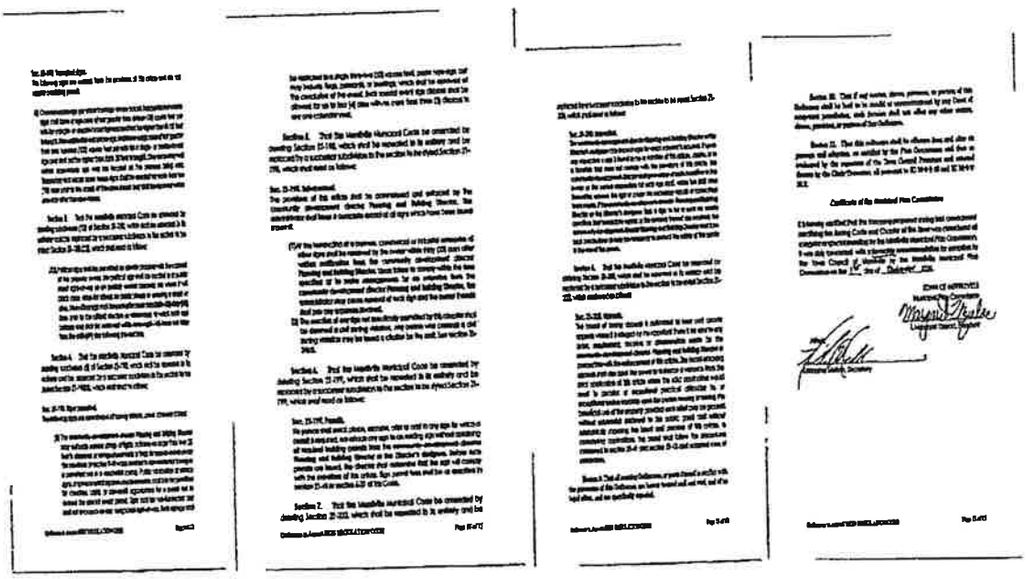
Upon a roll call vote, there were six affirmatives and no negatives. Councilors Neal, Chandler-Felton, Uzelac, Pettit, Hardaway, and Bella voted in the affirmative. There were no negatives. The motion passed. The ordinance was approved on the first and final reading.

Ordinance 26-20 (Discussion & Roll Call Vote)

An Ordinance to Amend Chapter 21 of the Merrillville Municipal Code Relating to Signs and Sign Regulations







Action by Legislative Body

Duly Ordained Adopted pursuant to the provisions of IC 36-5-2-9.8 (b)(1), the recommendation of the Plan Commission is noted, and the ordinance is hereby **adopted** by the Town Council of the Town of Merrillville, Lake County, Indiana, this _____ day of _____ 2026.

TOWN COUNCIL of the TOWN of MERRILLVILLE, INDIANA

It was moved by Councilor Pettit and seconded by Councilor Hardaway to approve Ordinance 26-20 on the first and final reading.

Councilor Pettit explained the ordinance.

Upon a roll call vote, there were six affirmatives and no negatives. Councilors Neal, 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 and final reading.

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

An Ordinance Appropriating Additional Moneys in Excess of the Current Budget for the Cumulative Capital Improvement Fund (4401) 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 Cumulative Capital Improvement Fund for costs as yet unplanned by the department.

TOWN OF MERRILLVILLE
APPROPRIATION ENACTMENT
ORDINANCE No. 26-24

An Ordinance Appropriating Additional Moneys in Excess of the Current Budget for the Cumulative Capital Improvement Fund (4401) 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. 6-3-1, it has been determined that it is now necessary to appropriate more money than was appropriated in the current budget for the Cumulative Capital Improvement 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: expenses associated with the conversion of the Towns' financial accounting software; 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 alia, 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 CUMULATIVE CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT FUND, and for the purposes herein specified, as identified by the accounts herein, subject to the laws governing the same:

CUMULATIVE CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT FUND
Increase in the following:

		Increased	Appropriated
4401.010.394	CCIU Contractual Services	$ 15,140.00	$ 15,140.00

Section 2. 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 be made available for expenditure subject to an order of the Commissioner, pursuant to IC 6-1.1-18.

Ordinance 26-24 Page 2

Section 3. That in satisfaction and for the purposes of the provisions set out in I.C. 36-5-2-9.8, 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 September, 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

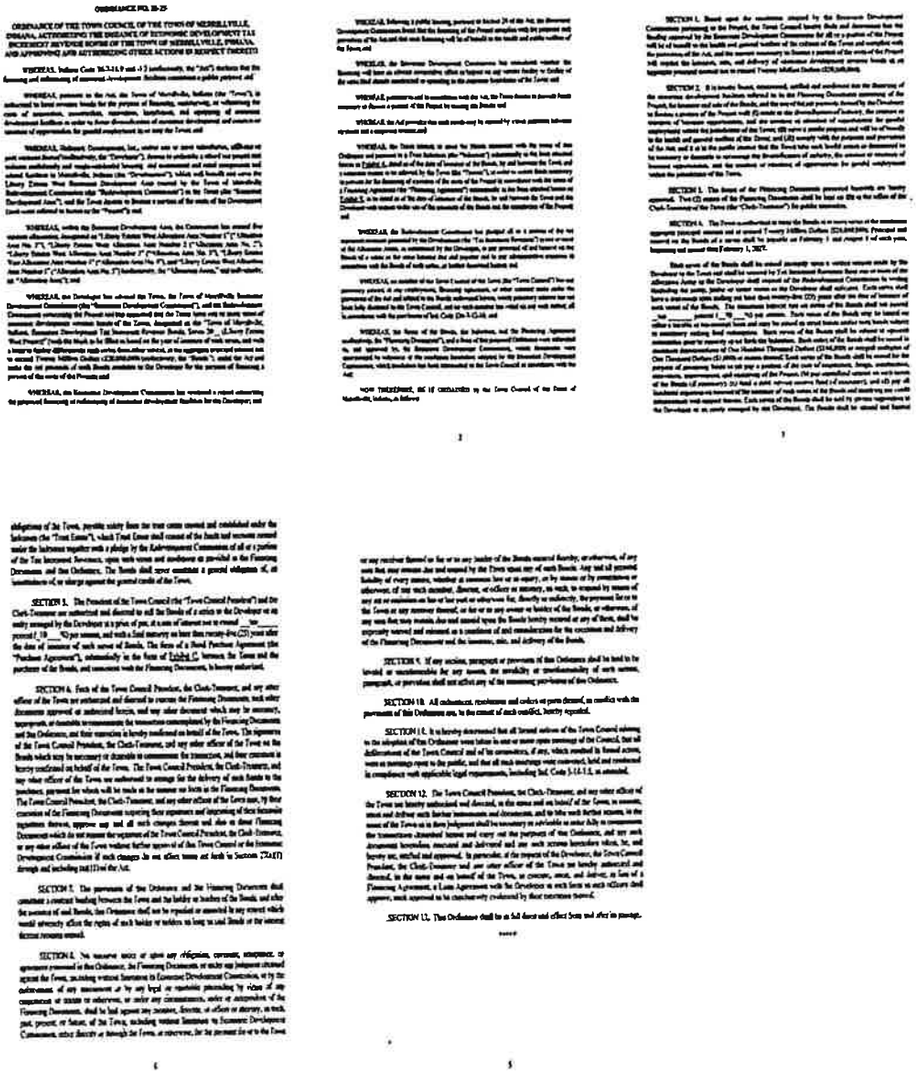
It was moved by Councilor Uzelac and seconded by Vice President Neal to approve Ordinance 26-24 on the first reading.

Upon a roll call vote, there were six affirmatives and no negatives. Councilors Neal, 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 26-25 (Discussion & Roll Call Vote)

Ordinance of the Town Council of the Town of Merrillville, Indiana, Authorizing the Issuance of Economic Development Tax Increment Revenue Bonds of the Town of Merrillville, Indiana, and Approving and Authorizing Other Actions in Respect Thereto.

(remainder intentionally blank)



All of which is passed and adopted this _____ day of _____, 2026, by the Town Council of the Town of Merrillville, Indiana.

TOWN COUNCIL OF THE TOWN OF
MERRILLVILLE, INDIANA

It was moved by Councilor Uzelac and seconded by Councilor Pettit to approve Ordinance 26-25 on the first reading.

Town Manager Griffin explained the ordinance.

Upon a roll call vote, there were six affirmatives and no negatives. Councilors Neal, 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 26-46 (Discussion & Voice Vote)
An Exigent Resolution Providing for the Transfer of Appropriation Balances from and Among Major Budget Classifications in the Wheel Tax Fund And Police Pension 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.

TOWN OF MERRILLVILLE, INDIANA
RESOLUTION No. 26-46

AN EXIGENT RESOLUTION PROVIDING for the TRANSFER of APPROPRIATION BALANCES from and AMONG MAJOR BUDGET CLASSIFICATIONS in the WHEEL TAX FUND and POLICE PENSION 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 26-46 Page 2 of 2

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 Wheel Tax Fund and the Police Pension 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 existing unobligated appropriations of the Wheel Tax Fund and the Police Pension 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 appropriations in order to satisfy an existing need and further that a new a ss follows:

		Decrease	Increase
2250.010.394	Wheel Tax/Contractual Services	$ 25,000.00	
2250.010.243.006	Wheel Tax/Other Supplies DR		$ 25,000.00
8802.010.196	PPF-25/Funeral Benefit	$ 1,000.00	
8802.010.311	PPF-25/Attorney Fees		$ 1,000.00

[remainder intentionally blank]

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

DULY RESOLVED and ADOPTED by the TOWN COUNCIL of the TOWN of MERRILLVILLE, LAKE COUNTY, INDIANA, this 8th day of SEPTEMBER, 2026.

TOWN COUNCIL of the TOWN of
MERRILLVILLE, INDIANA

It was moved by Vice President Neal and seconded by Councilor Pettit to approve Resolution 26-46.

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS:
The Town Council President announced the following:

- Town Council Meeting September 22, 2026, at 6:30 p.m.
- RDC Meeting September 22, 2026, at 6:00 p.m.
- Plan Commission September 15, 2026
- Town Council Workshop Wednesday, September 16, 2026

ADJOURNMENT:
Having completed all items on the agenda, the Town Council President, Rick Bella, announced the meeting had adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

Rick Bella, Town Council President

Eric O. January, Clerk-Treasurer

Respectfully Submitted By Angela Lewis