Town Council of Merrillville
7820 Broadway Ave - Merrillville, IN 46410
Town Council Meeting Minutes of the Regular Meeting of
March 26, 2024 - 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.

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

PETITIONS, COMMUNICATIONS, ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS, AND REMONSTRATIONS

- **Appointment by the Council President of Merrillville's delegate to the Joint Board of Delegates for the interlocal Cooperation Entity**.

  Council President Bella appointed Councilor Keesha Hardway to the Shared Ethics Entity Joint Board of Delegates.

- **Letter from Andrean High School**
  Upon a request from President Bella, Councilor Hardaway read into the record a letter from Andrean High School's Principal Mr. Jaycob Knazur:

- This section purposely blank -

ANDREAN HIGH SCHOOL

CHRIST IS MY TEACHER

March 25, 2024

Andrean Family-

Over the past eight years, Andrean High School has been ardently studying and exploring how to strengthen and ensure the strategic future of our school to maintain its position as a beacon of faith, learning, leadership, and service for the people of the Diocese of Gary and Northwest Indiana. One of the key drivers of the study was an assessment of the physical campus and needs for the future.

Several respected individuals have worked diligently to understand and assess the many factors, perspectives, trends, trade-offs, programming, donor capacity, and tactile needs of what would be required to influence the desired future for Andrean and our ability to live out our mission. After several years of silent campaigning and measuring anticipated benchmarks, a committee was formed this fall to offer a final recommendation on the future of our physical campus to myself and our Superintendent of Schools. The fruit of the committee's wisdom proposed that we invest in our current campus in a practical, phased manner that properly honors the traditions of our past and the needs of our future through potential renovation, new on-site construction, and/or redevelopment. Appreciative of their work and perspective, I accepted their recommendation and presented the findings to Bishop McClory earlier this month. He has since affirmed this and bestowed his full endorsement of the recommendation.

The Andrean Initiative reflects a big dream. With this more defined direction, there is excitement to move forward at our current campus to ensure students' continued success but in a campus setting they have long deserved. We stand at an important crossroads poised to influence a vibrant future for our diocese and the Northwest Indiana Region; Andrean is an essential component and valuable asset of that future. Toward this goal, we will continue to dedicate focused energy to strengthening our partnership with the Town of Merrillville, local universities, philanthropic organizations, and our devoted and loyal alumni base.

We envision a future where Andrean remains an honored asset and beacon to our region -- for this is what we have been, what we are, and what we believe our mission will continue to be into the next generation. Our energies, resources, and goals should reflect this awesome call and important responsibility. As a product of this institution, I have a deep appreciation for our history and our mission. Even more so, I have an abiding faith in Andrean's future success and know that her best days are still ahead.

Christ is My Teacher,

Jaycob Knazur
Principal, Andrean High School

President Bella reported that the Redevelopment Commission and the Town Council will talk more about how we can assist Andrean with their endeavors for remodeling and new construction.

Councilor Pettit reported this was part of his plans to assist Andrean High School.

- **Recognition Letter from the Arbor Day Foundation**
  President Bella reported that the Town of Merrillville was recognized by the Arbor Day Foundation as a 2023 Tree City USA and received a growth award. This is the fourteenth year that the Town of Merrillville has been recognized.

- **Employee of the Month: March 2024**
  Director Steve King of the Street Department and Interim Town Manager Michael Griffin presented to the council and audience Administrative Assistant Brenda Mecchia as March's Employee of the Month for the Town of Merrillville. Ms. Mecchia received a certificate of recognition and a gift card on behalf of the Town of Merrillville. Director King elaborated on Ms. Mecchia's exemplary qualities as an employee at the Street Department.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

- *NONE*

CONSENT AGENDA

- Accts. Payable Register Voucher Approval for Approval for March 26th, 2024
- AP Voucher Register Summary for ARP Purchases for March 26th, 2024
- Approval of Town Council Meeting Minutes of March 12th, 2024

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

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

Madam Clerk-Treasurer Pro-Tempore Angela Lewis reported that the Redevelopment Commission did receive a separate Accounts Payable Register Voucher. President Bella reported that Clerk-Treasurer Eric January was absent due to an injury.

PRESENTATION of DECLARATIONS

- *NONE*

STANDING & SPECIAL COMMITTEES REPORTS

BUDGET & FINANCE - NEAL – Councilor Neal had nothing to report at this time.

COUNCIL AFFAIRS- PETTIT – Councilor Pettit reported that a Workshop occurred last Wednesday at which it became apparent for a need to convene a Council Affairs Committee meeting.

Upon leave from President Bella, Councilor Pettit called a Council Affairs meeting for April 2, 2024, at 5:00 pm to review ordinances and prepare them to present to the council at the April 9th meeting.

STREET DEPARTMENT- UZELAC– Councilor Uzelac reported that the Street Department has been picking up tree branches and debris.

ELECTIONS, PUBLIC RELATIONS, & TOWN BEAUTIFICATION - NEAL- Councilor Neal reported that the committee is still working on beatification (flowers and hanging basket) of the Town with Director Steve King and Tracy Ryan from the Street Department.

The committee will be calling a meeting with Robinson Engineering to move forward with the new Town Slogan and signage.

Upon a question by President Bella regarding old sign designs, Director King responded that he had the old sign designs on file. President Bella asked that the design be sent to council members.

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS- PETTIT – Councilor Pettit reported that Councilor Neal attended her first Lake County Solid Waste meeting.

Upon a question from Councilor Pettit, Councilor Neal reported she would give her report under the Lake County Solid Waste Management section listed on the agenda.

PERSONNEL POLICY & EMPLOYEE BENEFITS – HARDAWAY- Councilor Hardaway reported that the search has resumed for a Parks Director. The candidate who was extended an offer respectfully declined the position. Council Hardaway further reported that the Parks Director's position has been reposted along with the Assistant Parks Director, Front Desk Attendants, as well as Site Supervisors.

PUBLIC SAFETY- HARDWAY- Upon a request from Councilor Hardaway, Fire Chief Ed Yerga came to the podium to explain the aerial ladder firetruck request to the council.

Chief Yerga reported that the Fire Territory is here to petition the council to sign an agreement with Pierce Manufacturing. The Fire Territory Board has gone through a bid process for the Aerial Ladder Firetruck and Pierce Manufacturing was the only bidder. The cost will be a little over $2,600,000.00. The Fire Territory Board will enter into a 2024 Bond to pay for other projects and doesn't have the funding to pay for the truck. The new truck will be replacing a truck that the council approved for purchase in 1993 that has been out of service for the last ten years.

Chief Yerga also reported that the contract needs to be signed as soon as possible because the build time is between forty-five and forty-eight months. The payment to Pierce Manufacturing won't be due until the truck is delivered.

It was moved by Councilor Hardaway and seconded by Councilor Pettit to sign the contract with Pierce Manufacturing.

Upon a question from President Bella regarding amending her motion to state, that the Town Council President will sign the contract, Councilor Hardway amended her motion.

Councilor Hardaway amended her motion and Councilor Pettit seconded still stand for the Town Council President to sign the contract with Pierce Manufacturing.

Chief Yerga added that there will be change orders with this contract because build-out is over the next four years because of changing technology.

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 Town Council President was approved to sign the contract with Pierce Manufacturing.

(Agreement as signed is on file with the Office of the Clerk-Treasurer)

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT-PETTIT – Councilor Pettit reported that the Redevelopment Commission had a workshop and public meeting where a presentation was given by Light Source BP regarding developing a solar farm on Colorado Street. Since this is a large developer, Councilor Pettit asked for assistance with our equipment needs for the Fire and Police Departments.

Light Source BP is going to make approximately a $100,000,000.00 investment with approximately 400,046 acres that they are securing on both sides of Colorado Street.

PARKS & RECREATION- UZELAC - Councilor Uzelac reported that several calls from residents regarding booking birthday parties at the local parks.

UTILITY LIAISON – CHANDLER-FELTON – Councilor Chandler-Felton reported that the committee is still in the process of making meeting arrangements with Indiana American Water, Merrillville Conservatory District, and possibly NIPSCO.

SPECIAL COMMITTEES

ABANDONED-BLIGHTED PROPERTIES - HAYNES-EDWARDS & CHANDLER-FELTON– Councilor Haynes-Edwards reported that a meeting occurred last week where discussions were held on how to handle abandoned and blighted properties. It was agreed upon by the committee that aggressive steps would be taken going forward.

Councilor Haynes-Edwards also reported that she attended her first court session with Councilor Pettit regarding abandoned and blighted properties and touring the Town looking at the buildings.

Upon a question from President Bella regarding the demolition of an abandoned and blighted home, Councilor Haynes-Edwards responded that a motion and hearing date had been established to move forward with the demolition of the home.

SEMI-QUINCENTENNIAL COMMITTEE - HAYNES-EDWARDS – Councilor Haynes-Edwards reported that she has no report at this time.

SPECIAL TOWN PROJECTS - NEAL – Councilor Neal reported on the following upcoming events that are listed on the Town's website merrillville.in.gov:

- The annual Juneteenth Celebration will be on Juneteenth and will include a movie night at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center. There will be concessions and two separate movies will be shown at around 8:00 pm. There will be other activities on this day.

- The annual July 4th Fireworks will be on July 3rd at Merrillville High School. The event will start at 9:00 pm.

- The annual July 4th parade will be held on July 4th. The parade will start at 11:00 am at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center. If you would like to participate in the parade, applications are available on the Town's website.

President Bella reported that he will be reinstating the Dean and Barbara White Community Center Committee with the following appointments:

- Councilor Pettit as the Chairman,
- Councilors Hardaway and Haynes-Edwards as members.

DEPARTMENT & COMMISSION REPORTS

LAKE COUNTY SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT-NEAL– Councilor Neal reported that she She attended the meeting last week. One of the topics that was discussed was the Citizens Advisory Committee. Lake County Solid Waste Management (LCSWMD) is looking for residents to serve on this committee. The application is located on their website at www.lcswmd.com. The committee meets four times a year.

LCSWMD also has leaf drop-off from April 1st until May 2nd. The drop-off site is Lake County Fairground. The leaves must be in biodegradable yard bags and branches and twigs can't exceed three inches. There is also a drop-off site located in Gary, Indiana. The Calumet Township Multipurpose Center is located at 1900 West 41st Street.

LCSWMD is also giving away a half of cubic yard of compost to residents. If you are a business, you will have to pay for the compost. You can contact them at (219) 853-2420. The next household hazardous waste collection is on April 20th at Munster Public Works located on 508 Fisher Street in Munster, Indiana. The next board meeting is scheduled for May 16th.

NORTHWESTERN INDIANA REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION-HARDAWAY – Councilor Hardaway reported that the meeting is next month.

STORMWATER MANAGEMENT RESOURCES-LAKE – Director Lake wasn't present at the meeting.

SOUTHSHORE VISITORS AND CONVENTION AUTHORITY-PATENA – Deanne Patena wasn't present at the meeting.

FIRE TERRITORY BOARD - NEAL & HARDAWAY – Councilor Hardaway reported that a meeting occurred where the Aerial Fire Truck was discussed. A new board was appointed. Steven Minchuk as President, Councilor Keesha Hardaway as Vice-President, and Ron Dudley as Secretary. The remaining board positions are members.

New Matter. President Bella reported that the Lake County Health Department will be added to the agenda. There was no objection. It was noted owing to a recent change in legislation, Merrillville as the second most populous municipality in the in the county, may submit up to

three nominees for consideration for appointment to the Lake County Board of Health by the County Commissioners. Councilor Chandler-Felton's name will be submitted for consideration to this board. This was done by general consent.

DEPARTMENT REPORTS/INTERIM TOWN MANAGER

Chief Nuses – Police Department

Chief Nuses reported a summary for March 2024. The report listed the following:

- 2,000 calls for service.
- 443 traffic stops
- 64 arrests

He also reported that crime has decreased in the Town of Merrillville, but the seriousness of the crimes has increased. He elaborated on some of the serious incidents.

Chief Yerga – Fire Department

Chief Yerga reported that the Fire Department is remodeling the fire station on 57th Avenue to get a staff engine on site. A five-year plan was also distributed to the Public Safety Committee. Chief Yerga elaborates on several other projects in the works.

Upon a question from President Bella regarding the Lake of the Four Seasons Fire Department not being able to get the votes to pass their Fire Territory, Chief Yerga responded that he attended multiple meetings and, in his opinion, all three entities must be involved in the final decision.

Director Shine - Building and Planning

Director Shine reported that she wants to remind residents and businesses of how important to pull permits before they have yard, exterior, or interior work done this Spring or Summer. The Building and Planning Department's inspectors (fire and building) are finding contractors working without a permit. In some cases, money has been given and the work wasn't completed.

Director King – Street Department

Direct King reported that his department has been busy picking up branches around the Town. His department is also working on beautification.

Director King also reported that his department completed Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) training.

President thanked the officers who participated in the Women's Self-Defense Course. Chief Nuses reported that another course will be held in August of 2024.

Interim Town Manager Griffin – Town Administration

Interim Town Manager Griffin reported that his monthly report has been submitted to the council and that he would like to point out some of the following highlights:

- Chaz Riley – Media work as our Content Manager
- Stormwater Management - Director Lake details information on projects
- Human Resources - Director Pettit benefits review and hiring
- Economic Development - Director Chilcott's economic development projects
- Police and Fire Departments Report - Public Safety
- Parks and Recreation Department – Interim Town Manager Griffin is the Acting Department Head in the absence of the Director of Parks and Recreation encouraged review of the report's details.

  Interim Town Manager Griffin thanked President Bella for reinstating the Dean and Barbara White Community Center Committee.

GENERAL ORDERS

A. Ordinances:

First Readings:

It was moved by Councilor Hardaway and seconded by Councilor Haynes-Edwards to approve Ordinance 24-05 on the 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.

(The original is on file in the Office of the Clerk-Treasurer.)

2. **Ordinance 24-06 (Discussion and Roll Call Vote)** An Ordinance of the Town of Merrillville, Lake County, Indiana, Appropriating Additional Monies Within the Various Fire Protection Territory Funds for the Year 2024 Not Included in the Current Budget.

It was moved by Councilor Uzelac and seconded by Councilor Haynes-Edwards to approve Ordinance 24-06 on the 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.

(The original is on file in the Office of the Clerk-Treasurer.)

Second Readings:

NONE

B. Resolutions:

NONE

C. BZA & LARGE GATHERING ACTIONS

Petitioner: Quing Song
Owner: Liberty Square
Request: Special Exception Approval
Purpose: To allow Massage Therapy
Location: 7890 Broadway
Zoning: C-2, Community Commercial Zoning District

Planning and Building Director Shine reported the ABZA approved the use variance.

Upon a question from President Bella regarding the other location, the Petitioner reported that the other location is in Highland, Indiana.

Upon a question from Councilor Uzelac regarding the pricing of services, the Petitioner reported that the amounts are as follows:

30 minutes is $50.00
1 hour is $80.00
90 minutes is $120.00

Upon a question from President Bella regarding communication with the Town of Highland business site, Director Shine reported that she did speak to someone regarding this business.

It was moved by Councilor Pettit and seconded by Councilor Neal to approve the Petition and use variance with the conditions of a six-month and twelve-month review with the Chief of Police, Fire Inspector, and the Planning and Building Director to report on how business is being conducted at 7890 Broadway for this Petitioner at this location for this use only.

Upon a voice vote, the motion passed. The Petition and the use variance were approved with conditions.

OLD BUSINESS

NONE

NEW BUSINESS

NONE

PUBLIC COMMENT

1. Chanda Flowers, Merrillville, Indiana voiced her concerns regarding a new business opening up in the Town of Merrillville without the Town Court verifying if the business has outstanding tickets.

2. DeAndre Evans, Merrillville, Indiana voiced his concerns regarding basketball opportunities for the children of Merrillville. President Bella requested that Councilor Pettit add this item to the agenda for his first Dean and Barbara White Community Center Committee meeting.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Town Council President announced the following:

- Abandoned & Blighted Committee Meeting April 2nd at 5:30 p.m.
- The Town Council's next regular meeting is on April 9th at 6:30 p.m.
- Council Affairs Committee Meeting April 2nd at 5:00 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

Having completed all items on the agenda, the President declared the meeting adjourned at 7:43 p.m.

Rick Bella, Town Council President

Eric O. January, Clerk-Treasurer

Respectfully Submitted By Angela Lewis, Clerk-Treasurer Pro Tempore