Town Council of Merrillville
7820 Broadway Ave - Merrillville, IN 46410
Town Council Meeting Minutes of the Regular Meeting of
February 10, 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 Dennis Walton of Faith Temple of Christ Church.

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

Attorney Svetanoff was present to provide legal advice.

PETITIONS, COMMUNICATIONS, ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS, AND REMONSTRATIONS:

- **MHS Declaration Honoring MHD State Champion Wrestler Charisma "Izzy" Lawrence:**

  Clerk-Treasurer Eric January read the following declaration into the record:

Town of Merrillville
DECLARATION
State of Indiana

The Town Council of Merrillville Recognizes High School Wrestling State Champion Charisma "Izzy" Lawrence

Whereas, Charisma "Izzy" Lawrence, a senior student-athlete at Merrillville High School, has demonstrated outstanding athletic excellence, determination, and sportsmanship through her participation in the sport of wrestling; and

Whereas, Izzy achieved the remarkable distinction of winning the Indiana State Wrestling Championship in the 145-pound weight class, finishing her senior season with an exceptional 38-1 record; and

Whereas, Lawrence is a three-time state-placing wrestler and an essential member of the Merrillville Pirates Girls Wrestling Team, contributing to the team's impressive 7th-place finish at the state level this season; and

Whereas, her accomplishments earned her recognition on the Indiana High School Athletic Association State Finals poster, highlighting her as one of the state's premier athletes in this rapidly growing sport; and

Whereas, her journey in girls wrestling exemplifies perseverance, discipline, and dedication through adversity, serving as a powerful example to fellow students and athletes; and

Whereas, through her achievements and leadership, Charisma "Izzy" Lawrence is helping pave the way for future generations of female wrestlers to step onto the mat with confidence, pride, and a strong sense of belonging.

Now, therefore be it declared, that the Town Council of the Town of Merrillville, Indiana proudly recognizes and congratulates and honors Charisma "Izzy" Lawrence for her outstanding achievements, her representation of Merrillville High School with excellence, and her positive impact on The Heart of the Region. We extend our congratulations and best wishes for her continued success in athletics, academics, and all future endeavors.

Congratulations and Let's Go Pirates!

Declared and signed by the following Honorable Town of Merrillville Town Councilors and attested to by the Honorable Town Clerk-Treasurer, this 10th day of February, 2026.

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

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

Councilor Pettit informed the council that he and Attorney Svetanoff have been working with Opus's attorney out of Minneapolis, Minnesota, regarding concerns for the ICE Detention Facility. The communication resulted in the following letter being generated by Opus' Attorney and read into the record:

OPUS.

February 4, 2026

QUINTAIROS, PRIETO, WOOD & BOYER, P.A.
9111 Broadway Suite RR #2
Merrillville, IN 46410
Attn: Joseph Svetanoff

Mr. Svetanoff,

Thank you for your email to me dated January 30, 2026. This letter is provided in response to your request.

Opus, its board and its leadership team earnestly value the relationship our company has with the municipalities and communities we serve. Maintaining those deep connections and our reputation as a world-class, responsible real estate developer is one of our highest priorities.

We also understand the reason for your inquiry and the position of the Town Council of the Town of Merrillville.

As an experienced attorney, we know you will appreciate that there are circumstances in which obligations of confidentiality limit parties in their abilities to make public statements. While we would very much like to be helpful in our response to your request, any disclosure must comply with our ongoing legal obligations.

Nevertheless, we can confirm that we are not under contract nor are we in active negotiations concerning the sale or lease of our facility at 8719 Mississippi Street, Merrillville, IN 46410 with or involving any federal governmental agency.

Thank you again for reaching out to us.

Sincerely,

OPUS HOLDING, LLC
Signed by:
Shanna Strowbridge
Shanna L. Strowbridge, Vice President & General Counsel

Attorney Svetanoff requested that the Opus' letter be posted on the Town's website.
website: https://www.merrillville.in.gov/news_detail_T27_R577.php

PUBLIC COMMENTS:
Public comments were made at the meeting regarding Data Centers, Dean and Barbara White Community Center, and Public Comments. A copy of the video from the Town Council Meeting held on February 10, 2026, has been uploaded to the Town's website at:
https://www.merrillville.in.gov/government/town_council/town_council_meetings.php.

MOTIONS ON THE TABLE:

Resolution 26-01 (Discussion and Voice Vote)
A Resolution of the Town Council Authorizing and Approving a Transfer of Property from the Town of Merrillville to the Lake County Parks and Recreation Department, pursuant to IC 36-1-11-8.

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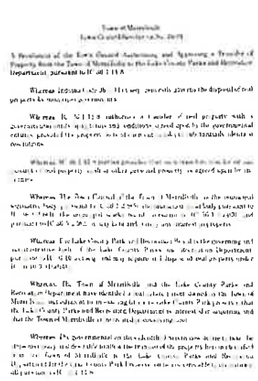
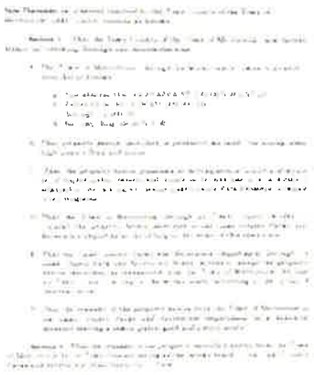
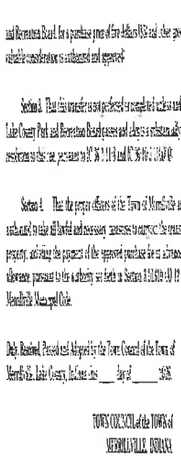






Exhibit

Parcel Identification Number : 45-13-28-451-009.000-030 Owner : Town of Merrillville
Site Address : 9140 VIGO APPR ST CROWN POINT IN 46307
Mailing Address : 7820 Broadway Merrillville IN 46410 Tax Code : 030
Tax Description : Merrillville Property Class :
Exempt Municipality Acreage : 11.0999792
Sec Twp Rng : 28 35N 07W



It was moved by Councilor Uzelac and seconded by Councilor Haynes-Edwards to approve Ordinance 26-01.

Upon a question from Clerk-Treasurer Eric January, a constituent asked him about the transfer of Town property to Lake County Parks and Recreation. Councilor Pettit explained the property and the transfer.

Director Matthew Lake of Stormwater added to the discussion.

President Bella added that this property was not identified in the Town's Master Plan as property that should be developed.

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

Upon a question from Councilor Pettit regarding Resolution 26-01 being deferred at the last meeting due to his absence and whether the resolution needed to be removed from the table, President Bella responded that the resolution had just been approved and was verified with Attorney Svetanoff, who confirmed that the process was acceptable.

CONSENT AGENDA:

- Accounts Payable Register Voucher Approval for February 10, 2026.
- Approval of Town Council Meeting Minutes of January 27, 2026,
- Approval of Town Council Workshop Minutes from January 21, 2026
- ARP Accounts Payable Register Voucher Approval for February 10, 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 & SPECIAL COMMITTEES REPORTS:

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS:

***BUDGET & FINANCE*—NEAL**— Vice President Neal had nothing to report.

STREET DEPARTMENT & PARK MAINTENANCE - UZELAC– Councilor Uzelac reported that the Street Department, under the direction of Steve King, has done a respectable job with snow removal due to severe winter weather conditions. The crew worked 16 hours one day to keep the roads and streets clear.

Councilor Uzelac deferred to Director Steve King for the rest of the report under departmental reports.

COUNCIL AFFAIRS—PETTIT—Councilor Pettit had nothing to report.

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE- HARDAWAY- Councilor Hardaway had nothing to report.

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

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

President Bella informed the council that the Merrillville FOP Lodge 168 is hosting their Daytona 500 fundraiser on Sunday, February 15th, from 11:30 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. at the Slovak Club located on 6920 Broadway. There will be a 50/50 raffle and $10.00 at the door for all you can eat hot dogs and chili.

ELECTIONS, PUBLIC RELATIONS, & TOWN BEAUTIFICATION - NEAL- Vice President Neal reported that she has received an email from Roberson Engineering regarding the foundation for the Gateway signs. Since the weather is warming up, the installation area will be evaluated, and a call-in for utility locates will be made.

Director Steve King gave an update regarding planting and flowers in the greenhouse.

Upon a question from Vice President Neal regarding how much the Town of Merrillville is saving by doing the beautification in-house, Director Steve King responded that he does not have the exact figure, but we are saving thousands of dollars.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT-PETTIT – Councilor Pettit reported that a Redevelopment Authority (RDA) and Redevelopment Commission (RDC) meeting was held before the council meeting tonight. The following activities took place at the meetings:

- Officers were elected for 2026.
- The RDC Resolution was passed, which is going before the Plan Commission, Town Council, and then back to RDC regarding modifications to Liberty Estates West in the allocation area and the work Andy Hall is doing south of US 30 near Whitcomb Street

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

PARKS AND DEAN & BARBARA WHITE COMMUNITY CENTER - PETTIT – Councilor Pettit surveyed the committee members regarding the next meeting date being scheduled after all the Black History Celebration events are over. The committee agreed to schedule the next committee meeting after the Black History Celebration events.

Councilor Pettit deferred to Parks Director Jerry McCartney regarding updates that will be given under his departmental report. Councilor Pettit also requested that Director McCartney email him all the Parks' Events and Activities Artwork in a jpeg file to display on Lamar's Billboards throughout the Town of Merrillville. This is part of the agreement with Lamar to post Town events and activities.

SPECIAL COMMITTEES

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

SPECIAL TOWN PROJECTS – HAYNES-EDWARDS – Councilor Haynes-Edwards reported on the following event:

- **2026 Black History Celebration** - This year black history theme is 100 Years of Black History Month, Our Time, Our Town, Our History. There will be a dinner on Saturday, February 28th, from 5:00 p.m. until 10:00 p.m. for people 35 years old or older at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center.

  The dress code is after 5:00 p.m. attire. The Advance tickets price may be extended. Those tickets are $20.00, and the regular ticket price of tickets will be $25.00. The tickets are available through the mymerrillville app and at the door.

- **Ross Township Trustee Office - Ticket Raffle** – A ticket raffle will be held on February 27th at 1:00 p.m. for all Ross Township residents to enter to win a 55-inch flat screen television. Residents can claim their free tickets at the Ross Trustee Office before 10:00 a.m. February 27th at 26 West 73rd Avenue, Merrillville, Indiana, with a valid photo identification and utility bill.

- **Veterans' TGI Friday** – This event will be held on Friday, February 20th at 6880 Hendricks Street in Merrillville, Indiana, with comedians, a live band, and food. There will be a $10.00 donation for this event.

SEMI-QUINCENTENNIAL COMMITTEE - HAYNES-EDWARDS – Councilor Haynes-Edwards reported that the committee met on February 5th at 5:00 p.m. at Town Hall, 7820 Broadway, Merrillville, Indiana, to gather ideas for this extravaganza. The next meeting will be on March 5th at the same location. We are still looking for residents to volunteer for this July 4th 250th anniversary event.

President Bella requested an updated budget from Financial Advisor Hudson regarding the Special Town Project appropriation line-item. Financial Advisor Hudson stated she is working on the budget report.

DEPARTMENT & COMMISSION REPORTS:

NORTHERN INDIANA REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION-HARDAWAY – Councilor Hardaway had nothing to report.

LAKE COUNTY SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT - NEAL - Vice President Neal reported on the following flyer regarding the collection of plastic bottle caps:



The caps will be used to make tables and park seats for kids. The flyer is on the Town's website and the mymerrillville app.

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

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

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

- **Food and Beverage Tax** – Clerk-Treasurer Eric January reported that the Town received another Food and Beverage Tax check for $141,366.99, which brings the fund balance to $2,259,099.49.

Clerk-Treasurer Eric January informed the council that some businesses listed on the Food and Beverage Collection Report from the Indiana Department of Revenue should not have paid into the Food and Beverage Tax Fund because these payments become a liability to the Town of Merrillville. The businesses are outside the Merrillville limit but have a Merrillville address. The Town could potentially owe back to Indiana Department of Revenue $241,851.76. in receipts for those businesses.

President Bella stated that Attorney Svetanoff will contact the Indiana Department of Revenue for clarity on what the Town of Merrillville should do regarding this issue.

SSCVA – DEANN PATENA - No Report

DEPARTMENT REPORTS/ TOWN MANAGER:

Director Jerry McCartney – Parks and Recreation
Director McCartney reported on the following:

- **Black History Month** – The dinner will be held on February 28th at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center (D&BWCC). The tickets can be purchased through the rec desk. The Student Exhibit will be on February 25th at D&BWCC in the event center. We have also set up a black history resource table with educational materials.
- **Erie Lackawanna Trail**– All the lights have been installed in the tunnel, and the power is on from 5:00 p.m. until 5:00 a.m. We hope to get a camera installed later.
- **Parks Master Plan** – The plan is due April 15th for resubmittal.

Director Matthew Lake – Stormwater Management
Director Matthew Lake reported on the following:

- **Jet Vac Trunk** – We have been in communication with Best Equipment regarding the Jet Vac Truck that is being delivered in Mid-March.
- **Kaiser Ditch** – Director Lake contacted Bill Emerson, Lake County Surveyor, regarding the plans and specifications for Kaiser Ditch. Director Lake is waiting to hear back from Mr. Emerson and will update Councilor Uzelac.
- **Master Plan Update** – We have identified the following key projects with Christopher Burke Engineering:
    - A bypass interceptor 72 inches along 61st Street for Turkey Creek
    - Regional Storage North of 54th Avenue
    - Grant Place Reduction Project – 61st Street, which includes a pump station.
    - Outfall Reconstruction and Rehab on Skinner Pond
    - Conveyance along Clay Street North of 97th
    - Phase II of Chapel Manor Box Culvert.
- **MS4 11th Annual Contractor Workshop** – This workshop will be held on February 17th at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center. We will have close to 300 people attending this workshop.

Police Chief Nuses– Police Department
Police Chief Nuses reported the following statistics for January 2026:

- **Calls for Service** – 2,351, which resulted in 3,722 officers' responses.
- **Adult Arrest** – 65
- **Juvenile Arrest** – 3
- **Traffic Stops** – 293, which resulted in under 391 tickets.
- **Recruitment** – The Merrillville Police Department is still hiring new police officers. Applications will be accepted until February 13, 2026, at 3:00 p.m.
- **NIPSCO Protest** – Chief Nuses thanked the Lake County Sheriff's Department for assisting with the protest at NIPSCO's headquarters in Merrillville. The protest was peaceful.

Upon a question from President Bella regarding the cost of the extra patrol officers for the protest, Chief Nuses responded that the estimate is about $12,000.00.

Upon a question from President Bella regarding budgeting for extra patrols for future protests, Financial Advisor Hudson responded that we have not in the current 2026 budget, but it is a great idea moving forward in this current environment.

Director Shine – Building and Planning
Director Sheila Shine was absent.

Director King - Street Department
Director Steve King reported that NIPSCO must do remediation on a gas leak in the intersection of 73rd and Mississippi Street in the northwest corner on February 19, 2026. Director King and Deputy Fire Chief Lilley met with NIPSCO regarding closing the intersection. We vehemently disagree with NIPSCO closing the intersection, so they will be shifting lanes. This remediation will be a one-day project, and the traffic pattern will be posted on the Town's website.

Upon a question from Councilor Pettit regarding the NIPSCO remediation, Director King responded that there is a gas leak that must be rectified by a certain time.

Merrillville Administrative & Building Manager Linda Rosas – Town Administration

Town Manager Giffin was absent, and Administrative & Building Manager Rosas had nothing to report.

GENERAL ORDERS

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

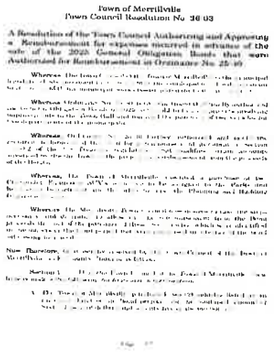
Zoning: (Motion to adopt or reject; confer IC 36-5-2-10(d): **NONE**

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

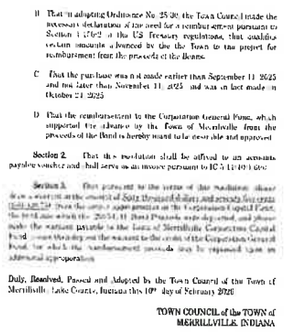
Second Reading: (Discussion, Public Comments Only If Required & Roll Call Vote): **NONE**

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

Resolution 26-03 (Discussion & Roll Call Vote)
A Resolution of the Town Council Authorizing and Approving a Reimbursement for expenses incurred in advance of the sales of the 2025 General Obligation Bonds that were Authorized for Reimbursement in Ordinance No. 25-30.


Town of Merrillville
Town Council Resolution No. 26-03

A Resolution of the Town Council Authorizing and Approving a Reimbursement for expenses incurred in advance of the sale of the 2025 General Obligation Bonds that were Authorized for Reimbursement in Ordinance No. 25-30


B. That in adopting Ordinance No. 25-30, the Town Council made the necessary declaration of the need for a reimbursement pursuant to Section 1.150-2 of the US Treasury regulations, that qualifies certain amounts advanced by the Town to the project for reimbursement from the proceeds of the Bonds.

C. That the purchase was not made earlier than September 11, 2025 and not later than November 11, 2025 and was in fact made in October 21, 2025.

D. That the reimbursement to the Corporation General Fund, which supported the advance by the Town of Merrillville from the proceeds of the Bond is hereby stated to be desirable and approved.

Section 2. That this resolution shall be affixed to an accounts payable voucher and shall serve as an invoice pursuant to IC 5-11-10-1 (dec.

Section 3. That pursuant to the terms of this resolution, there is a warrant at the amount of Sixty thousand dollars and seventy five cents ($60,000.75) from the entire appropriation in the Corporation General Fund, the 2025 sale which the 2025 Bond Proceeds were deposited, and please make the warrant payable to the Town of Merrillville Corporation General Fund, [illegible] the warrant to the credit of the Corporation General Fund, for which the reimbursement proceeds may be expensed upon an additional appropriation.

Duly, Resolved, Passed and Adopted by the Town Council of the Town of Merrillville, Lake County, Indiana this 10th day of February 2026.

TOWN COUNCIL of the TOWN of MERRILLVILLE, INDIANA

Financial Advisor Hudson explained the resolution.

It was moved by Councilor Pettit and seconded by Councilor Uzelac to approve Resolution 26-03.

Upon a question from President Bella regarding everything being in order, Attorney Svetanoff responded that the council may proceed.

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

OLD BUSINESS: ***NONE***

NEW BUSINESS: ***NONE***

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

The Town Council President announced the following:

- RDC Meeting February 24, 2026, at 6:00 p.m.
- Town Council Meeting February 24, 2026, at 6:30 p.m.

- BZA & Plan Commission Meeting for February has been cancelled and will be picked up in March.
- Black History Exhibit February 25th for 12-4 at the D&BWCC
- Black History Celebration February 28th from 5-10, tickets are on sale now!

ADJOURNMENT:
Having completed all items on the agenda, the Town Council President announced the meeting had adjourned at 7:11 p.m.

Rick Bella, Town Council President

Eric O. January, Clerk-Treasurer

Respectfully Submitted By Angela Lewis