Town Council of Merrillville
7820 Broadway Ave - Merrillville, IN 46410
Town Council Meeting Minutes of the Regular Meeting of
February 24, 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 Church.

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

Absent from the meeting were Councilors Rhonda Neal, Shauna Haynes-Edwards, and Keesha Hardaway.

Interim Attorney Ricardo Hall was present to provide legal advice.

PETITIONS, COMMUNICATIONS, ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS, AND REMONSTRATIONS:

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

President Bella explained that public comments are at the beginning of the council meeting to allow comments for items listed on the agenda. When the comments were at the end, it became a critique of what the council did and not advice for you on how we should vote on items listed on the agenda. The council intention is to keep the public comments at the beginning of the meeting.

Public comments were made at the meeting regarding Logan's Love Foundation Events, the Crossroads Kiwanis Event, Public Comments at the beginning of the meetings, and signs posted on telephone poles regarding the release of 20 million gallons of water held back by the Lake County Surveyor. A copy of the video from the Town Council Meeting held on February 24, 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: ***NONE***

CONSENT AGENDA:

- Accounts Payable Register Voucher Approval for February 24, 2026.
- Approval of Town Council Meeting Minutes of February 10, 2026,
- Approval of ARP Accounts Payable Register Voucher Approval for February 24, 2026 (**the actual date of the ARP Register Voucher is February 24th, not February 14th)**
- Approval of Murphy Law Firm PD Representation Contract Renewal Request

Lester F. Murphy, Sr. (1899-1973)
Lester F. Murphy (1936-2019)
J. Justin Murphy

Murphy Law Firm
Attorneys at Law
6939 Kennedy Avenue
Hammond, Indiana 46323
Telephone (219) 844-3025
Fax (219) 844-3400

E-Mail: justinmurphy@sbcglobal.net

VIA EMAIL ONLY

February 20, 2026

Rick Bella, President
Merrillville Town Council
7820 Broadway
Merrillville, Indiana 46410

Re: Letter of Interest
Our File No.: 16412

Dear President Bella:

This correspondence shall serve to confirm the undersigned's interest in continuing to represent the Town Board of Metropolitan Police Commission of the Town of Merrillville as its attorney as well as my willingness to attend regular and special meetings of the Town Board of Metropolitan Police Commissioners as scheduled. For legal services rendered, I propose an hourly rate of $200.00 per hour plus any ordinary and necessary out-of-pocket expenses incurred upon submission of written of documentation.

Thank you for the opportunity to be considered as the attorney for the Town Board of Metropolitan Police Commissioners of the Town of Merrillville.

Thank you for your attention to this correspondence.

Very truly yours,

MURPHY LAW FIRM

BY: J. JUSTIN MURPHY

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

Upon a question from Councilor Uzelac regarding other law firms applying, President Bella responded that no other firms responded.

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

SPECIAL ORDERS: ***NONE***

BZA & LARGE GATHERING ACTIONS*:*

Petitioner: Costco Wholesale Corporation
Owner: John Mathewson

Request: Variance of Use Approval
Purpose: To Allow Offsite Parking for Costco Employees
Location: 1240 East 79th Avenue and 1500 East 79th Avenue
Zoning: Planned Unit Development/C-3 Highway Commercial Zoning District

Planning and Building Director Sheila Shine reported that the ABZA approved the Variance of Use and gave an overview of the business and parking lot project.

Director Shine also stated that the vote was 4-0 in approval, with four being present.

The Petitioner, Larry Dziurdzik, Costco Real Estate Consultant added a few comments to Director Shine's explanation regarding working with the Town of Merrillville.

It was moved by Councilor Pettit and seconded by Councilor Chandler-Felton to approve the BZA Variance of Use.

Councilor Pettit informed the council that he wants the Town of Merrillville to be indemnified regarding this project because of the traffic coming in and out of Costco on 79th Avenue.

Councilor Pettit amended his motion to add the condition of an indemnification statement from Costco. Councilor Chandler-Felton stated her second stand on the additional condition of Costco's indemnification statement.

Interim Town Attorney Hall stated that he has reviewed some of the indemnification language, but Costco wanted a waiver and release. We are in the process of getting the language established to come to an agreement.

The Petitioner, Larry Dziurdzik, Costco Real Estate Consultant, stated that the language from the Town Attorney and Costco's Attorney was reviewed. A draft agreement on the language is in the final stages.

President Bella added that a meeting with Director Steve King needs to be scheduled to discuss Hawk Signal, proper painting, stripping on the roadway, signage, speed humps, and planters.

Director King added that he has received the plans from Costco.

Upon a roll call vote, there were four affirmatives and no negatives. Councilors Leona Chandler-Felton, Margaret Uzelac, Shawn Pettit, and Rick Bella voted in the affirmative. The motion passed. The BZA Variance of Use was approved.

STANDING & SPECIAL COMMITTEES REPORTS:

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS:

***BUDGET & FINANCE*—NEAL**— Vice President Neal was absent.

Upon a question from President Bella regarding a report, Town Manager Griffin responded that he and Financial Advisor Hudson are working on a date with the Chair regarding a committee meeting to discuss ramifications of what is likely to come out of the legislature and other concerns we have about the 2026 budget.

STREET DEPARTMENT & PARK MAINTENANCE - UZELAC– Councilor Uzelac reported that the Street Department is still picking up branches and trash.

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

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE- HARDAWAY- Councilor Hardaway was absent.

Upon a question from President Bella regarding a report, Town Manager Griffin responded that he has nothing to report.

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

PUBLIC SAFETY—HARDAWAY—Councilor Hardaway was absent.

ELECTIONS, PUBLIC RELATIONS, & TOWN BEAUTIFICATION - NEAL- Vice President Neal was absent.

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

- Approved the Consent Agenda and Pay Bills

Councilor Pettit also informed the council that the Economic Development Commission held their annual meeting and elected officers.

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

Councilor Pettie added that he spoke to Alexius Barber. Public Affairs & Economic Development Manager, regarding the Town's streetlights and other problems with NIPSCO. Director Steve King will compile a list of streetlights (Town and NIPSCO-owned) to discuss at the next meeting of the committee or a council workshop.

Director Steve King added that his Street Department has already compiled the list of streetlights that are out and reported them to NIPSCO.

Town Manager Griffin added that, with permission from President Bella, he will prepare a letter on behalf of the council that can be approved at the next meeting. The letter will then be filed with the Office of Utility Consumer Counselor. If NIPSCO is a regulated utility, part of the reason that they have a rate that's regulated and they are allowed to behave as a practical monopoly is that they have a guarantee that they are not only going to have their costs recovered, but they are going to try to have a

guarantee of service. Streetlights are not meters, so every time the Town reports a streetlight is out, we are not consuming energy.

Director Steve King commented that temporary streetlights were installed on 86th Avenue two years ago and are still up.

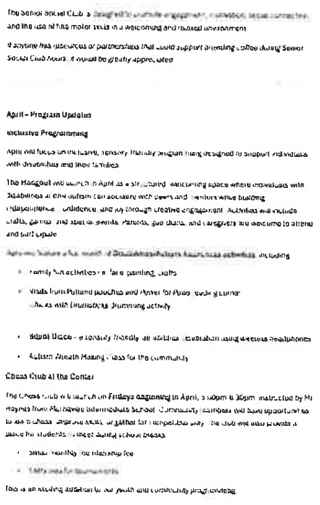
President Bella asked Attorney Hall to find out the Town of Merrillville legal rights in this matter.

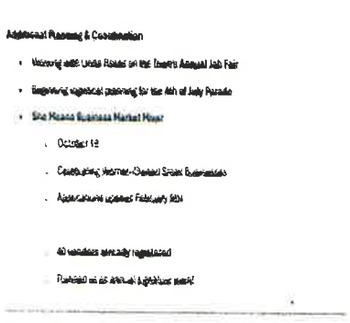
PARKS AND DEAN & BARBARA WHITE COMMUNITY CENTER - PETTIT – Councilor Pettit reported that Superintendent Jerry McCartney prepared a committee brief that has been given to council members and Clerk-Treasurer Eric January.











Superintendent McCartney added that the brief is a summary of activities at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center.

Councilor Pettit also reported that due to the Black History Month events and activities taking place, the committee meeting will have to be rescheduled. Councilor Pettit will meet with Town Manager Griffin and Superintendent McCartney to work out the details regarding the March meeting.

.

SPECIAL COMMITTEES

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

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

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

DEPARTMENT & COMMISSION REPORTS:

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

LAKE COUNTY SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT - NEAL - Vice President Neal was absent.

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

FIRE TERRITORY BOARD - NEAL & HARDAWAY – Vice President Neal and Councilor Hardaway were absent.

CLERK-TREASURER OFFICE - JANUARY – Clerk-Treasurer Eric January reported the following for January 31, 2026:

- **Cash Balances - $82,390,574.26** (Obligated and Unobligated Funds) Town Court, Fire Department, General Fund, Police Department, RDA, Stormwater, etc.
  - **RDA $15,788,081.61**
  - **General Fund $4,605,290.59**

- **Food and Beverage Tax – $2,500,981.19** (a portion of these funds is not the Town's)

SSCVA – DEANN PATENA - No Report

DEPARTMENT REPORTS/ TOWN MANAGER:

Superintendent Jerry McCartney – Parks and Recreation
No report given.

Director Matthew Lake – Stormwater Management
No report given.

Police Chief Nuses– Police Department
No report given.

Director Shine – Building and Planning
No report given.

Director King - Street Department
No report given.

Town Manager Griffin – Town Administration
No report given.

GENERAL ORDERS

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

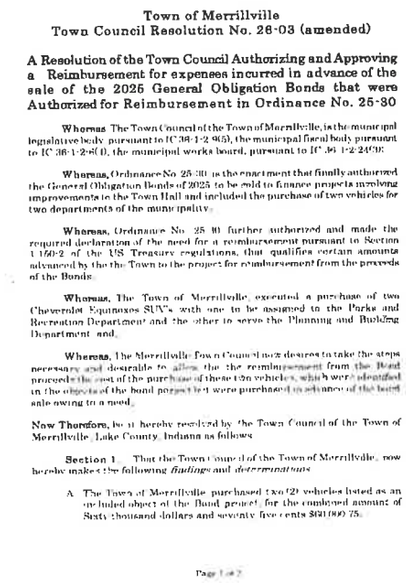
Zoning: (Motion to adopt or reject; confer IC 36-5-2-10(d): **NONE**

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) (Amended)
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 (amended)

A Resolution of the Town Council Authorizing and Approving a Reimbursement for expenses incurred in advance of the sale of the 2026 General Obligation Bonds that were Authorized for Reimbursement in Ordinance No. 25-30

Whereas, The Town Council of the Town of Merrillville, is the municipal legislative body pursuant to IC 36-1-2-9(3), the municipal fiscal body pursuant to IC 36-1-2-9(f), the municipal works board, pursuant to IC 36-1-2-24(3);

Whereas, Ordinance No. 25-30 is the enactment that finally authorized the General Obligation Bonds of 2025 to be sold to finance projects involving improvements to the Town Hall and included the purchase of two vehicles for two departments of the municipality;

Whereas, Ordinance No. 25-30 further authorized and made the required 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 the Town to the project for reimbursement from the proceeds of the Bonds;

Whereas, The Town of Merrillville executed a purchase of two Chevrolet Equinoxes SUV's with one to be assigned to the Parks and Recreation Department and the other to serve the Planning and Building Department and;

Whereas, The Merrillville Town Council now desires to take the steps necessary and desirable to allow the the reimbursement from the Bond proceeds the cost of the purchase of these two vehicles, which were identified in the objects of the bond project but were purchased in advance of the bond sale owing to a need;

Now Therefore, be it hereby resolved by the Town Council of the Town of Merrillville, Lake County, Indiana as follows:

Section 1. That the Town Council of the Town of Merrillville, now hereby makes the following *findings* and *determinations*:

A. The Town of Merrillville purchased two (2) vehicles listed as an included object of the Bond project, for the combined amount of Sixty thousand dollars and seventy five cents $60,000.75.

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 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 on October 28, 2025.

D. That the reimbursement to the Municipal Cumulative Capital Fund which supported the advance by the Town of Merrillville from the proceeds of the Bond is hereby found 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 5-11-10-1.6(d).

Section 3. That pursuant to the terms of this resolution, please draw a warrant in the amount of Sixty thousand dollars and seventy five cents ($60,000.75) from the proper appropriation in the Corporation Capital Fund the fund into which the 2025 G.O. Bond Proceeds were deposited, and please make the warrant payable to the Town of Merrillville Municipal Cumulative Capital Fund, please then deposit the warrant to the credit of the Municipal Cumulative Capital Fund, for which the reimbursement proceeds may be expended upon an additional appropriation.

Duly Resolved, Passed and Adopted by the Town Council of the Town of Merrillville, Lake County, Indiana, this 24th day of February 2026.

TOWN COUNCIL of the TOWN of MERRILLVILLE, INDIANA

Page 1 of 2

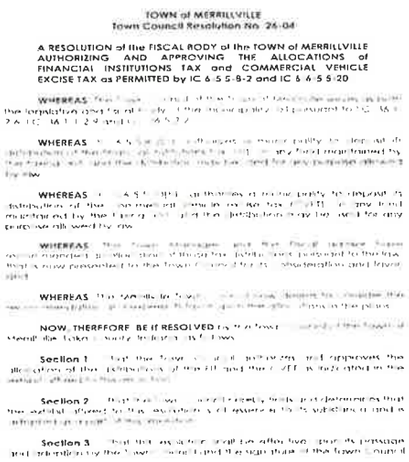
Town Manager Griffin explained the resolution.

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

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

Resolution 26-04 (Discussion & Roll Call Vote) (Amended)

A Resolution of the Fiscal Body of the Town of Merrillville Authorizing and Approving the Allocations of Financial Institutions Tax and Commercial Vehicle Excise Tax as Permitted By IC 6-5.5-8-2 and IC 6-6-5.5-20.



TOWN of MERRILLVILLE
Town Council Resolution No. 26-04

A RESOLUTION of the FISCAL BODY of the TOWN of MERRILLVILLE AUTHORIZING AND APPROVING THE ALLOCATIONS of FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS TAX and COMMERCIAL VEHICLE EXCISE TAX as PERMITTED by IC 6-5.5-8-2 and IC 6-6-5.5-20

WHEREAS

WHEREAS

WHEREAS

WHEREAS

WHEREAS

NOW, THERFFORE BE IT RESOLVED

Section 1.

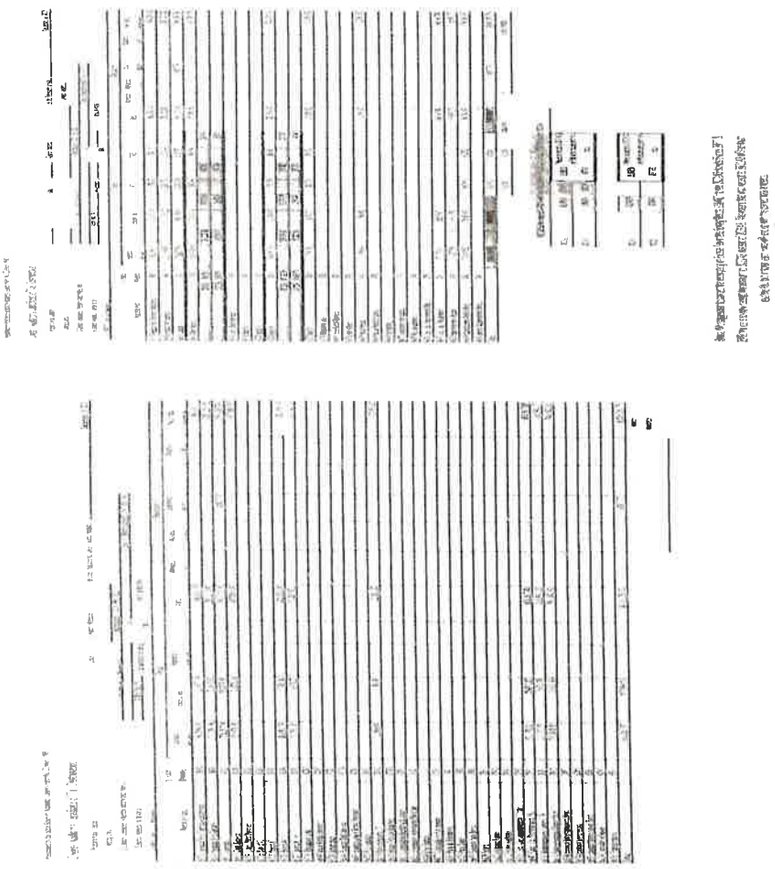
Section 2.

Section 3.

President as attested thereto by the Clerk-Treasurer, pursuant to IC 36-5-2-10(a).

DULY RESOLVED 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



Town Manager Griffin explained the resolution.

It was moved by Councilor Uzelac and seconded by Councilor Pettit to approve Resolution 26-04.

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

Resolution 26-05 (Discussion & Roll Call Vote) (Amended)
An Exigent Resolution Providing For The Transfer Of Appropriation Balances From And Among Major Budget Classifications In The Fire Equipment Project Fund And Corporate Capital 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. 26-05
TOWN OF MERRILLVILLE, INDIANA

AN EXIGENT RESOLUTION PROVIDING for the TRANSFER of APPROPRIATION BALANCES from and AMONG MAJOR BUDGET CLASSIFICATIONS in the FIRE EQUIPMENT PROJECT FUND and CORPORATE CAPITAL 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 Fire Equipment Project Fund and Corporate Capital 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 Fire Equipment Project Fund and Corporate Capital Fund, which are not needed at this time for the purposes for which originally appropriated, and may be transferred to a newly authorized category of appropriation in order to satisfy an existing need and further that a new a as follows:

		Decrease	Increase
1412.010.311	Fire Equip Proj/Prof. Srvcs	$ 985.97	
1412.010.440	Fire Equip Proj/Capital Outlay		$ 985.97
1413.404.394.004	Corp. Cap./Contr Svcs-Other	$ 427,944.75	
1413.404.440.000	Corp. Cap./Capital Outlay		$ 367,944.00
1413.404.440.001	Corp. Cap./Capital Outlay-Reimb.		$ 60,000.75
			$ 429,088.00

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 24th day of FEBRUARY, 2026.

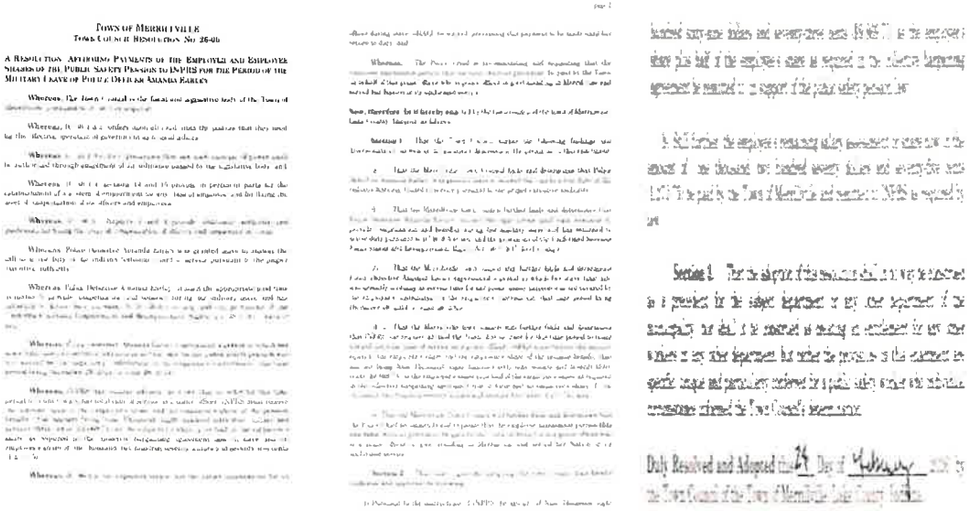
TOWN COUNCIL of the TOWN of MERRILLVILLE, INDIANA

Town Manager Griffin explained the resolution.

It was moved by Councilor Pettit and seconded by Councilor Uzelac to approve Resolution 26-05.

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

Resolution 26-06 (Discussion & Roll Call Vote) (Amended)
A Resolution Affirming Payments Of The Employer And Employee Shares Of The Public Safety Pension To INPRS For The Period Of The Military Leave Of Police Officer
Amanada Earley.



TOWN OF MERRIONVILLE
TOWN COUNCIL RESOLUTION No. 26-06

A RESOLUTION APPROVING PAYMENTS OF THE EMPLOYEE AND EMPLOYER SHARES OF THE PUBLIC SAFETY PENSION TO INPIRS FOR THE PERIOD OF THE MILITARY LEAVE OF POLICE OFFICER AMANDA BARLEY

It was moved by Councilor Pettit and seconded by Councilor Uzelac to approve Resolution 26-06.

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

OLD BUSINESS: ***NONE***

NEW BUSINESS: ***NONE***

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

The Town Council President announced the following:

- Town Council Meeting March 10, 2026, at 6:30 p.m.
- Black History Celebration February 28th from 5-10 p.m.

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