Town Council of Merrillville
7820 Broadway Ave - Merrillville, IN 46410
Town Council Meeting Minutes of the Regular Meeting of
February 27, 2024 - 6:30 P.M.
CALL TO ORDER: Councilor Bella called the meeting to order at 6:30 P.M.

INVOCATION/MOMENT OF SILENCE: A brief invocation was given along with a moment of silence by Pastor Robert Szoke of Impact Church.
PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: The Pledge of Allegiance to the United States Flag was led by Councilor Bella.

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

PETITIONS, COMMUNICATIONS, ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS, AND REMONSTRATIONS

Employee of the Month - Fire Department
Deputy Fire Chief Ed Yerga and Interim Town Manager Griffin presented to the council and audience Administration Assistant Stacy Gaza as February's Employee of the Month for the Town of Merrillville. Mrs. Garza received a certificate of recognition and a gift card on behalf of the Town of Merrillville. Chief Yerga elaborated on Mrs. Gaza's exemplary qualities as an employee at the Fire Department.

Swearing in of Police Officers Nicholas Enyeart and Brian Williams
Police Officers Candidates Nicholas Enyeart and Brian Williams were sworn in by Clerk-Treasurer Eric January. Chief Nuses gave a brief overview of Officers Enyeart and Williams's qualifications and experience. All congratulated Police Officers Nicholas Enyeart and Brian Williams.

PUBLIC HEARING

a) **Town Attorney review of Proof of Publication(s):** Proof Publication date of February 15th, 2024 in the NWI Times, as required in IC5-3-1 et seq. and IC 6-1.1-18 et seq.

   Attorney Svetanoff reported that he has reviewed the Proof of Publication, and everything is in order. The council may proceed with the public hearing.

b) **Public Hearing: Re ORD 24-01 Appropriating Additional Money for the Municipal Cumulative Capital Fund**

   Interim Town Manager Griffin explained that the additional appropriations were to support the costs associated with the quadrennial municipal election, the support for costs associated with the North Police Station at the Broadway Plaza, and an estimate of costs associated with housing stray animals with the county.

   Public Comment:
   None

c) **Action on Proposed Ordinance:**
   Ordinance 24-01 will be taken up under a second reading on the agenda.

CONSENT AGENDA

- Accts. Payable Register Voucher Approval for February 27th, 2024

- AP Voucher Register Summary for ARP Purchases for February 27th, 2024
- Approval of Town Council Meeting Minutes of February 13th, 2024
- Approval of Town Council Workshop Minutes from February 21st, 2024

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

With leave from the Town Council, Clerk-Treasurer Eric January reported that in the previous Town Council Meeting held on February 13th it was reported to Councilor Uzelac that everyone received a 3% raise. After examining the records, he is reporting to the council that two Administrative Secretaries received a 5.64% raise while the rest of the full-time Town employees received 0% or a 3% raise.

Upon a roll call vote, there were six affirmatives and one negative. Councilors Neal, Haynes-Edwards, Chandler-Felton, Pettit, Hardaway, and Bella voted in the affirmative. Councilor Uzelac voted in the negative. The motion passed. The consent agenda was approved.

PRESENTATION of DECLARATIONS

- Women's History Month

The following Declaration was read by Councilors Neal, Haynes-Edwards, Chandler-Felton, Uzelac, and Hardaway:

Town of Merrillville
DECLARATION
State of Indiana
The Town Council of Merrillville Designating the Month of March as "Women's History Month"

Whereas, American women of every race, class, and ethnic background have made historic contributions to the growth and strength of our Nation in countless recorded and unrecorded ways;

Whereas, American women have played and continue to play critical economic, cultural, and social role in every sphere of the life of the Nation by constituting a significant portion of the labor force working inside and outside of the home;

Whereas, American women have played a unique role throughout the history of the Nation by providing the majority of the volunteer labor force of the Nation;

Whereas, American women were particularly important in the establishment of early charitable, philanthropic, and cultural institutions in our Nation;

Whereas, American women of every race, class, and ethnic background served as early leaders in the forefront of every major progressive social change movement;

Whereas, American women have served our country courageously in the military;

Whereas, American women have been leaders, not only in securing their own rights of suffrage and equal opportunity, but also in the abolitionist movement, the emancipation movement, the industrial labor movement, the civil rights movement, and other movements, especially the peace movement;

Whereas, despite these contributions, the role of American women in history has been consistently overlooked and undervalued, in the literature, teaching and study of American history;

Whereas, The Town Council of Merrillville, Indiana is committed to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, through the continued educational programs for all town employees, practiced daily with our pledged and displayed Diversity and Equity Statement we would like to make the following declaration

Now, therefore be it resolved, that the Town Council of the Town of Merrillville, Indiana, does hereby declare the Month of March, 2024 be designated and recognized as **AMERICAN WOMEN'S HISTORY AWARENESS MONTH** and call upon the citizens of Merrillville to observe, discuss and educate others with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and other activities about the value and contributions that American Women have made to the betterment of our nation, state and more specifically, our hometown of Merrillville

Signed by the following Honorable Town of Merrillville Town Councilors and attested to by the Honorable Town Clerk Treasurer, this 27th day of February, 2024.

Rick Bella, Council President

Margaret A. Uzelac, Councilor

Rhonda Denise Neal, Vice President

Shawn Michael Pettit, Councilor

Shauna Haynes Edwards, Councilor

Keesha M. Hardaway, Councilor

Leona Chandler Felton, Councilor

ATTEST: Eric O. January, Clerk Treasurer

TOWN OF MERRILLVILLE IN. 1971

It was moved by Councilor Uzelac and seconded by Councilor Chandler-Felton to approve the Women's History Declaration.

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 Women's History Declaration was approved.

STANDING & SPECIAL COMMITTEES REPORTS

BUDGET & FINANCE- NEAL – Councilor Neal reported that a meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, February 28th at 12:30 P.M.

COUNCIL AFFAIRS- PETTIT – Councilor Pettit had nothing to report at this time.

STREET DEPARTMENT- UZELAC– Councilor Uzelac reported that she spoke to Director King about a couple of potholes that were filled on Hendricks Street and garbage.

ELECTIONS, PUBLIC RELATIONS, & TOWN BEAUTIFICATION - NEAL- Councilor Neal reported that the Town Slogan has been chosen by the community. Candy Colvin submitted the slogan "Merrillville, *"The Heart of the Region"*. Out of 350 submissions, 242 chose Ms. Colvin's slogan. Ms. Colvin was given a token of appreciation on behalf of the council.

It was moved by Councilor Neal and seconded by Councilor Chandler-Felton to adopt "Merrillville, The Heart of the Region" as the new Town slogan. Upon a voice vote, the motion passed. The new Town slogan was adopted.

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS- PETTIT - Upon a question from Councilor Pettit, Councilor Neal responded that she attended her first meeting of the Lake County Solid Waste Management District Board of Directors, and the next meeting will be on March 21st.
Councilor Pettit reported that he would defer to Director Lake under the department report for Stormwater.

PERSONNEL POLICY & EMPLOYEE BENEFITS – HARDAWAY- Councilor Hardaway reported that the interviews for the Parks Director will begin on Wednesday, February 28th. Three candidates will be interviewed on Wednesday 28th and Friday, March 1st.
Councilor Hardway reported that later on the agenda there is a resolution to leave the Nationwide 457 Plan and to approve True Wealth as representatives for the 457 Plan. True Wealth came in and met with staff and department heads to explain the 457 Plan.

PUBLIC SAFETY- HARDWAY- Councilor Hardaway reported that a meeting was held with Waste Management regarding how garbage is being picked up in the Town. The meeting was productive, and Waste Management has implemented some procedures to ensure that garbage and other debris aren't scattered all over the Town.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT-PETTIT – Councilor Pettit reported that a Redevelopment Commission Workshop was held. Representatives from Butler, Fairman, and Seufert were there to discuss the Mississippi Street Corridor. The Town has secured $6,000,000.00 in federal aid for the intersection improvement at 69th Mississippi and potentially at 79th Mississippi. The next workshop will be on March 26th at 5:00 pm to discuss the Whitcomb Street Corridor. There will also be a Redevelopment Commission Meeting at 6:15 pm on the same day.

PARKS & RECREATION- UZELAC - Councilor Uzelac had nothing to report at this time.

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

ABANDONED-BLIGHTED PROPERTIES - HAYNES-EDWARDS – Councilor Haynes-Edwards had nothing to report at this time.

SEMI-QUINCENTENNIAL COMMITTEE - HAYNES-EDWARDS – Councilor Haynes-Edwards had nothing to report at this time.

SPECIAL TOWN PROJECTS - NEAL – Councilor Neal reported on the following:

- **Annual Black History Program**
  The Annual Black History Scholarship Program titled Still I Rise Created for Greatness was a success. From this event, we can give $5,000.00 to the Legacy Foundation for scholarships. The scholarships are awarded the Merrillville High School students and one Andrean High School Student.

- **Town Beautification**
  We are working on the Town's flowers and other things for beautification. The information will be forthcoming at a later date.
  Upon a question from Councilor Bella regarding fireworks, Councilor Neal responded that negotiation has started for the Town's July 4th fireworks display that will occur on July 3rd.

DEPARTMENT & COMMISSION REPORTS

LAKE COUNTY SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT-NEAL– Councilor Neal reported that a meeting will be held on March 21st where all new members will receive training.

NORTHWESTERN INDIANA REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION-HARDAWAY – Councilor Hardaway reported that the next meeting will be in April 2024.

STORMWATER MANAGEMENT RESOURCES-LAKE – Director Lake reported that Stormwater Management did a presentation to the Little Calumet River Basin Development Board of Directors for a project on 97th Grand Avenue. If awarded the funding, it will be $345,000.00. which is about 50% of the construction.

A proposal was submitted to the Indiana Department of Environment Management by Stormwater for the Climate Production Pollution Reduction Grant. If awarded, the Town would receive $57,814.00 of non-matching funds towards a Climate Action Plan. These funds will cover 100% of the plan.
Director Lake elaborated on other projects in the works.

Upon a question from Councilor Pettit regarding the status of Connecticut at Peirce on 69th Street, Director Lake responded that we are waiting on NIPSCO.

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

FIRE TERRITORY BOARD - NEAL & HARDAWAY – Councilor Hardaway and Councilor Neal had nothing to report at this time.

DEPARTMENT REPORTS/INTERIM TOWN MANAGER

Director King – Street Department
Director King reported that street enhancements, trimming of trees, and patchwork are going on throughout the Town. A Street Department Committee was held to discuss what would be done with the fuel tanks.

Councilor Uzelac reported that the Street Department needs two more employees and that a mailbox knocked down by Waste Management was reinstalled by the Street Department.

Councilor Bella responded that to move forward on the two additional employees, the Town has to identify the funding.

Chief Nuses – Police Department
Chief Nuses reported that the Department has been receiving a lot of calls regarding the Women's Self-Defense Class being held at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center on March 21st at 6:00 pm. There is no registration. It's open until we are at space capacity.

Interim Town Manager Griffin
Interim Town Manager Griffin reported that he has nothing to report at this time, but he will get his written report to the council on Friday, March 1st

There were no questions from the council.

GENERAL ORDERS

A. Ordinances:
First Readings:

1. **Ordinance 24-03 (Discussion and Roll Call Vote)**

An Ordinance Appropriating Additional Money in the Annual Budget for the Park Department (006) of the Corporation General Fund (1101), all Pursuant to I.C. 36-5-3-5, et seq.
It was moved by Councilor Pettit and seconded by Councilor Hardaway to approve Ordinance 24-03 on the first reading.

Interim Town Manager Griffin explained the purposes of Ordinance 24-03, which was to support costs associated with installation of monitoring systems.

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. No one voted in the negative. 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 24-04 (Discussion and Roll Call Vote)**

An Ordinance of the Town of Merrillville, Lake County, Indiana, Authorizing Additional Appropriations In the 2024 Budget Motor Vehicle Highway – Restricted Fund (Streets)
Interim Town Manager Griffin explained the purposes of Ordinance 24-04. These are based upon allocations of expenses based upon revised guidance in the Indiana Accounting and Compliance Maula for Cities and Towns, prepared by the Indiana State Board of Accounts.

It was moved by Councilor Hardaway and seconded by Councilor Pettit to approve Ordinance 24-04 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.

Second Readings:

1. **Ordinance 24-01 (Discussion, Public Comment, and Roll Call Vote)**

An Ordinance Appropriating Additional Money in Excess of the Annual Budget for the Municipal Cumulative Capital Development Fund (4402) all pursuant to I.C.6-1.1-18.I.C 36-5-3-5. et seq,
Interim Town Manager Griffin explained the purposes of Ordinance 24-01 as he did during the public hearing on the proposes additional appropriations.

It was moved by Councilor Pettit and seconded by Councilor Hardaway to approve Ordinance 24-01 on the second reading.

Public Comment:
None

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. No one voted in the negative. The motion passed. The ordinance was approved on the second reading.

Upon a question from Councilor Bella regarding the second reading and advertisement of the ordinance, Interim Town Manager Griffin responded that the public hearing required by IC 5-3-1 was conducted earlier.

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

B. Resolutions:

1. Resolution 24-05 (Discussion and Voice Vote)

Approval of a Resolution approved by the Stormwater Board of Directors: "Approval Small and Emergency Purchases of Services and Supplies by the Executive Director of Storm Water Utility. "(Storm Water)

Director Matt Lake explained the purpose of resolution 24-05, which involved a refining existing purchasing code and authoring a purchase threshold for the Executive Director with certain contracts.

It was moved by Councilor Uzelac and seconded by Councilor Neal to approve Resolution 24-05.

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

2. Resolution 24-06 (Discussion and Voice Vote)

A Resolution of the Town of Merrillville, Lake County, Indiana, Transferring Monies of the 2024.

It was moved by Councilor Uzelac and seconded by Councilor Hardaway to approve Resolution 24-06.

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

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

3. Resolution 24-07 (Discussion and Voice Vote)

A Resolution of the Town of Merrillville, Lake County, Indiana, Transferring Monies of the 2024 Budget Within the General Fund (Administration)

It was moved by Councilor Pettit and seconded by Councilor Haynes-Edwards to approve Resolution 24-07.

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

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

4. Resolution 24-08 (Discussion and Voice Vote)

A Resolution Ending the Nationwide Deferred Compensation Plan (Section 457 Plan). Presently by Nationwide as a Bundled Plan, and Replacing it with Deferred Compensation Plan with True Wealth, Inc., to Serve as Plan Representatives. (Administration/HR)

The Interim Town Manager elaborated on the resolution to replace the Nationwide Deferred Compensation Plan with True Wealth, Inc.

With leave from the Town Council, Clerk-Treasurer Eric January voiced his concerns regarding the investment alternatives that employees will be offered by the True Wealth 457 Plan which are only retail investments. The Clerk-Treasurer suggested that there is no significant difference between the Nationwide and True Wealth 457 Plans. Before approving Resolution 24-08, we should make sure there are no other adequate alternatives for the Town of Merrillville employees.

Interim Town Manager Griffin reported that the difference between the plans is the fees. Nationwide is near 2% while True Wealth fees are averaging .084%. Adoption of Resolution 24-08 doesn't bar the council from offering a second plan to the employees in addition to the True Wealth Plan.

Upon a question by Councilor Uzelac regarding reduced fees from True Wealth compared to Nationwide, Interim Town Manager Griffin responded the fees on investment would be lowered with True Wealth.

The Interim Town Manager elaborated on the resolution to replace the Nationwide Deferred Compensation Plan with True Wealth, Inc.

With leave from the Town Council, Clerk-Treasurer Eric January elaborated on why Resolution 24-08 should not be adopted.

Upon a question from Councilor Bella regarding the meetings employees had with True Wealth, Councilor Hardaway reported that the meetings occurred before this resolution was introduced to the council and Clerk-Treasurer Eric January reported that he attended one of the meetings and voiced his concerns in the meeting about the plan being "garbage."

Upon a question from Councilor Uzelac regarding the total number of employees enrolled in Nationwide, Clerk-Treasurer Eric January responded that thirty employees are currently enrolled in the Nationwide 457 Plan.

It was moved by Councilor Hardaway and seconded by Councilor Pettit to approve Resolution 24-08.

Upon a roll call vote, there were six affirmatives and one negative. Councilors Neal, Haynes-Edwards, Uzelac, Pettit, Hardaway, and Bella voted in the affirmative. Councilor Chandler-Felton voted in the negative. The motion passed. The resolution was approved.

Councilor Bella reported that Resolution 24-08 isn't the end-all of investments for the Town of Merrillville employees.

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

C. BZA & LARGE GATHERING ACTIONS

None

OLD BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

- Memorandum of Understanding Between the Lake County Sheriff & the Town of Merrillville for Animals Control Service.

  Interim Town Manager Griffin explained the need for a Memorandum of Understanding regarding Animals Control Services.

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. No one voted in the negative. The motion passed. The Memorandum of Understanding was approved.

SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS

None

PUBLIC COMMENT

1. Bryon Mesarch, Merrillville, Indiana voiced his concerns about Turkey Creek, Sock Trails signs, mailboxes, abandoned buildings, and a single-family home divided into apartments with a dumpster in the front of the building.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

The Town Council President announced the following:

- The Town Council's next regular meeting is on March 12th at 6:30 p.m.

- Planning Commission meeting is on March 5th at 6:30 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

Having completed all items on the agenda, the President declared the meeting adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

Rick Bella, President

Eric O. January, Clerk-Treasurer

Respectfully Submitted By Angela Lewis