Town Council of Merrillville

7820 Broadway Ave - Merrillville, IN 46410

Town Council Meeting Minutes of the Regular Meeting of

January 23, 2024 - 6:30 P.M.

CALL TO ORDER: Councilor Bella called the meeting to order at 6:35 P.M.

INVOCATION/MOMENT OF SILENCE: A brief invocation was given along with a moment of silence by Pastor Earl Barton of Impact Church.

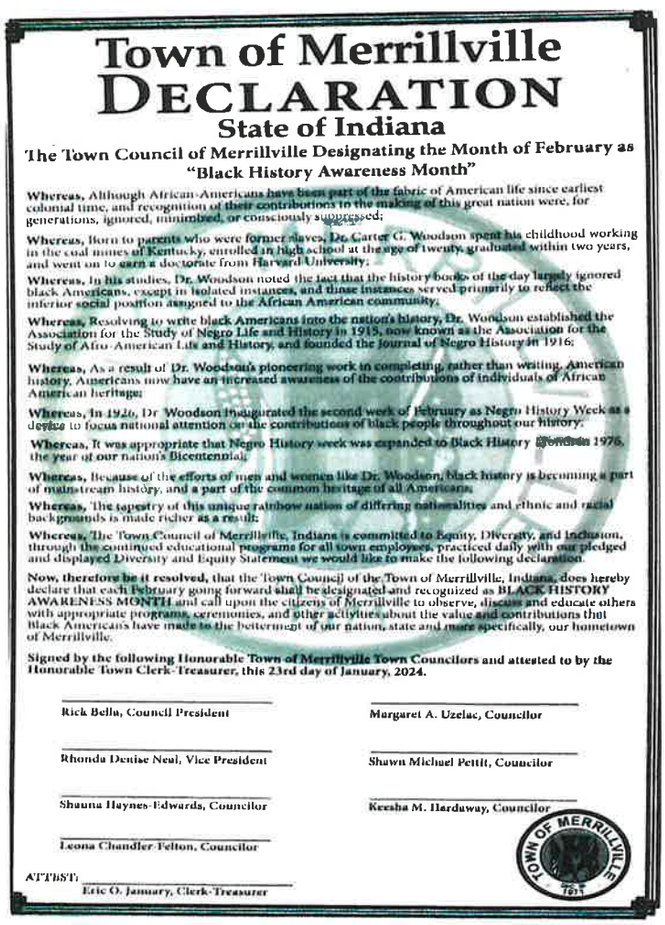
PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: The Pledge of Allegiance to the United States Flag was led by Chief Nuses.

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

Declaration of Black History Awareness Month

The following National Law Enforcement Appreciation Day Proclamation was read into the record by Carlton Clay the 2024 Lilly Endowment Community Scholarship Recipient from Merrillville High School:



Town of Merrillville
DECLARATION
State of Indiana

The Town Council of Merrillville Designating the Month of February as "Black History Awareness Month"

Whereas, Although African-Americans have been part of the fabric of American life since earliest colonial time, and recognition of their contributions to the making of this great nation were, for generations, ignored, minimized, or consciously suppressed;

Whereas, Born to parents who were former slaves, Dr. Carter G. Woodson spent his childhood working in the coal mines of Kentucky, enrolled in high school at the age of twenty, graduated within two years, and went on to earn a doctorate from Harvard University;

Whereas, In his studies, Dr. Woodson noted the fact that the history books of the day largely ignored black Americans, except in isolated instances, and those instances served primarily to reflect the inferior social position assigned to the African American community;

Whereas, Resolving to write black Americans into the nation's history, Dr. Woodson established the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in 1915, now known as the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History, and founded the Journal of Negro History in 1916;

Whereas, As a result of Dr. Woodson's pioneering work in completing, rather than writing, American history, Americans now have an increased awareness of the contributions of individuals of African American heritage;

Whereas, In 1926, Dr. Woodson inaugurated the second week of February as Negro History Week as a device to focus national attention on the contributions of black people throughout our history;

Whereas, It was appropriate that Negro History week was expanded to Black History [illegible] 1976, the year of our nation's Bicentennial;

Whereas, Because of the efforts of men and women like Dr. Woodson, black history is becoming a part of mainstream history, and a part of the common heritage of all Americans;

Whereas, The tapestry of this unique rainbow nation of differing nationalities and ethnic and racial backgrounds is made richer as a result;

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 that each February going forward shall be designated and recognized as **BLACK 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 Black Americans 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 23rd day of January, 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

Employee of the Month for January 2024

Chief Nuses and Interim Town Manager Griffin acknowledged Detective Michael Bunnel as January's Employee of the Month for the Town of Merrillville. Detective Bunnell received a certificate of recognition and a gift card on behalf of the Town of Merrillville. Chief Nuses elaborated on Detective Bunnell's exemplary qualities as an employee at the Police Department.

CONSENT AGENDA

Accts. Payable Register Voucher Approval for January 23rd, 2024.
Approval of Town Council Meeting Minutes of January 9th, 2024.

It was moved by Councilor Pettit and seconded by Councilor Uzelac to approve the consent agenda. Upon a voice vote, the motion passed. The consent agenda was approved.

STANDING & SPECIAL COMMITTEES REPORTS

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

COUNCIL AFFAIRS- PETTIT – Councilor Pettit reported that the committee was working on some ordinance changes with Attorney Svetanoff and his associates. The committee meeting will be rescheduled, and all council members are encouraged to attend when the date has been established.

The Town Council President asked that the Council Affairs Committee work with Chief of Police Nuses and Chief of Fire Yerga exigent response policy and public safety ordinances.

Councilor Uzelac would like the Committee to consider an ordinance to prohibit the parking in front of the mailboxes.

STREET DEPARTMENT- UZELAC– Councilor Uzelac reported the plows are out and people are being mindful not to park on the street during plowing.

ELECTIONS, PUBLIC RELATIONS, & TOWN BEAUTIFICATION - NEAL- Councilor Neal had nothing to report at this time.

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

PERSONNEL POLICY & EMPLOYEE BENEFITS – HARDAWAY- Councilor Hardaway reported that the committee will meet to discuss, and review resumes for the position of Parks Director.

Upon a question from the Town Council President, Councilor Hardaway reported that thirteen resumes are up for review, but there were forty applications submitted to the Human Resources Department. The Human Resource department assembled the thirteen best candidates from the forty.

Responding to a question from Counselor Uzelac regarding whether the council members could review the other resumes that weren't submitted to the Personnel and Benefits Committee, Councilor Hardaway reported that all the resumes received may be reviewed by council members.

PUBLIC SAFETY- HARDWAY- Councilor Hardaway reported that a meeting will be held with Chief Nuses and Chief Yerga next week regarding the Emergency Action Plan.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT-PETTIT – Councilor Pettit reported that the Redevelopment Commission had a meeting just before the council meeting where officers were elected. Councilor Pettit was selected as President, Councilor Chandler-Felton was selected as Vice-President, and Councilor Hardaway was selected as Secretary. A Redevelopment Commission workshop is scheduled for February 6th from 5:00 pm until 6:30 pm.

PARKS & RECREATION- UZELAC - Councilor Uzelac reported that the parks are in good condition, and we are in the process of selecting a new Parks Director.

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

UTILITY LIAISON – CHANDLER-FELTON – Councilor Chandler-Felton 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 Program will be on February 23rd from 6:00 pm until 10:00 pm at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center. We are also working on the marketing campaign for this event.

- **Town Slogan**
  Out of all the entries that were submitted, we have narrowed the entries down to five. The five entries will go out to the community for a vote. The voting will continue for three weeks. The community can start voting through the Town's website starting January 24th. We received over forty entries and five entries were selected to be voted on by the community.

  Councilor Pettit inquired about the new signage to replace the old Welcome to Merrillville and Parks signs and will the new slogan be incorporated into the sign.

  Councilor Neal reported that the new slogan will be incorporated in the sign.

DEPARTMENT & COMMISSION REPORTS

LAKE COUNTY SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT – No report was given.

NORTHERN INDIANA REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION-HARDAWAY – Councilor Hardaway reported that she attended her first meeting and there are projects underwork in the Portage and Chesterton areas.

STORMWATER MANAGEMENT RESOURCES-LAKE – Director Lake reported that the Stormwater Management Board approved engineering, design, and permitting for the Country Club second edition and Country Club Unit A. This is a subdivision north of 61st east of Taft Street.

Director Lake had a meeting with Grimmer Construction regarding materials and scheduling for the project on East 69th Connecticut Street. Homer Tree Service is wrapping up its Risk Tree Removal (RIS) in Turkey Creek

Director Lake elaborated on other projects in the works.

Councilor Pettit asked Director Lake to give a thumbnail on the Stormwater Management Plan to the new members of the council.

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

FIRE TERRITORY BOARD - NEAL & HARDAWAY – No report was given

DEPARTMENT REPORTS/INTERIM TOWN MANAGER

Chief Nuses – Police Department

Chief Nuses reported that the Woman's Self-Defense Class will be on March 21st from 6:00 pm until 9:00 pm at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center. This event is open to the community.

Councilor Haynes-Edwards inquired about a charge for this event and the age minimum.

Chief Nuses reported it's free to the community. The minimum age is 18 to participate in the class.

Director Shine – Building and Planning

Director Shine reported that she has a meeting once a month with one of the owners of Hickory Ridge Lake Apartments. The meeting for January occurred today with Mr. Weisberg. Mr. Weisberg completed interior remodeling on two buildings. He has also paved the parking lot, changed the lighting on the buildings, met with all the tenants and addressed their concerns, and paid for the electricity to be turned on in two buildings. The owner will also do a walk-through with the council at a date to be determined later.

Chief Nuses added that 180 cameras were installed on the property.

Director King – Street Department

Director King reported that his department has been extremely busy with snow and ice removal in the Town of Merrillville during winter operations. The winter weather is taking a toll on the trucks, but his department is keeping the trucks running for winter operations. The Street Department has also replaced street signs, stop signs, and light poles that people are running over.

Councilor Bella inquired about the staffing shortage in the Street Department.

Director King reported that his department is short by one employee, but Human Resources has some applications; he hopes to interview the applicants next week.

Interim Town Manager Griffin

Interim Town Manager Griffin reminded the Town Council that he submitted a written report. There were no questions.

GENERAL ORDERS

A. Ordinances:

First Readings:

None

Second Readings:

1. **Ordinance 23-34 (Discussion, Public Comment, and Roll Call Vote)**

An Ordinance of the Town of Merrillville, Lake County, Indiana, Providing that the Zoning Ordinance Town of Merrillville, Lake County be Amended by Changing the Established C-3, Highway Commercial Zoning District, and R-2, Residential Zoning District to a PUD, Planned Unit Development Zoning Classification.

It was moved by Councilor Uzelac and seconded by Councilor Neal to approve Ordinance 23-34 on the second reading.

Public Comment:

There were no public comments.

Councilor Pettit reported that he would abstain from voting on Ordinance 23-34 because of a fiduciary conflict of interest on the property.

Upon a roll call vote, there were six affirmatives, no negatives, and one abstention. Councilors Neal, Haynes-Edwards, Chandler-Felton, Uzelac, Hardaway, and Bella voted in the affirmative. Councilor Pettit abstaining. The motion passed. The ordinance was approved on the second reading.

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

2. **Ordinance 23-35 (Discussion and Roll Call Vote)**

An Ordinance of the Town of Merrillville Indiana, Providing That the Zoning Ordinance Town of Merrillville, Lake County, Indiana be Amended by Changing the Established C-3, Highway Commercial Zoning District, to a PUD, Planned Unit Development Zoning Classification.

It was moved by Councilor Pettit and seconded by Councilor Uzelac, to approve Ordinance 23-35 on the second reading.

Public Comment:

There were no public comments.

Upon a roll call vote, there were seven affirmatives and no negatives. With Councilors Neal, Haynes-Edwards, Chandler-Felton, Uzelac, Pettit, Hardaway, and Bella voting in the affirmative, the motion passed. The ordinance was approved on the second reading.

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

B. Resolutions:

None

C. American Rescue Plan

Councilor Bella reported that the AP Voucher Register Summary for ARP Purchases for January 23, 2024 is $1, 656.25.

Interim Town Manager Griffin noted that the ARPA Committee was still not formed for 2024. In its absence he reported that he reviewed the AP Voucher Register Summary for ARP, and noted that the purposes for which these were filed were within the acceptable purposes of the ARPA.

It was moved by Councilor Pettit and seconded by Councilor Uzelac, to approve the ARP AP Voucher Register Summary for $1 656.25. Upon a voice vote, the motion passed. The ARP AP Voucher was approved.

D. BZA & LARGE GATHERING ACTIONS

OLD BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

None

SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS

None

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Town Council President announced the following:

- The Town Council's next regular meeting is on February 13th at 6:30 p.m.
- The Redevelopment Commission Workshop is on February 6th at 5:00 p.m.
- A joint meeting of the Council, BZA, and Plan Commission on the Comprehensive Plan is on January 30th from 5:00 p.m. until 7:00 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

Having completed all items on the agenda, the President declared the meeting adjourned at 7:17 p.m.

Rick Bella, President

Eric O. January, Clerk-Treasurer

Respectfully Submitted By Angela Lewis