



Town of Merrillville
Town Council Meeting Minutes
May 23, 2023
6:30 P.M.

CALL TO ORDER: President 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 Denise Walton of Faith Temple of Christ.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: Led by Commissioner Ward.

ROLL CALL – Roll Call was taken by Accounts Payable Secretary Angela Lewis.

Present were:

Vice-President Hardaway- (Ward 2)

Councilman Minchuk- (Ward 3)

Councilwoman Uzelac- (Ward 4)

Councilman Pettit – (Ward 6)

Councilman White - (Ward 7)

President Bella- (Ward 5)

Six (6) were Present at Roll Call

Councilman Spann arrived at 6.45 pm after the roll call.

PETITIONS, COMMUNICATIONS, ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS, AND REMONSTRATIONS:

May Employee of the Month

- President Bella informed the council that the Employee of the Month is deferred until June 2023 because the employee is out of town.

CONSENT AGENDA

Accts. Payable Register Voucher Approval for May 23, 2023.
Approval of Town Council Meeting Minutes of May 9, 2023.

A motion was made by Councilwoman Uzelac to approve the Consent Agenda, seconded by Councilman Pettit.

President Bella asked that the start and end times for the Memorial Day Parade be corrected in the minutes for May 9, 2023,

No further questions or comments from the council.

Motion carries by voice vote 6-0.

STANDING & SPECIAL COMMITTEES REPORTS

BUDGET & FINANCE- HARDAWA Y – Vice-President Hardaway informed the council that an American Rescue Plan (ARP) meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, May 24th at 5:30 pm. Three residents' applications have come up for approval for tomorrow night. We continue to encourage residents and especially small business owners to apply for ARP funds.

President Bella asked Vice-President Hardaway about the end date of ARP funds.

Vice-President Hardaway informed the council that the ARP funding he believes that the ARP funds expire in 2024.

Vice-President Hardaway also informed the council that less than \$100,000.00 of the \$300,000.00 allocated for the program has been spent. He encouraged residents and businesses to apply.

COUNCIL AFFAIRS- PETTIT – Councilman Pettit informed the council that he has nothing to report at this time.

STREET DEPARTMENT- MINCHUK – Councilman Minchuk informed the council that the branch pickup program is still ongoing in the south part of Merrillville.

Director King informed the council that according to the Town's Newsletter branch pickup ended on May 5, 2023, and a committee meeting needs to be scheduled. The Street Department is continuously getting calls regarding picking up branches. The branch pickup continuing past the May 5, 2023 deadline stated in the Town's Newsletter hinders the Street Department summer operations. Director King requested a committee meeting to bring branch pickup to an end.

Councilwoman Uzelac informed the council that Mr. Markle called her regarding a branch pickup that will be on Saturday, May 27, 2023, because of the many telephone calls from residents.

Director King informed the council that hopefully this will be the last Saturday for branch pickup.

Councilman Minchuk informed the council he will contact Director King to schedule a committee meeting this week.

ELECTIONS, PUBLIC RELATIONS, & TOWN BEAUTIFICATION-PETTIT- Councilman Pettit informed the council that a meeting occurred before the Town Council Meeting. The Northwest Indiana Times (Times) gave a presentation regarding the Be In Indiana Campaign. Several communities have already signed up to participate in this promotional effort by the Times and South Shore Convention and Visitors Authority to promote Northwest Indiana.

Councilman Pettit also informed the council that the Times is looking for membership in this campaign and the cost for the Town of Merrillville to participate is \$7,500.00. The Town will receive a website site link to upload promotional media such as our newly created video about the Town of Merrillville. The Town will also receive a stipend from the South Shore Convention and Visitors Authority. The council will have Town Manager Reardon look into this upon his return. The Town of Merrillville is looking to spend about \$3,800.00 on this campaign.

A motion was made by Councilman Pettit to engage in the Be In Indiana Campaign with the Northwest Indiana Times with a fee not to exceed \$4,000.00 once the stipend is received, seconded by Councilwoman Uzelac.

Councilman Minchuk informed the council that a multi-year fee may be available from the Times at a discounted rate, but until the Times informed us of the discounted rate, we will leave the motion on the table as stated.

No further questions or comments from the council.

Motion carries by voice vote 6-0.

Councilman Pettit also informed the council that creating educational posters for the residents was also discussed at the meeting. Content Manager Reilly will create information posters that will be located in Town buildings specifically at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center on the walking path. The posters will highlight different topics such as the following:

- What is the Food and Beverage Tax?
- How many Police Officers do we need?
- What does a Tiff District do?
- Other Topics

Councilman Pettit informed the council that the committee came up with eighteen ideas that Content Manager Reilly will design and bring back to the committee for final approval. The committee will also look into replacing the Gateway's and Parks' signs.

Councilman Pettit also informed the council that Mielle Organics located in Merrillville owner Monique Rodrigues will be using a college basketball spokesperson Angel Reese from Louisiana State Women's Basketball Team. The team won the State Championship.

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS- WHITE - Councilman White informed the council that the Center for Disease Control Covid-19 level for Lake County is low and no deaths were reported.

PERSONNEL POLICY & EMPLOYEE BENEFITS – HARDAWAY- Vice-President Hardaway informed the council that the posting for Labor 1 and Mechanics applicants went up today. These positions are for the Street Department. We are having a hard time filling these positions for some reason. The posting will be for fourteen days both internally and externally. If no viable applicants are found after fourteen days, the positions will again be posted for applicants to apply.

Vice-President Hardaway also informed the council that we need the Mechanic's position filled quickly. He spoke to Human Resources Director Pettit regarding the Mechanic's position. Two applicants couldn't make the interview, but their applications will be kept on file to become part of the upcoming interviewing process.

Councilwoman Uzelac informed the council she received a call regarding the job postings.

Councilman Minchuk asked whether the job posting was internal and external at the same time.

Director King informed the council that the positions are posted internally and externally simultaneously.

President Bella stated these are good-paying jobs in the Street Department.

Vice-President Hardaway informed the council that the Labor 1 position pays 22.07 per hour and the Mechanic position pays 24.06 per hour. The two problems hindering the hiring process are background checks because the Town can't hire applicants with a felony record nor those who can't pass a drug test. Some of the applicants are omitting to check the boxes that indicate yes or no. There are two components to the hiring process. If the applicant fails either one, the applicant won't be considered for hiring.

Councilman White asked what kind of felony will disqualify an applicant.

Vice-President Hardaway stated that any felony will disqualify an applicant.

President Bella informed the council that Councilman Spann joined the meeting at 6:45 pm.

Director King informed the council that the felony question is stated on the application and some applicants leave it blank and others check no, but when the background checks come back, they show that some of the applicants lied on the application.

Councilwoman Uzelac asked where applications should be submitted.

Vice-President Hardaway stated that the application should be submitted to the Human Resources Department.

PUBLIC SAFETY- MINCHUK- Councilman Minchuk informed the council that the internal section of the job opening for a Chief of Police of Merrillville comes to an end on Friday, May 26, 2023. The internal applications will be collected, and the council will be contacted. A Public Safety/Personnel meeting will be scheduled to conduct interviews with the applicants.

Councilman Minchuk also informed the council that the Fire Department hosts the Memorial Day Parade every year. It's a silent parade. We will meet at the Old Town Hall located on 73rd Avenue at 10:00 am on May 29, 2023. The start of the silent parade will be at 10:15 am going down to War Memorial Cemetery on 73rd Avenue by 65th and have a ceremony there then come back to the fire station at about 11:00 am. A memorial service will be conducted there and open to the public.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT-PETTIT – Councilman Pettit informed the council that an Economic Development meeting occurred last Tuesday before the Planning Commission meeting. The City of David gave an impressive presentation in response to Director Chilcott and Town Manager Reardon putting out interest for property owned by the Town located on 73rd and Madison on the Northwest Corner. The City of David's proposal is looking at retail on the bottom and residential on two floors probably condominiums. A three-story high building. The group has some very strong leads on the commercial side. Director Chilcott and Town Manager Reardon will reach out to any other prospective people before the Request for Proposal deadline regarding the selling of the property on 73rd and Madison

Councilman Pettit also informed the council that at the meeting a second proposal for a tax abatement for the Avante building out at Ameriplex located at the Crossroads from the Holladay Properties Group. The proposal was given a favorable recommendation.

Councilman Pettit informed the council that Director Chilcott is working on the resolutions to be presented at the next council meeting on June 13, 2023.

PARKS & RECREATION- UZELAC – Councilwoman Uzelac informed the council that she received several telephone calls regarding the bike trails. The bike trails are being used as dumping

grounds for trash. She asked Director Price to place trash cans on the bike trails. She also asked about the bids for the gazebo at Rosenbalm Park.

Director Price informed the council that trash cans have been placed at the bike trails, but magically they have legs and walked away (taken without permission). The Parks Department will look into and monitor the situation.

Director Price also informed the council that work has already begun on the gazebo at Rosenbalm Park and other parks. The work should be finished in about two weeks.

Councilwoman Uzelac informed the council that a ton of grass clipping was left after the mowing of Hendrick Street Park and is turning white from the sun. She asked Director Price does the mower have a mulcher.

Director Price stated he would look into the grass clippings.

Councilwoman Uzelac asked about the gazebo in the parking lot of Town Hall.

President Bella stated that the gazebo wasn't included in the repair project, but the council will take a look at it.

Councilman Pettit informed the council that he was driving through Curtis Park and noticed that the damaged sign is still up and must be removed. Secondly, it has been reported to him that graffiti is in the tunnel of the bike trail underneath I-65. He asked that Director Price take a look at both of these issues.

Councilman White asked how graffiti is removed.

Director Price informed the council that the Parks Department uses a special graffiti remover product.

Councilman White asked the council whether the court does community services.

Director Price informed the council that the Parks Department receives calls about community service and has a group of volunteers to help with the cleanup project.

President Bella informed the council that he believes the county has stopped some of its work release programs because of insurance liability issues, and we have to be careful regarding any community service program we establish. We need to make sure Attorney Svetanoff and Judge Velazco approve and look at it from a legal standpoint.

Councilwoman Uzelac informed the council that Sheriff Martinez was very good at helping with cleanup.

President Bella informed the council that we need to look at community service from a liability standard.

Director Price informed the council that a background check is performed by the Police Department on any individual requesting community service because of children coming in and out of the Dean and Barbara White Community Center. The staff also work with the individual's Parole Officer to make sure a schedule is followed, and community service hours are logged.

ABANDONED -BLIGHTED PROPERTIES-HARDAWAY – Vice-President Hardaway informed the council that he has nothing to report at this time.

DEAN & BARBARA WHITE COMMUNITY CENTER-MINCHUK & PETTIT – Councilman Pettit informed the council that a meeting was held to talk about the overflow parking lot and field improvements. Everything seems to be completed for field improvements except the protective railing around the fence. For the overflow parking lot, we are going to look and see what is left over in the bond issue and the cost to finish the project. The next meeting will be the first week of June 2023.

Councilwoman Uzelac asked wasn't the parking lot already paved.

Councilman Pettit elaborated on the overflow parking lot.

President Bella asked what the holdup was on the protective railing around the fence.

Councilman Pettit stated he didn't know, and President Bella asked Director Price did he have any information regarding the delay.

Director Price informed the council that he doesn't recall quotes for the work being discussed.

Councilman Pettit informed the council the committee will reconvene.

President Bella informed Chief Nuscs and Director Price to stay after the meeting.

SPECIAL PROJECTS (F & B TAX, DIVERSITY, 4TH of JULY CELEBRATION-

HARDAWAY - Vice-President Hardaway informed the council that he would yield to Director Shine.

Director Shine informed the council that the Town of Merrillville will celebrate Juneteenth with the Freedom Festival on June 17th from 12:00 pm until 5:00 pm at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center located on 6600 Broadway. We have approximately thirty vendors who have signed up to participate. The vendors are as follows:

- Community Health Net
- Walgreens
- A & B Diagnostics
- Indiana University Archives (with a display and interactive computers)
- Food Trucks
- Corvette Club
- DJ
- Steven Mann Band
- Dance Teams

Director Shine encourages the council and audience to share this information with friends and family.

Vice-President Hardaway asked Chief Nuses about security for the Juneteenth Celebration Festival.

Chief Nuses informed the council that he met with Director Shine, and they are looking a three or four Police Officers for this event.

Vice-President Hardaway informed the council that the Fourth of July firework is on July 3rd at 9:00 pm at the Merrillville High School parking lot. A portion of the parking lot will be under construction so please pay attention to the directions on the signs. The Police, Fire, EMA, and Code Enforcement Departments will be out directing traffic.

Vice-President Hardaway also informed the council that the parade will be on July 4th. The lineup is at 10:00 am at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center and kick-off will be at 11:30 am. Applications for participation in the parade are available at the Town Administration, Building and Planning, Clerk Treasurer's Office, Dean and Barbara White Community Center, and online.

Councilwoman Uzelac informed the council that admission to the fireworks show is free.

Vice-President Hardaway informed the council that the fireworks show and parking are free. He also stated there are no fees to participate in the parade.

Councilman Pettit informed the council that the Town's Annual Job Fair is on July 27th from 11:00 am until 3:00 pm at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center in the Mike Anderson Event Center.

Vice-President Hardaway informed the council that the Town's Tax Talk will be held on June 14th at 6:30 pm at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center in the Mike Anderson Event Center. The guest speaker will be Michael Griffith former Clerk-Treasurer of the Town of Highland for thirty years. Mr. Griffith will be discussing all forms of taxes including food & beverage, and property taxes.

Councilman Pettit informed the council a panel will be available for the question-and-answer portion of this event. The panel will include Mr. Griffin, Financial Advisor Hudson, and Mr. Robert Swintz.

Councilman White asked will Madam Clerk-Treasurer Kelly White Gibson be at this meeting.

President Bella stated she isn't part of the program.

DEPARTMENT & COMMISSION REPORTS

LAKE COUNTY SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT-WHITE – Councilman White informed the council that he didn't attend the last meeting because of medical matters, however, he did speak with the District Director who told him about the employee issue that he spoke about in the past meeting.

Councilman White also informed the council that he spoke with Director King about the Household Hazardous Waste Program the county had in one of their buildings.

Director King informed the council that the Solid Waste District used to store hazardous waste and used paint in the building, but nothing has been stored in that building for a long time. The building is an oversize shed and the Street Department would like to have it removed because our department could use the space.

Director King also informed the council that he asked Councilman White to reach out to Lake County Solid Waste Management to see what they are going to do with the building.

President Bella asked did the residents use this in the past to turn in paint cans for proper disposal.

Director King informed the council that certain communities take certain things. We don't take paint anymore, but the City of Hobart takes all that for Lake County Solid Waste District. We do take small appliances which we scrap out. How the building was used in the past we don't have that anymore at our facility.

Councilman White elaborated on the Household Hazardous Waste Program.

Councilman White informed the council that he will reach out to Lake County Solid Waste District regarding the building.

NORTHERN INDIANA REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION-HARDAWAY – Vice-President Hardaway informed the council that he has nothing to report at this time.

STORMWATER MANAGEMENT RESOURCES-LAKE – Director Lake informed the council that 60% of the project is complete on the Kaiser Lateral Ditch called Tancy Ditch. We have a couple of conflicts with NIPSCO and AT&T. They are working on relocation and will finish up that project.

Director Lake also informed the council that a meeting was held last week with Little Calumet River Basin Development Commission at Merrillville Stormwater Resource Center. We presented our construction project for the Hickory Ridge Lake Apartment Flight Control. Our request for \$900,00.00 will be voted on at the next meeting. You can review our presentation and everything regarding our request for funding at www.littlecalumetriverbasin.org.

Director Lake informed the council that bid documents are being gathered for a joint project between us and MCD. We are doing the storm side and MCD is doing the sanitary side. This project is for Southmoor Park, and we will be the lead agency. The attorneys for both sides met and a MOU will be signed, and everything will be processed through us. We will make all the arrangements and anticipate going up for bid next month. We will be finished this summer.

Director Lake elaborated on other ongoing projects:

- 93rd and Randolph Street Project
- Community Block Grant Application Submission - Requesting \$147,000.00 for the 58th and Massachusetts East of Broadway Project

Councilman Pettit asked Director Lake where we stand with the huge ditch on 97th and Grand Boulevard.

Director Lake informed the council that the report from the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) listed things they would like to see such as a two-stage ditch design. Director Lake doesn't think a two-stage ditch design is needed because of the slope improvements. We are going back and forth with the USACE. The plans are about 95% percent complete unless the USACE wants to see any more modifications.

Councilwoman Uzelac asked when will the Kaiser Ditch project be completed.

Director Lake informed the council that it depends on when NIPSCO and AT&T are finished. He can't give a definite date at this time.

SOUTHSHORE VISITORS AND CONVENTION AUTHORITY – Town Manager Reardon wasn't present at the meeting.

FIRE TERRITORY BOARD-MINCHUK – Councilman Minchuk informed the council that no meeting is scheduled at this time.

DEPARTMENT REPORTS/TOWN MANAGER

President Bella informed the council that on Saturday, May 20th he witnessed many Police Officers standing at attention by their vehicles. He asked Chief Nuses to elaborate on this event.

Chief Nuses

Chief Nuses informed the council that the Saturday event was a Police inspection that hadn't been done in the Town of Merrillville in nineteen or twenty years. The Police Officers wore their Class A dress uniforms, and an inspection was done.

Chief Nuses also informed the council that Code Enforcement had a very busy month. Three hundred calls came in for service in May. Code Enforcement handed out citations and warnings.

Chief Nuses informed the council that the Merrillville Police Community Night will be on May 25th from 6:00 pm until 8:00 pm. He encouraged the residents to come out and meet the officers. A question-and-answer session will be at 7:00 pm.

Director Price – Parks and Recreation

Director Price informed the council and audience that the Parks Department is responsible for all Parks and trash on Trailways, not the Street Department. If the residents have any concerns, please contact our department at (219) 980-5911. We are working on getting a schedule on the Town's website. Residents will be able to see when the Parks are going to be mowed and trash emptied. The schedule will be tentative and subject to change depending on the weather or projects going on in the Town. Director Price also informed the council and audience that the upkeep of a lot is the owner's responsibility. If you see a lot in need of mowing or garbage pickup, please contact Code Enforcement Director Bunnell at (219) 769-3699 and report the address. If the lot belongs to the Town, we will take care of the mowing and trash removal.

Director Price informed the council and audience of the summer schedule at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center. The schedule is as follows:

- Open Gym - Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 10:00 am until 3:00 pm for High School Youth.
- Young Rembrandts (Art Class) - Mondays June and July from 11:30 am until 12:30 pm ages 6 years through 12 years old
- Bricks for Kids (Engineering Class using Legos) – Wednesdays June and July from 11:30 am until 12:30 pm ages 6 years through 12 years old

This information is on the Town's website at www.merrillville.in.gov. Use the quick link to access Parks and Recreation to see programs, events, and signup.

Councilman White informed the council that he received several telephone calls regarding summer jobs.

President Bella informed the council that we had a summer program. We hired students for the Street Department and Parks Department.

Vice-President Hardaway informed the council that those who are hired come through the departments. The Parks Department hired three and the Street Department hired five. The departments bring in students who worked last summer.

Director Shine – Building and Planning

-Director Shine informed the council that she has nothing to report until the BZA section on the agenda.

Director King – Street Department

Director King informed the council that the Street Department is in summer operations and is mowing lots that belong to the Town. Based on a list from Code Enforcement, the department mows residential lots that are privately owned. The property is then lien to recoup the cost.

Director King also informed the council that the department is doing roadway maintenance which includes crack sealing, fixing washouts, street sweeping, and construction projects during our summer operations.

GENERAL ORDERS

A. Ordinances

First Readings: (Discussion and Roll Call Vote)

None

Second Readings: (Discussion, Public Comment, and Roll Call Vote)

Ordinance 23-14 (Discussion, Public Comment, and Roll Vote)

An Ordinance Vacating a Portion of a 40-Foot-Wide Unimproved Frontage Road in the Town of Merrillville, Lake County, Indiana

A motion was made by Councilman Pettit to approve Ordinance 23-14, seconded by Councilwoman Uzelac.

Councilman White asked where Frontage Road is located.

The Petitioner informed the council that the location is on the Southside of 93rd East of Broadway behind Ace Hardware.

No further questions or comments from the council or the public.

Motion carries by roll call vote 7-0.

B. Resolutions: (Discussion and Voice Vote)

None

C. American Rescue Plan

AP Voucher Register Summary for ARP Purchases for May 23, 2023

Vice-President Hardaway informed the council that the ARP Voucher summary is \$54,435.98.

Vice-President Hardaway made a motion to approve ARP purchases for \$54,435.98, seconded by Councilman Pettit.

No further questions or comments from the council.

Motion carries by voice vote 7-0.

D. BZA & LARGE GATHERING ACTIONS

Petitioner: Leonard White

Owner: Crossroads Plaza

Request: Variance of Use Approval

Purpose: To Allow an Office and Event Venue

Location: 6120 Broadway

Zoning: M-2, Limited Industrial Corridor District

Planning and Building Director Shine elaborated on the BZA Action.

The Petitioner is Councilman White.

A motion was made by Councilman Pettit to remove the BZA Action from the table for approval, seconded by Councilwoman Uzelac.

President Bella asked Attorney Svetanoff if the motion was proper.

Attorney Svetanoff confirmed that the motion was proper.

No further questions or comments from the council.

Motion carries by roll call vote 5-Yes and 2-Abstention

A motion was made by Councilman Pettit to approve the BZA Action, seconded by Councilwoman Uzelac.

Councilman Minchuk asked Councilman White about Professional Trade International.

Councilman White informed the council that Professional Trade International is trying to become a union to help train young people in environment, building, and trade skills.

Councilman Minchuk asked if they are affiliated with any other unions in the area.

Councilman White informed the council he isn't aware of any affiliation with any other unions in the area.

No further questions or comments from the council.

President Bella asked Attorney Svetanoff if a voice vote is proper.

Attorney Svetanoff confirmed a voice vote is proper.

Motion carries by voice vote 6-1.

Councilman White thanked the council members.

OLD BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

None

SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS

None

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- BZA Meeting May 24th at 6:30 pm
- Merrillville PD Community Night Out May 25th from 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm
- Town Council Meeting June 13th at 6:30 pm
- Juneteenth Freedom Fest June 17th, 12:00 pm – 5:00 pm
- Fireworks will be at Merrillville High School on July 3rd
- 4th of July Parade July 4th at 11:30 am starting at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center going South.

ADJOURNMENT:

A motion and a second were made and passed by voice vote.

Meeting Adjourned.



Rick Bella, President



Kelly White Gibson, Clerk-Treasurer

Minutes Submitted By Angela Lewis