



Town of Merrillville
Town Council Meeting Minutes
September 12, 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 Robert Szoke.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: Led by Vice-President Hardaway

ROLL CALL – Roll Call was taken by Madam Clerk-Treasurer Kelly White Gibson

Present were:

Vice-President Hardaway - (Ward 2)

Councilman Minchuk - (Ward 3)

Councilwoman Uzelac - (Ward 4)

Councilman White - (Ward 7)

Councilwoman Neal – (Ward 1)

Councilman Pettit – (Ward 6)

President Bella - (Ward 5)

All Seven (7) Present

President Bella welcomed Interim Town Manager Michael Griffin.

PETITIONS, COMMUNICATIONS, ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS, AND REMONSTRATIONS:

None

CONSENT AGENDA

Accts. Payable Register Voucher Approval for September 12, 2023.

Approval of Town Council Meeting Minutes of August 22, 2023.

Approval of Special Town Council Meeting Minutes of August 29, 2023

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

No further questions or comments from the council.

Motion carries by voice vote 7-0.

STANDING & SPECIAL COMMITTEES REPORTS

BUDGET & FINANCE- HARDAWAY – Vice-President Hardaway informed the council that he would like Advisor Hudson to give him the balance of the American Rescue Plan funds.

Advisor Hudson stated she would give him the balance.

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 Town’s Fall Newsletter will be coming out soon and there will be a schedule listed for leaf pickup in the newsletter.

ELECTIONS, PUBLIC RELATIONS, & TOWN BEAUTIFICATION - NEAL- Councilwoman Neal informed the council that she will be meeting with Director Chilcott of Economic Development regarding the banners for the Town. She will also be driving around Town looking at different signs.

Councilwoman Neal also informed the council that on October 31, 2023, the Town's Treat or Trick hours will be 5:30 p.m. until 7:30 p.m.

President Bella asked if that was in the form of a motion.

Councilwoman Neal stated yes.

A motion was made by Councilwoman Neal approving Halloween Trick or Treat hours from 5:30 p.m. until 7:30 p.m. on October 31, 2023, seconded by Councilman Minchuk.

No further questions or comments from the council.

Motion carries by voice vote 7-0.

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS- WHITE - Councilman White informed the council that the Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommendation for Lake County is low for COVID-19. However, upon his further research of wastewater treatment systems the virus had spiked in Lake County.

Councilman White also stated that some type of monitoring system should be in place to handle spikes in the virus.

Councilwoman Uzelac informed the council that booster shots along with flu shots will be available at Walgreens and CVS.

Councilman White stated the new booster shot is Federal Drug Administration (FDA) approved for 6 months and older.

PERSONNEL POLICY & EMPLOYEE BENEFITS – HARDAWAY- Vice-President Hardaway informed the council that he has nothing to report at this time.

PUBLIC SAFETY- MINCHUK- Councilman Minchuk informed the council that he has nothing to report at this time.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT-PETTIT – Councilman Pettit informed the council that there will be a BZA action letter on the agenda.

PARKS & RECREATION- UZELAC – Councilwoman Uzelac informed the council that the Parks are up to par, and she believes that Director Price will be doing winterizing.

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

DEAN & BARBARA WHITE COMMUNITY CENTER-PETTIT – Councilman Pettit informed the council that a meeting will be held at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center on Thursday, September 28th at 4:30 pm.

SPECIAL PROJECTS (F & B TAX, DIVERSITY, 4TH of JULY CELEBRATION-HARDAWAY - Vice-President Hardaway informed the council that he has nothing to report at this time, but there are a couple of events for next year that the new council should be thinking about like the Black History Dinner.

Vice-President Hardaway also informed the council that he will have more information at the next council meeting regarding a committee.

President Bella asked Vice-President Hardaway to give an update regarding the Diversity Program spearheaded by Dr. Lackey.

Vice-President Hardaway informed the council that he hasn’t spoken to Dr. Lackey and has no update regarding the Diversity Program.

Councilman White asked for an update on the Food and Beverage Tax (F & B Tax).

Vice-President Hardaway informed the council that nothing has been passed by this council regarding the F & B Tax.

DEPARTMENT & COMMISSION REPORTS

LAKE COUNTY SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT-WHITE – Councilman

White informed the council that a meeting was held a couple of weeks ago regarding two employees who were terminated. The two individuals were part of the Education Team.

Councilman White also gave the council an update regarding the compost operations. There were 2,500 cubic yards of material at the facility and 193 cubic yards of it were sold for \$1,992.00. This is the first to his knowledge that money was made from the materials. Some of the rich compost will be available to municipalities or people for planting.

Councilman White informed the council that household hazardous waste collection will begin September 13th at Lowell High School.

Councilman White also informed the council that communities have turned in their recycling grant applications and the Town of Merrillville received \$200,000.00. Lake County Solid Waste Management also made changes to its Personnel Manual.

Councilman White thanked Director Lake for all the work that was done at Barkley Village to make it safe for children.

NORTHERN INDIANA REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION-HARDAWAY – Vice-President Hardaway informed the council that a meeting has been scheduled for next week.

STORMWATER MANAGEMENT RESOURCES-LAKE – Director Lake informed the council of the following:

- Hickory Ridge Basin Project
 - Little Calumet River Basin Development Commission approved funding of close to \$1,000,000.00 for the Hickory Ridge Lake Apartment Regional Basin Project, The project will go out for bid in late fall, and the contract can start this winter.
- Lateral Stormwater Drainage Project
 - The project is between eighty-five to ninety-five percent completed. NIPSCO is supposed to be working on relocating the gas lines for us to put in the last sections of the box culverts. The roads are paved and passable and the project is progressing. We had Howard's Tree Service go through to do ditch maintenance along the whole corridor which is completed.
- 69th Connecticut
 - We're preparing big documents through VS Engineering. The grant agreements are all complete, and the school just has to sign off on the paperwork.
- Director Lake elaborated on several other projects in the works at Stormwater.

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

FIRE TERRITORY BOARD-MINCHUK – Councilman Minchuk informed the council that he has nothing to report at this time.

Councilman White informed the council that he supports Chief Kosta in what he is doing for the animals

DEPARTMENT REPORTS/INTERIM TOWN MANAGER

Director Price– Parks Department

Director Price was absent from the meeting. Lisa Roberts Building and Event Staff Manager at the Parks Department informed the council of the following:

- Calumet Christian School will be holding a volleyball tournament on Saturday, September 16th.
- The cruise night is back one last time on Saturday, September 23rd from 5:00 pm - 9:00 pm
- The 3rd Annual Entrepreneur & Business Workshop will be held on Saturday, September 16th at 10:00 am-12:00 pm. The workshop wants to inspire and motivate entrepreneurs & business

professionals to be excellent, excel, step out, innovate, and go after the highest mark. The guest speaker will be Tai Heslia Crayton.

- Indiana Game Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) tryouts for boys will be held on Saturday, September 23rd from 11 a.m.-4 p.m. at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center (DBWCC)
- 94 Feet AAU Tryouts for boys will be held on Saturday, September 30th from 10:00 am-3:00 pm
- Lady Gym Rats AAU Tryouts will be held on Saturday, September 23rd. Registration will be at 11:00 a.m. Grades 3rd -7th will take place from 12:00 pm - 1:30 pm. For grades 8th -11th registration will be at 1:00 pm, with tryouts going from 2:00 pm - 4:00 pm.
- Starting October 6, DBWCC will be hosting Adult Volleyball leagues through December 15.
- Howards Martial Arts Academy: A Way of Life program grand opening will be on September 18, 2023. The classes will be every Monday & Friday from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at DBWCC.

Chief Nuses – Police Department

Chief Nuses informed the council of the following:

- Speed Blitz Program
 - The Police Department initiated the Speed Blitz Program which consists of several tow-hour blocks of traffic enforcement. We have a total of eight hours of enforcement which resulted in 43 tickets, 12 warnings, 1 traffic arrest, and 2 vehicle impounds. We plan to continue with this program.
- Targeted Operations
 - As a result of the Speed Blitz Program, we stumbled on some other areas that need to be addressed in the Town of Merrillville through the crime suppression unit by gathering intel on people who are causing problems in the Town.
- Scams
 - A new scam has come to light. The Walgreens Scam targets individuals by telephone automated system regarding discounted rates on prescription drugs. Don't give out your information hang up and call your local Walgreens.
- Juvenile Runaways
 - There has been a spike in juvenile runaway cases, and we have limited solutions. We are in the process of setting up a meeting with the Lake County Juvenile Justice Division to come up with solutions to this problem.

Councilman White informed the council that he doesn't see any expiration date on out-of-state plates and that could this be a factor in why out-of-state residents aren't changing over to Indiana plates.

Chief Nuses informed the council that out-of-state residents have 60 days to change over their plates, but the problem is nobody is keeping track of how long the residents have been in the Town.

Director Shine – Building and Planning

Director Shine informed the council about the progress of the Merrillville Comprehensive Plan. The Steering Committee will meet at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center on Wednesday, September 20th at 6:00 pm in Event Room 2.

Director Shine also informed the council that the Momentum Community will meet at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center on Wednesday, September 21st at 6:00 p.m. in Event Room 2.

Director Shine informed the council that the two meetings will focus on the July Workshop Concepts. The open house will be held on Thursday, October 10th from 5:00 pm until 7:00 pm.

Director King – Street Department

Director King informed the council of the following:

- 86th Avenue Project
 - The road expansion that runs between Broadway and Merrillville Road will be nearing completion at the end of the month. The department is working with NIPSCO on lighting because the area is dark.
- Branch Pickup

- Branch pickup is still ongoing in the Town. The chippers are down so the branches are being picked up by hand using a backhoe. The chippers should be up and running soon. The branch pickup program will end on September 30th.
- Asphalt Patching and Crack Sealing
 - Asphalt Patching and Crack Sealing is going on throughout the Town.

Director King elaborated on other projects in the works.

Vice-President Hardaway asked about the permit for the bus shelter at Stracks.

Director King informed the council that the permit had been obtained.

Vice-President Hardaway informed the council that the permit is to move the bus shelter from Andrea High School to Stracks.

Councilman White asked about the lights and the bridge on 61st Avenue.

Director King informed the council that the lightning is a slow process. It took two and half years to get three lights on Adams Street. The bridge can be fixed.

Interim Town Manager Griffin– Town Hall

Interim Town Manager Griffin informed the council that he is still onboarding. He thanked everyone for their warm welcome and professionalism. He will also submit a detailed report to the council and Madam Clerk-Treasurer Kelly White Gibson but will be brief for this meeting.

Interim Town Manager Griffin informed the council that he will continue with the Wednesday 10:00 am meetings with Department Heads where we will talk about any action items and what's on everybody's minds.

GENERAL ORDERS

A. Ordinances

First Readings: (Discussion and Roll Call Vote)

None

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

None

B. Resolutions: (Discussion and Voice Vote)

None

C. American Rescue Plan

AP Voucher Register Summary for ARP Purchases for September 12, 2023

Vice-President Hardaway informed the council that the ARP Voucher summary is \$6,627.00.

Vice-President Hardaway made a motion to approve \$6,627.00, seconded by Councilman Pettit.

Madam Clerk-Treasurer Kelly White Gibson informed the council that there are two ARP Voucher summaries one is for \$208,614.44 and the other is for \$6,627.00.

Vice-President Hardaway stated that he doesn't have the ARP voucher for \$208,614.44.

President Bella asked can the vouchers be approved separately so that we could continue with the meeting.

Vice-President Hardaway amended his motion to combine the \$6,627.00 and \$208,614.44 ARP vouchers.

President Bella asked Councilman Pettit does his second still stands with this additional cost.

Councilman Pettit asked about the additional cost.

Madam Clerk-Treasurer informed the council that the additional cost is \$208,614.44.

Councilman Pettit stated his second still stands.

No further questions or comments from the council.

Motion carries by roll voice vote 6-1.

D. BZA & LARGE GATHERING ACTIONS

Applicant: Merrillville Solar, LLC by Lightsource BP
Request: Variance of Use Approval
Purpose: To Allow a Solar Project
Location: South of HWY 30 between Colorado/Clay, West of Grand
Zoning: M-1 Industrial Zoning District and M-2 Industrial Zoning District

Planning and Building Director Shine elaborated on the BZA.

A motion was made by Councilman Pettit to approve the BZA, seconded by Vice-President Hardaway.

Councilman Pettit informed the council that the parcels are in his Ward on Colorado Street, Clay Street, Polycon, and Modern Forge.

Councilman Pettit elaborated on the project.

No further questions or comments from the council.

Motion carries by roll call vote 7-0.

Petitioner: Cody R. Wallenius
Owner: 2450-2490 West 81st Hillside LLC
Request: Special Exception Approval
Purpose: To Allow a Tattoo Studio
Location: 2460 West Lincoln Highway
Zoning: C-3, Highway Commercial Zoning District

Planning and Building Director Shine elaborated on the BZA.

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

No further questions or comments from the council.

Motion carries by roll call vote 7-0.

OLD BUSINESS

Councilman White informed the council that gang graffiti is still on the old Pancake House building.

Director King informed the council that he had reached out to the owner of the Pancake House.

Director Shine also informed the council that she and Director King have reached out to the owner several times to allow him to remove the graffiti. Since the owner hasn't complied, they are going to take care of it.

President Bella informed the council that Attorney Svetanoff has to be looped in on this situation because of non-compliance with the owner of the Pancake House.

Attorney Svetanoff informed the council that we could paint the building and file a lien against the property.

Councilman White also informed the council that the storage container on US 30 by Portillo's still is covered in gang graffiti.

Director Shine informed the council that we don't own the container.

President Bella informed the council that Director Lake could find out who own the storage container.

NEW BUSINESS

Councilman Minchuk requested to a point of personal preference.

President Bella allowed Council Minchuk's point of personal preference.

Councilman Minchuk thanked the council and all the Town employees for their thoughts and prayers.

Councilman White asked about the street sign for the late Councilman Donald Spann.

President Bella asked Councilman White to work with Director King on the sign.

Councilwoman Uzelac asked the council if the Golden Corral on Broadway going to open.

President Bella stated no.

Attorney Svetanoff stated that the owner has problems.

SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Plan Commission Meeting September 19th at 6:30 p.m.
- RDC Meeting September 26th at 6:15 p.m.
- Town Council Meeting September 26th at 6:30 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion and a second were made.

Motion carries by voice vote 7-0.

Meeting Adjourned.



Rick Bella, President



Kelly White Gibson, Clerk-Treasurer

Minutes Submitted By Angela Lewis