



Town of Merrillville
Town Council Meeting Minutes
March 28, 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 of Impact Church.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: Led by Vice-President Hardaway.

ROLL CALL – Roll Call was taken by Office Manager Whiteside.

Present were:

Vice-President Hardaway- (Ward 2)

Councilman Minchuk- (Ward 3)

Councilwoman Uzelac- (Ward 4)

Councilman White - (Ward 7)

Councilman Spann- (Ward 1)

Councilman Pettit- (Ward 6)

President Bella- (Ward 5)

All Seven (7) Present

PETITIONS, COMMUNICATIONS, ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS, AND REMONSTRATIONS:

Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) Contract Signing

President Bella called up President Davidson-Dugan of the FOP, Secretary Irvin of the FOP, Merrillville Police Chief Nuses, Councilman Minchuk Chairman of Public Safety, Attorney Svetanoff Town Council, and Attorney Dowling FOP Labor Council

Attorney Svetanoff informed the council and audience that the Fraternal Order of Police and the Town of Merrillville has successfully negotiated a collective bargaining agreement. The negotiations went smoothly between both parties.

Attorney Svetanoff also stated that Councilman Minchuk did a lot of work on the contract, and this should be a very proud moment in the Town's history. The contract is for three years and makes sure both entities are protected on the streets and protected in terms of a contractual view.

Attorney Svetanoff stated at this time he fully endorses the contract being signed tonight.

Attorney Dowling stated that he is happy to report that this year we got a three-year contract done which is very important.

President Bella elaborated on working with the FOP and the contract.

Letter from Town Engineering Administrator Steve King recommending approval of CORE payment #5 for the Town's Conference Room.

Town Engineering Administrator Steven King informed the council that he reviewed the December 2022 billing for the work completed in the Town Hall conference room and concurs with Core Construction's recommendation on approving payment for application number 5 to the vendors listed in the total amount of \$6,760.43.

A motion was made by Councilman Pettit to approve application #5, seconded by Vice-President Hardaway.

President Bella stated that this payment should complete the work done on the conference room, and thanked the Redevelopment Commission for paying for the work that was done.

No further questions or comments from the council.

Motion carries by voice vote 7-0.

Letter from Town Engineering Administrator Steve King recommending approval of First Group Engineering for the Community Crossing Grant Project

Town Engineering Administrator Steve King informed the council that on May 7, 2022 bids were opened for the Community Crossing Project. Milestone Contractors North was the lowest responsive and responsible bidder at \$1,142,824.50. Fifty percent of that amount will come from our Community Crossing Grant. The other fifty percent will be funded out of our Wheel Tax Revenue.

Town Engineering Administrator Steve King also informed the council about the three projects listed. The 86th Avenue from Merrillville Road to McKinley Street, the Broadway Frontage Roads, the East Side from East 84th Place to 91st Avenue, and the West Side from 83rd Avenue to two hundred feet south of 89th Avenue. He recommends that we approve the contract for Milestone.

A motion was made by Councilman Pettit to approve the Community Crossing Grant Project, seconded by Councilwoman Uzelac.

Councilman White informed the council that he is constantly seeing Wheel Tax being used, but none of it is coming up north. He is getting complaints about the streets in Ward 7 but is constantly seeing multi-million dollars being spent in other areas.

Councilman White also stated he would like to support the council in these other areas, but there hasn't been any for Ward 7. The support has been minimal at best.

Councilman White elaborated on the complaints of his constituents in Ward 7 regarding how the Wheel Tax Funding is being spent in other Wards, but not in Ward 7.

Councilman Spann stated he agrees with Councilman White that other Wards don't get the same consideration regarding the Wheel Tax Funding.

No further questions or comments from the council.

Motion carries by roll call vote 5-2

President Bella asked Town Engineering Administrator Steve King to prepare a list of where grant funds have been spent over the last three years.

Councilman White stated that he had requested the information from Town Manager Reardon and is still waiting to receive the information.

CONSENT AGENDA

Accts. Payable Register Voucher Approval for March 28, 2023.
Approval of Town Council Meeting Minutes of March 14, 2023.

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

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 has no report at this time.

COUNCIL AFFAIRS- PETTIT – Councilman Pettit informed the council that he has no report at this time.

STREET DEPARTMENT- MINCHUK – Councilman Minchuk informed the council that a few items came up in the workshop that will be discussed at the next meeting.

ELECTIONS, PUBLIC RELATIONS, & TOWN BEAUTIFICATION-PETTIT- Councilman Pettit informed the council that every second Saturday in May mail carriers and more than ten thousand cities and towns across America participates in the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) Stamp Out Hungry national food drive. This is the largest one-day food drive in the nation led by letter carriers represented by the NALC AFL-CIO with help from rural letter carriers and other postal employees and other volunteers. The drive has delivered more than one billion pounds of food in the past 25 years. Carriers collect non-perishable food donations left by mailboxes and in post offices. The non-perishable items are delivered to Local Community Food Banks pantries and shelters in approximately 1,500 NHLC branches in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Virgin Islands.

Councilman Pettit also informed the council that the United States Postal Service, National Association of Letter Carriers, National Rural Letter Carriers Association, AFL-CIO United Way, Valasis Valpak Direct Marketing Systems, CVS Health, Kellogg's, United Food and Commercial Workers International Union are all supporting this year's Stamp Out Hunger food drive. If you would like to donate, you can place a box or can of non-perishable food next to your mailbox before your letter carriers deliver mail on the second Saturday in May. The carrier will do the rest. The food is sorted and delivered to an area food bank or pantry where it is available for needy families.

Councilman Pettit informed the council and audience that one in eight Americans face hunger every day in the United States and this is one way you can help those in your city or town who need help.

President Bella asked Brandi Shaw a mail carrier for the Town of Merrillville to elaborate more on the food drive.

Councilman Pettit informed the council that the Town has banners regarding the food drive and asked Town Engineering Administrator Steven King to check on it with INDOT.

Town Engineering Administrator Steven King stated that the Town has all kinds of banners.

Councilman Pettit stated that Lamar is committing to advertising space for the food drive and the information will be posted on the digital billboard throughout the Town.

President Bella stated that the artwork will be shared with area business that operates the digital signs in the Town because businesses have agreed to put Town messages on their billboards.

President Bella also stated that a Proclamation will be presented at the next Town Council meeting declaring the pickup date and the times for residents to participate in the food drive.

Vice-President Hardaway informed Town Engineering Administrator Steven King that if the banners can't be found work with President Bella to get new banners.

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS- WHITE - Councilman White informed the council that according to the Center for Disease Control, the level is still low for Lake County.

Councilman White also stated that we need to start planning for the next pandemic. According to International Researchers, the spread of the virus was traced back to a raccoon dog. All he can say is to stay strong and keep vaccinated.

PERSONNEL POLICY & EMPLOYEE BENEFITS – HARDAWAY- Vice-President Hardaway asked Councilman Pettit to call an Executive Session with the Community Center and Personnel Committees to discuss staff.

Councilman Pettit asked about the date.

Vice-President Hardaway stated it will be next Tuesday.

PUBLIC SAFETY- MINCHUK- Councilman Minchuk informed the council that Ordinance 23-13 is coming up on the agenda and he will give his report at that time.

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

PARKS & RECREATION- UZELAC – Councilwoman Uzelac informed the council that she has no report at this time, but the parks are being kept in order by Public Works. The Parks are all clean and the children are more than welcome to use them at this time.

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 he has nothing to report at this time.

SPECIAL PROJECTS (F & B TAX, DIVERSITY, 4TH of JULY CELEBRATION-HARDAWAY - Vice-President Hardaway informed the council that the Juneteenth Committee met last week on Thursday, March 23, 2023, and will meet again on Thursday, March 30, 2023, at noon.

Vice-President Hardaway also stated that anyone from the community who is interested in serving on the committee is welcome to come to the meeting at Town Hall at noon.

Councilman White asked the council if there was an update on the Diversity Committee.

President Bella stated there is no update at this time. He and Vice-President are currently in discussion with a retired school teacher who helped the Town in the past with special programs. When the information is available, they will update the council.

Councilman White stated he just wanted to know about updates and be informed in the future.

President Bella stated that the council will be updated.

DEPARTMENT & COMMISSION REPORTS

LAKE COUNTY SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT-WHITE – Councilman White informed the council that a meeting was held. One of the topics that came up was paying \$188,000 for damages that happened at Solid Waste District. A check for \$188,000.00 was issued to Solid Waste District and repairs are in progress.

Councilman White also informed the council that a personnel issue came up at the meeting. A resolution was discussed to amend the Personnel Manual. Councilman White stated he didn't think there was enough information for this to happen and asked that the resolution be tabled. Solid Waste District did table the resolution and sent additional information to the members. The resolution will be on the agenda for the next meeting and Councilman White will give his approval.

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 the CRS five-year cycle visit had occurred. It was a mountain of paperwork, and he will be submitting it online to FEME. FEME will review it and let the Town know if additional information is needed.

Director Lake also informed the council that the annual MS report for IDM is being finalized to stay in compliance.

Director Lake informed the council that we received the \$144,000.00 for our Community Development Block Grant for Marcella Road.

Director Lake elaborated on other ongoing projects.

Councilman White informed the council that the constituents in Ward 7 are emailing him regarding the drainage issue in the ward. Councilman White also asked do he need to make a motion to receive funding to resolve this issue in his ward.

President Bella informed Councilman White to attend one of the board meetings for the Stormwater Management District because the decision for funding can't be made by the council.

Councilman White asked Director Lake about the next meeting.

Director Lake informed Councilman White that the meetings are held on the first Tuesday of every month.

Councilman White stated he would attend the next board meeting.

SOUTHSHORE VISITORS AND CONVENTION AUTHORITY – Town Manager Reardon informed the council that two weeks ago the Southshore Convention Visitors Authority hosted a meeting in Crown Point under the new President and CEO Uran. The featured speaker was Senator Milton who reference

the food and beverage tax, but focus on the Convention Center. Senator Milton did a great job in his presentation and answered a lot of questions.

Town Manager Reardon informed the council that he came away from the meeting with two ideas.

1. The decision as to where a Convention Center would go is very competitive. There are a lot of criteria that communities will need to meet about and that fact alone will rule out many communities county-wide.
2. There is a discussion among the board members with South Shore to take this study which is about two to three years old and update it. Councilman Pettit stated that the study is older than three years. It was done before the pandemic. Town Manager Reardon also stated there is a lot of very important information in the study that would help guide us in the decision.

Town Manager Reardon informed the council they can look for circulars and publications of upcoming events at the Chambers and Authority.

FIRE TERRITORY BOARD-MINCHUK – Councilman Minchuk informed the council that there are no meetings scheduled.

DEPARTMENT REPORTS/TOWN MANAGER

-Director Shine informed the council that with spring arriving she is informing the residents of the importance of pulling a permit when they are getting work done on their homes. She also stated that residents must be wary of giving down payments to contractors by checking with the Building and Planning Department that the contractor is licensed in the Town of Merrillville. There are many situations where down payments were given, and the contractors don't return to do the work. Unfortunately, when the residents call us, we have to inform them that the contractor wasn't licensed by the Town of Merrillville.

Director Shine reiterated to the council and audience to call the Building and Planning Department before your sign paperwork or work begins on your property.

-Town Engineering Administrator Steven King informed the council that the spring cleanup is coming up and the newsletter has gone out to residents. The leaf collection will begin the week of April 10th all Merrillville residents who live north of 73rd Avenue will be picked up that week. The residents south of 73rd Avenue will be picked up the week of April 17th.

Town Engineering Administrator Steven King also informed the council there will only be one pick-up due to the demands on staff. Residents can also bring leaves and branches to the facility at 5750 Tyler Monday through Friday from 7:15 am to 2:45 pm. There will also be dumpsters available during Spring Cleanup located at 13 West 73rd Avenue this is the Street Department Facility. The hours of operation are Monday through Friday 7:15 am to 2:45 pm and Saturday from 8:00 am to 12:00 pm. The dumpsters are located in the back, and we ask that you bring a driver's license and have Indiana plates on your car.

Town Engineering Administrator Steven King informed the council that there are a lot of problems with speeders that he and Chief Nuses have heard about in the Town. He has scheduled a meeting with Mr. Jim Entwistle from Traffic Logix on April 4th. He encouraged the council and audience to call with any traffic problem areas.

Town Engineering Administrator Steven King elaborated on Foreman Tracy Ryan.

-Chief Nuses informed the council of two announcements from his department.

1) The Police Department has gone live with online reporting. If you have an incident to report, you can report it online instead of coming into the station. The online system is a smartphone and PC friendly. The Police Department is working on getting a tablet outside to have a kiosk in front of the police station so those who do not have a phone, smartphone, or computer can have access to the online reporting system.

Chief Nuses also stated that the Police Department is also working on getting QR Codes. QR Codes are little bar codes that you can scan with a smartphone, and it takes you to the actual reporting site via a link. We are going to get business cards and hand them out to residents. Chief Nuses stated that this has been a long time coming to the Town and thanked Assistant Chief Gonzalez for bringing the vision to completion.

2) Chief Nuses informed the council that his department is working on setting up a meet-and-greet workshop with the police and citizens of Merrillville in late spring or early summer. The intention of this is to meet the people of Merrillville and let them know who the Police Officers are in the community.

Councilman White informed the council that he would like to thank Chief Nuses for the improvements he sees in the Town of Merrillville.

Councilman Spann also thanked Chief Nuses.

-Director Price informed the council that the Dean and Barbara White Community Center hosted the United States State of Indiana gymnastics competition this past weekend on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. The MMA fight was also hosted at the Community Center. Both events brought in large crowds and the performances were amazing.

Director Price also stated this spring weather permitting his department is looking forward to getting more lawns mown.

GENERAL ORDERS

A. Ordinances

First Readings: (Discussion and Roll Call Vote)

Ordinance 23-13 (Discussion and Roll Vote)

An Ordinance of the Town of Merrillville, Lake County, Indiana, Appropriation Additional Monies Within the Various Fire Protection Territory Funds for the Year 2023 Not Include in the Current Budget.

Councilman Minchuk informed the council that he had a conversation with Assistant Chief Lilley regarding one of their ladder trucks that had an unexpected repair that was very costly.

Councilman Minchuk made a motion to approve Ordinance 23-13 on first reading, seconded by Vice-President Hardaway.

President Bella asked Financial Advisor Hudson did she have anything to add.

Financial Advisor Hudson stated that Mr. Cender is the Financial Advisor to the Fire Department. This resolution was prepared directly by their staff, and Councilman Minchuk has all information to provide to the council.

Councilman Minchuk stated that the ordinance is in order.

Councilman Pettit asked Financial Advisor Hudson and Attorney Svetanoff can the council suspend after the first reading to get the repair paid.

Financial Advisor Hudson stated that we have to advertise the additional appropriation.

Councilman White asked how much the repair cost.

President Bella stated 75,000.00 and this additional appropriation will replenish the repair fund.

No further questions or comments from the council.

Motion carries by roll call vote 7-0,

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

None

B. Resolutions: (Discussion and Voice Vote)

Resolutions 23-08 (Discussion and Voice Vote)

A Resolution of the Town of Merrillville, Lake County, Indiana, Transferring Monies Within the 2023 Budget – General Fund, Dept.2, And Dept. 7 and Within the 2023 Budget-Parks Non-Reverting Fund

President Bella asked Financial Advisor Hudson to give an overview of Resolutions 23-08.

Financial Advisor Hudson informed the council that the budget had been set up so that the IT Director which was hopeful in the fall to have been hired by January would be paid as an employee from the payroll lines in the 100 series. This is the same with the Content Manager in the fall it had been budgeted as a payroll line item. The people who currently provide these services to the Town act as contractors not actual employees of the Town.

Financial Advisor Hudson also stated that it makes more sense for each of them to be paid out of their contractual line items by transferring funds. She also elaborated on Resolution 23-08

President Bella asked Office Manager Whiteside did she have anything to add.

Office Manager Whiteside stated she has nothing to add at this time.

Councilman Pettit made a motion to approve Resolution 23-08, seconded by Councilwoman Uzelac.

No further questions or comments from the council.

Motion carries by voice vote 7-0.

C. American Rescue Plan

AP Voucher Register Summary for ARP Purchases for March 14, 2023

Vice-President Hardaway made a motion to approve ARP Purchases for March 14, 2023, to correct the record, seconded by Councilman Pettit.

Councilman White apologized for causing the council to go off the topic resulting in no vote being taken.

Councilman White asked the council if any American Rescue Plan funds would be available to complete a study on the Black Maternity Death Rate in Northwest Indiana.

President Bella suggested that Councilman White contact the Lake County Health Department for the statistics regarding the issue.

Councilman White stated that he will and thanked President Bella for the suggestion.

No further questions or comments from the council.

Motion carries by voice vote 7-0.

AP Voucher Register Summary for ARP Purchases for March 28, 2023

Vice-President Hardaway informed the council that the ARP Voucher summary is \$28,296.50.

Vice-President Hardaway made a motion to approve ARP purchases for \$28,296.50, seconded by Councilman Pettit.

No further questions or comments from the council.

Motion carries by voice vote 7-0.

D. BZA & LARGE GATHERING ACTIONS

None

NEW BUSINESS

Councilman White informed the council that he would like to make a statement to the audience. Councilman White elaborated to the audience on his lack of votes from his white colleagues when it comes to committees and stipends.

President Bella informed Councilman White this isn't about race but his lack of interest.

Councilman White informed the council and audience that he is speaking facts.

OLD BUSINESS

None

SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS

None

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- Plan Commission Workshop April 4th at 6:30 pm
- Town Council Meeting April 11th, 2023, at 6:30 pm

ADJOURNMENT:

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

Meeting Adjourned.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Rick Bella", written over a horizontal line.

Rick Bella, President

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Kelly White Gibson", written over a horizontal line.

Kelly White Gibson, Clerk-Treasurer

Minutes Submitted By Angela Lewis