



**Town of Merrillville**  
**Town Council Meeting Minutes**  
**August 22, 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 Payroll Administrator Robyn Johnson.

Present were:

Vice-President Hardaway - (Ward 2)

Councilwoman Uzelac - (Ward 4)

Councilwoman Neal – (Ward 1)

Councilman Pettit – (Ward 6)

President Bella - (Ward 5)

Five (5) were Present and Two (2) were Absent - Councilman Minchuk and Councilman White.

***PETITIONS, COMMUNICATIONS, ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS, AND  
REMONSTRATIONS:***

**Swearing in of K-9 Officers Blue & Yaga**

K-9 Officers Blue and Yaga were sworn in by Judge Velazco.

Chief Nuses gave a brief overview of K-9 Officers Blue's & Yaga's breed, qualifications, and experience.

President Bella informed the council that he would get together with them to issue the proper thank you letters to the donors of K-9 Officers Blue and Yaga.

Chief Nuses informed the council that each dog cost #12,500.00 which doesn't include the necessary equipment.

**August Employee of the Month**

Director and Interim Town Manager King and Director of Economic Development Chilcott presented Joanna Guardiola to the council and audience as Employee of the Month for the Town of Merrillville. Mrs. Guardiola received a certificate of recognition and a gift card on behalf of the Town of Merrillville. Director Chilcott elaborated on Mrs. Guardiola's exemplary qualities as an employee in the Economic Development Department.

President Bella thanked Payroll Administrator Robyn Johnson for sitting in for Madam Clerk-Treasurer Kelly White Gibson.

***CONSENT AGENDA***

Accts. Payable Register Voucher Approval for August 22, 2023.  
Approval of Town Council Meeting Minutes of August 8, 2023.

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

No further questions or comments from the council.

Motion carries by voice vote 5-0.

***STANDING & SPECIAL COMMITTEES REPORTS***

***BUDGET & FINANCE- HARDAWAY*** – Vice-President Hardaway informed the council that on Tuesday, August 29<sup>th</sup> at 4:30 pm there will be a Budget & Finance meeting. We already met with the department heads to discuss their budgetary needs. We are convening a committee meeting to look over everything. We will come back to the entire council to have a meeting with everyone to make, if needed, any budget adjustments.

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

***STREET DEPARTMENT- MINCHUK*** – Councilman Minchuk was absent from the meeting.

President Bella asked Director and Interim Town Manager King if he had anything to report for the Street Department.

Director and Interim Town Manager King informed the council that he has nothing to report at this time.

***ELECTIONS, PUBLIC RELATIONS, & TOWN BEAUTIFICATION - NEAL***- Councilwoman Neal informed the council that the committee met today and went over a lot of information. She was included in this meeting and more information will be forthcoming at a later date. Councilwoman Neal deferred the rest of her report to Councilman Pettit.

Councilman Pettit informed the council that every year Saints Constantine & Helen Greek Orthodox Cathedral has a spaghetti dinner benefit. This year it will be on September 25<sup>th</sup> at Greek Hall. This event will benefit the Ross Township Food Pantry.

Councilman Pettit also informed the council this event will be advertised and encourages everyone to attend. He also believes carryout will also be available at this event. Lamar will also advertise the artwork for the event on the digital billboards as a community service.

Councilman Pettit asked Director Shine to make sure the artwork that he emailed Councilwoman Neal is available to on-premises digital people.

***ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS- WHITE*** - Councilman White was absent from the meeting.

President Bella asked Director and Interim Town Manager King if he had anything to report for Environmental Affairs.

Director and Interim Town Manager King informed the council that he has nothing to report at this time.

***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 was absent from the meeting.

President Bella asked Director and Interim Town Manager King if he had anything to report for Public Safety.

Director and Interim Town Manager King informed the council that he has nothing to report at this time.

President Bella asked Chief Nuses if he had anything to add to the report.

Chief Nuses informed the council that he has nothing to add at this time.

***ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT-PETTIT*** – Councilman Pettit informed the council that a Redevelopment Commission meeting was held before the council meeting. In the Redevelopment Commission meeting, we passed a resolution that will implement a grant that the Town of Merrillville decided to give to Midwest Aerospace as part of their development of the old field house building.

Councilman Pettit also informed Payroll Administrator Johnson that a check needs to be processed tomorrow and that Financial Advisor Hudson will get in contact with Bookkeeper Santos.

***PARKS & RECREATION- UZELAC*** – Councilwoman Uzelac informed the council that the Parks are in order. The lawns are well mowed. Everything is going very well with the Parks and bike trails.

***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 committee meeting is scheduled for August 24, 2023, at 4:30 p.m. The meeting will be held at the Mike Anderson Event Center in Room One (1). Director and Interim Town Manager King and I will be putting together an agenda.

**SPECIAL PROJECTS (F & B TAX, DIVERSITY, 4<sup>TH</sup> of JULY CELEBRATION-HARDAWAY** - Vice-President Hardaway informed the council he has nothing to report at this time.

Councilwoman Neal informed the council that she has nothing to report at this time.

President Bella informed the council there were a couple of changes on the agenda.

#### **DEPARTMENT & COMMISSION REPORTS**

**LAKE COUNTY SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT-WHITE** – Councilman White was absent from the meeting.

**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 was absent from the meeting.

**SOUTHSHORE VISITORS AND CONVENTION AUTHORITY -**

**FIRE TERRITORY BOARD-MINCHUK** – Councilman Minchuk was absent from the meeting.

#### **DEPARTMENT REPORTS/TOWN MANAGER**

##### **Director Shine – Building and Planning**

Director Shine informed the council she doesn't have anything to report until the large gathering section on the agenda.

##### **Director Chilcott – Economic Development**

Director Chilcott informed the council that in the past we worked with a company to bring the Showcase Video to Merrillville. The next item for the Town is to work with that same company to bring a Showcase Banner Program. She has been working with the professionals to create a design. This Showcase Banner Program is cost-free for the Town of Merrillville. The company will reach out to local businesses for sponsorships.

Director Chilcott also informed the council that the banner will be approximately 30 by 72. We selected to place the banners throughout the main corridors. The banners will go Town limits from down Broadway, across 61<sup>st</sup>, 73<sup>rd</sup>, and 93<sup>rd</sup> to help promote and feature Merrillville. The program is fully insured by the company. The company will do all the maintenance and installs. The Town has a three-year program and every year we can change the design. The designs are in progress and will be shared with the council.

Director Chilcott informed the council that she is also working with the Chambers on a Chamber Spotlight Program and The Times for the Move To Indiana Program. We are looking to attract businesses and residents. Our goal is to showcase what makes Merrillville great.

President Bella asked Director Chilcott how much it would cost for a company to have its name on the banner.

Director Chilcott informed the council the company she is working with will get back to her regarding the cost.

Councilman Pettit asked Director Chilcott was the Town limited on the corridors or were the corridors selected by the company.

Director Chilcott informed the council that she selected the corridors.

Director and Interim Town Manager King also added that we picked those specific corridors to make sure we covered all the thoroughfares.

Councilman Pettit asked was Merrillville Road and Taft mentioned in the discussion regarding corridors.

Director Chilcott informed the council that we looked at all the poles that the Town owned and made the determination.

**Director King – Street Department and Town Manager’s Office**

Director and Interim Town Manager King informed the council of the following:

- **Branch Pickup**  
The branch pickup is ongoing. The crew is out picking up branches every day.
- **Crack Sealing**  
The department has been out crack-sealing some of the major roadways and completed some spot asphalt repairs with our in-house pavement crew.

President Bella asked the Director and Interim Town Manager King to update the council on 86<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

Director and Interim Town Manager King informed the council that the work continues on the 86<sup>th</sup> Avenue extension project. The project has a completion date of September 30, 2023.

President Bella also informed the council that he noticed that the new roads have been paved especially over in the business section by Broadway. He also asked the Director and Interim Town Manager King will the roads be striped.

Director and Interim Town Manager King informed the council that the original roads weren’t striped, but we can handle the striping for the new roads on 86<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

**Chief Nuses – Police Department**

Chief Nuses informed the council of the following numbers for July 2023:

- Approximately 2,800 calls for service
- 435 traffic stops
- 200 traffic tickets issued out of the 435 traffic stops

Chief Nuses also informed the council these are rough numbers and will increase. He was also able to get all the data that was collected by the speed signs from the Director and Interim Town Manager King. Starting Saturday, August 26<sup>th</sup>, you will notice a lot more traffic enforcement. The problem areas for speeding will have a high visibility of traffic enforcement.

Chief Nuses informed the council that we have some issues in the Town. We have already identified who is the problem. The Merrillville Police Department is going to start doing what is considered a goal-oriented policing tactic where we are going to be preventive instead of reactive

Chief Nuses also informed the council that a couple of weeks ago there was an unfortunate incident on Taft Street. We had the assistance of Crown Point’s Emergency Management Agency (EMA) to help us with this situation and it was greatly appreciated. We are writing them a letter to say thank you.

Chief Nuses informed the council that the Police Department is forming good relationships and exchanging information with our law enforcement neighbors in Lake County. One thing we all have in common is the traffic woes. He shared with the other agencies that the Town of Merrillville will be doing a traffic study.

Chief Nuses also informed the council that he had been in contact with the citizens of Merrillville. The citizens are bringing a lot of things to light that the Police Department wasn't aware of that is happening in the Town. This is a good start on building our relationship and trust with our citizens because they are our eyes and ears in the community. We have more citizens than Police Officers in this Town.

**Director Price– Parks Department**

Director Price was absent from the meeting. Manager Lisa Robertson from the Parks Department informed the council of the following:

- **219 Ride’N Wranglers Glow Night**  
In partnership with the 219 Ride’N Wranglers, the Glow Night was a huge success. It was exciting to see all the vehicles glowing and everyone having a good time. With any first-time event, we recognize there are things we can always improve on for the next event. We have spoken with Chief Nuses concerning our noise ordinance and making sure we do a better job with noise control to be considerate of our residents. We also spoke with Office Berzac to address traffic control and the possibility of additional security to assist with traffic control. We will continue to fine-tune our events to ensure that they meet the standards set forth by the Town of Merrillville.

- **NWI Indiana Basketball Club**  
NWI Indiana Basketball Club is having tryouts on Saturday, August 26<sup>th</sup> for boys AAU Basketball. There will be two sessions. The first session for 3<sup>rd</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> graders will be from 9:00 a.m. until 11:00 a.m. The second session for 7<sup>th</sup> -11<sup>th</sup> graders will be from 12:00 p.m. until 1:30 p.m. The tryouts are **free** for Merrillville residents, but students must have theirs' school IDs to verify residency.
- **Creative Joy Comprehensive Art Program**  
On Tuesdays, the Creative Joy Comprehensive Art Program will be offering Art Classes at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center for Homeschooled children and their friends. The sessions are for six weeks and will instruct on basic art concepts. Elizabeth Munoz is the instructor for the class. If you have additional questions about the class, please contact her via email at CreativeJoyArtPrograms@gmail.com.
- **Cruise Night**  
Cruise Night will be on August 26<sup>th</sup> at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center from 5:00 p.m. until 9:00 p.m. Koney King, Get Jerked, and Fat Guys food trucks will be in attendance.

Manager Roberts also thanked the Kiwanis Club and Heavenly Purposed Ministries for dedicating a bench to Kurtis Park on Tuesday, August 9th.

Manager Roberts informed the council that school has started and we hope everyone has had a successful first week. The open gym has started and will be on Tuesdays and Thursdays. This is a reminder that all students will need theirs' school ID's to be admitted to the gym. She also reminded students to be respectful and govern themselves according to the rules. The rules for the open gym will be posted on the Town's website at [www.merrillville.in.gov](http://www.merrillville.in.gov).

Manager Roberts also informed the council that Merrillville Pop Warner begins this Sunday. If you have time, please come out and support the present/future of Merrillville.

## **GENERAL ORDERS**

### **A. Ordinances**

***First Readings: (Discussion and Roll Call Vote)***

*None*

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

#### **Ordinance 23-21 (Discussion, Public Comment, Roll Call Vote)**

An Ordinance of the Town of Merrillville, Lake County, Indiana, Authoring Additional Appropriations in the 2023 Budget.

A motion was made by Councilman Pettit to approve Ordinance 23-21, seconded by Councilwoman Uzelac

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

Motion carries by roll call vote 5-0.

### **B. Resolutions: (Discussion and Voice Vote)**

#### **Resolution 23-29 (Discussion and Voice-Vote)**

Town Of Merrillville, Indiana a Resolution of the Town of Merrillville, Lake County, Indiana, Transferring Monies of the 2023 Budget Within the Motor Vehicle Restricted Budget.

A motion was made by Councilwoman Uzelac to approve Resolution 23-29, seconded by Councilman Pettit.

No further questions or comments from the council.

Motion carries by voice vote 5-0.

### **C. American Rescue Plan**

AP Voucher Register Summary for ARP Purchases for August 22, 2023

Vice-President Hardaway informed the council that the ARP Voucher summary is \$42,367.67.

Vice-President Hardaway made a motion to approve \$42,367.67, seconded by Councilwoman Uzelac.

No further questions or comments from the council.

Motion carries by voice vote 5-0.

***D. BZA & LARGE GATHERING ACTIONS***

**Applicant:** Adam Espinoza

**Owner:** Pepe's off-Broadway

**Request:** Approval for A Large Gathering

**Purpose:** Mexican Independence Day Celebration

**Location:** 260 East 84<sup>th</sup> Drive

**Date:** September 9<sup>th</sup>, 4:30 pm – 9:30 pm

Planning and Building Director Shine elaborated on the Large Gathering Action. She also asked Mr. Adam Espinoza for clarification regarding the start time of the event.

Mr. Espinoza stated that the start time is 4:30 p.m., not 4:00 p.m.

President Bella informed the council that Mr. Espinoza does this event every year without any issues. He also stated that has no problem with approving this event, but will defer to Councilman Pettit to elaborate.

Councilman Pettit informed the council that this restaurant is in his Ward 6 and that Mr. Espinoza's parents lived in Chapel Manor for a long time.

A motion was made by Councilman Pettit to approve the Large Gathering Action, seconded by Councilwoman Neal.

President Bella informed the council that he would like to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Espinoza for staying in Merrillville and opening his business down the street when he sold his property to CVS.

No further questions or comments from the council.

Motion carries by voice vote 5-0.

***OLD BUSINESS***

**None**

***NEW BUSINESS***

- Recommendation and appointment of a New Town Representative to serve on the South Shore Visitors and Convention Authority.
  - President Bella gave an overview of Deann Patena's qualifications.
  - A motion was made by Councilman Pettit to approve the President/CEO of Crossroads Regional Chamber of Commerce Deann Patena as the Town of Merrillville representative on the South Shore Visitors and Convention Authority, seconded by Councilwoman Uzelac.
  - Councilman Pettit informed the council that in working with the Board of Directors he has worked with Deann Patena for several years on different activities and feels she will make an excellent representative.
  - President Bella informed the council that in anticipation of their approval, he did pen a letter which is included in your packets, After the approval of this recommendation, the letter will be sent over to the South Shore Visitors and Convention Authority.

No further questions or comments from the council.

Motion carries by voice vote 5-0.

***SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS***

**None**

***ANNOUNCEMENTS:***

- BZA Meeting August 23<sup>rd</sup> at 6:30 PM
- Town Council Meeting September 12th at 6:30 pm
- Town Council Executive Session on Wednesday, August 23<sup>rd</sup> at 5:30 pm.

***ADJOURNMENT:***

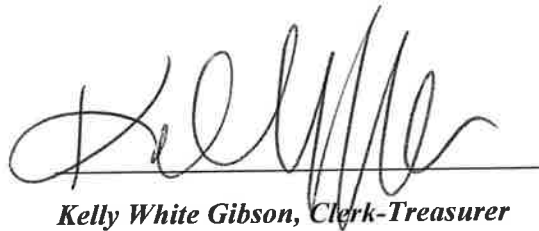
A motion and a second were made.

Motion carries by voice vote 5-0.

Meeting Adjourned.



***Rick Bella, President***



***Kelly White Gibson, Clerk-Treasurer***

***Minutes Submitted By Angela Lewis***