

Town Council Meeting Minutes 01/13/26



Town Council of Merrillville
7820 Broadway Ave - Merrillville, IN 46410
Town Council Meeting Minutes of the Regular Meeting of
January 13, 2026, 6:30 P.M.

CALL TO ORDER: President Rick Bella called the meeting to order at 6:30 P.M.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: The Pledge of Allegiance to the United States Flag was led by President Rick Bella.

INVOCATION/MOMENT OF SILENCE: A brief invocation was given, along with a moment of silence, by Pastor Dennis Walton of Faith Temple of Christ Church.

President Rick Bella announced the passing of employee Dennis J. Dobrolecki, who worked security for the Town of Merrillville.

ROLL CALL of COUNCIL: – Present at the meeting were Councilors Rhonda Neal, Shauna Haynes-Edwards, Leona Chandler-Felton, Margaret Uselac, Shawn Pettit, and Rick Bella. Acting Madam Clerk-Treasurer Joi Whiteside was present to memorialize the proceedings. A quorum was attained.

Councilor Keesha Hardaway was absent.

Attorney Svetanoff was present to provide legal advice.

PETITIONS, COMMUNICATIONS, ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS, AND REMONSTRATIONS:

- **Holiday Home Decoration Contest Winners:**

Councilor Haynes-Edwards and Media Officer Chas Reilly presented the following winners to the council and audience. For the 2025 contest, there were over 1,500 votes with no duplicates:

- **1st Place** - The Salus Family (2606 West 84th Place)
- **2nd Place** – The Cowgill Family (201 East 71st Avenue)
- **3rd Place** – The Pittman Family (405 East 78th Place)

Upon a question from President Bella regarding repeat or new winners, Media Officer Chas Reilly responded that the first-place and third-place winners are new. He also stated there were over 1,500 votes with no duplicate voting.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

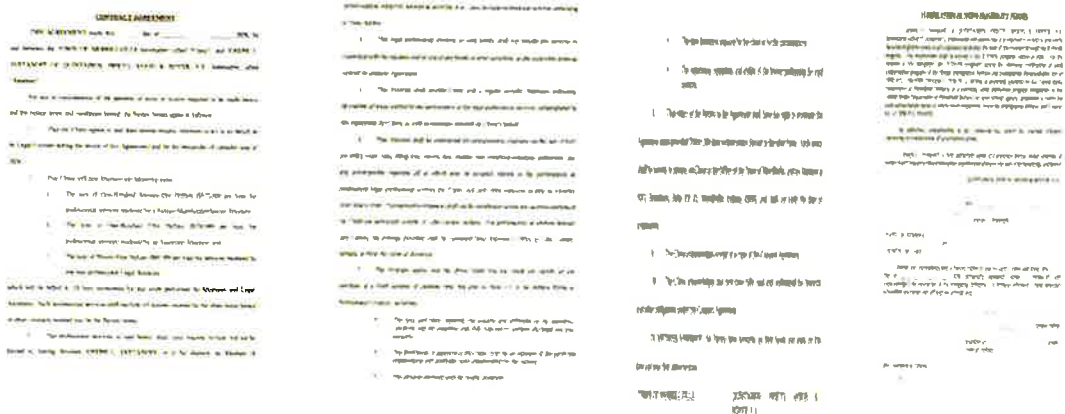
Public comments were made at the meeting regarding speculative information about an ICE Processing Center in the Town of Merrillville, data centers, leaf pickup, and power outages. A copy of the video from the Town Council Meeting held on January 13, 2026, has been uploaded to the Town's website at:

https://www.merrillville.in.gov/government/town_council/town_council_meetings.php.

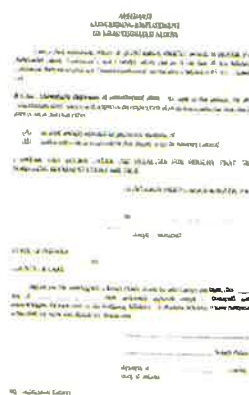
MOTIONS ON THE TABLE: NONE

CONSENT AGENDA:

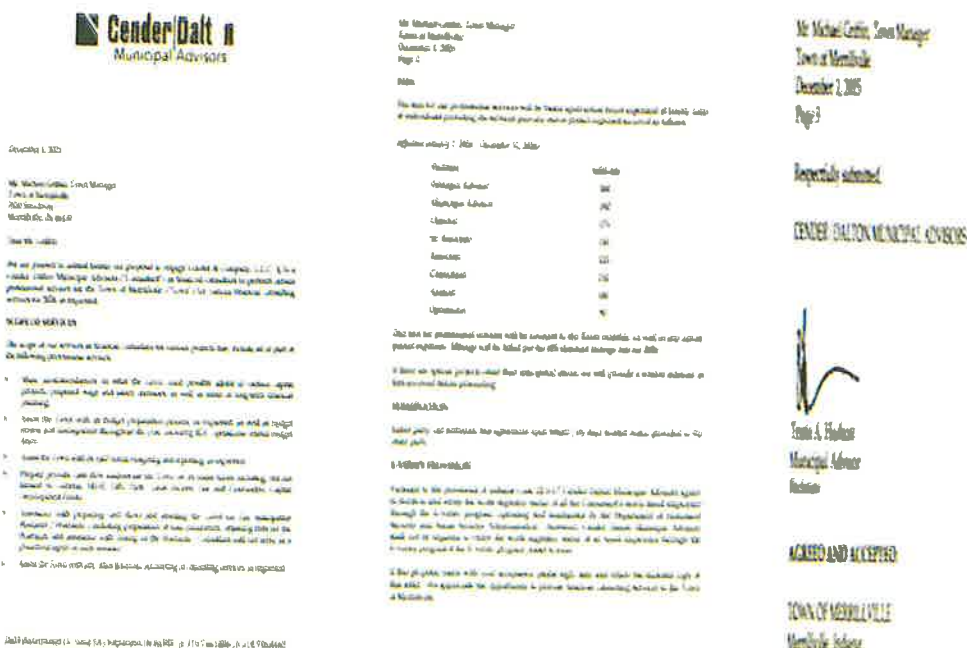
- Accounts Payable Register Voucher Approval for January 13, 2026
- ARP Accounts Payable Register Voucher Approval for January 13, 2026
- Approval of Town Council Meeting Minutes of December 23, 2025
- TC Special Meeting Minutes from December 22, 2025
- TC Special Meeting Minutes from January 5, 2026
- Letter of engagement from Attorney Svetanoff requesting to serve as Town Attorney for 2026



Town Council Meeting Minutes 01/13/26



- Letter of engagement from Cender Dalton for professional fiscal advisory services for 2026



It was moved by Councilor Uzelac and seconded by Councilor Pettit to approve the consent agenda.

Upon a voice vote, the motion passed. The consent agenda was approved.

SPECIAL ORDERS: NONE

BZA & LARGE GATHERING ACTIONS: NONE

APPOINTMENTS:

- **Executive Appointments 2026:**

- **Plan Commission:** Brian Gong (R)
- **Stormwater Management Board:** James Kendig
- **Fire Protection Territory Board:** Councilors Rhonda Neal and Keesha Hardaway
- **Redevelopment Commission:** Councilors Shawn Pettit, Margaret Uzelac, and Keesha Hardaway

President Bella reported that Councilors Leona Chandler-Felton and Shauna Haynes-Edwards are recommended as the council's selection.

It was moved by Councilor Pettit and seconded by Vice President Neal to approve the recommendations of Councilors Leona Chandler-Felton and Shauna Haynes-Edwards to the Redevelopment Commission.

Upon a voice vote, the motion passed. Councilors Leona Chandler-Felton's and Shauna Haynes-Edwards's appointments were approved for the Redevelopment Commission.

- **Economic Development Commission:** Dan C. Stevenson

Town Manager Griffin reported that Angie Chilcott must be nominated for another term as the municipal fiscal body nominee/executive appointment.

It was moved by Councilor Pettit and seconded by Councilor Uzelac to retain Angie Chilcott as the municipal fiscal body nominee/executive appointment.

Upon a voice vote, the motion passed. Angie Chilcott was approved for the municipal fiscal body nominee/executive appointment.

- **NIRPC:** Councilor Keesha Hardaway
- **Shared Ethics Entity:** Keesha Hardaway

- **Legislative Appointments 2026**

- **Plan Commission:**

President Bella reported that Councilor Shawn Pettit, Margaret Uzelac, and Leona. Chandler-Felton were the recommended appointments from the council work.

Town Council Meeting Minutes 01/13/26

It was moved by Councilor Uzelac and seconded by Vice President Neal to approve the recommendations of Councilors Shawn Pettit, Margret Uzelac, and Leona Chandler-Felton to the Plan Commission.

Upon a voice vote, the motion passed. Councilors Shawn Pettit, Margaret Uzelac, and Leona Chandler-Felton were approved for the Plan Commission appointments.

- **Board of Zoning and Appeals: Tim Fortier – Democrat**

It was moved by Councilor Pettit and seconded by Vice President Neal to approve the recommendation of Tim Fortier for another term.

Upon a voice vote, the motion passed. Tim Fortier was appointed for another term.

Town Board of Metro Police Commissioner-

President Bella reported that the Fraternal Order of Police nomination is William Polling, and the council would like to reappoint Luther Cuttino to the police commission.

It was moved by Councilor Uzelac and seconded by Councilor Chandler-Felton to approve the appointments of William Polling and Luther Cuttino.

Upon a voice vote, the motion passed. The appointments were approved.

- **Redevelopment Commission: No Changes currently.**
- **Solid Waste Management District Board of Directors (same): Councilor Rhonda Neal**

President Bella reported that Rhonda Neal is the recommended re-appointment.

It was moved by Councilor Pettit and seconded by Councilor Chandler-Felton to approve the recommendation to reappoint Councilor Rhonda Neal to the Solid Waste Management District Board of Directors.

Upon a voice vote, the motion passed. Counselor Rhonda Neal was approved for re-appointment to the Solid Waste Management District Board of Directors.

STANDING & SPECIAL COMMITTEES REPORTS:

President Bella reported that all committee assignments remain the same for the calendar year 2026.

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS:

BUDGET & FINANCE—NEAL— Vice President Neal had nothing to report.

STREET DEPARTMENT & PARK MAINTENANCE - UZELAC— Councilor Uzelac reported that she received several telephone calls regarding flooding. The Chase Creek overflowed onto the residents' property. The Conservatory helped with the drainage. Director Matthew Lake's department assisted with unclogging three sewers that were buried in three feet of water.

COUNCIL AFFAIRS—PETTIT—Councilor Pettit reported that he would meet with Town Manager Griffin and Attorney Svetanoff regarding any outstanding ordinances.

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE- HARDAWAY- Councilor Hardaway was absent.

Upon a question from President Bella regarding a report, Town Manager Griffin responded that there is nothing to report.

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS- UZELAC – Councilor Uzelac reported that she received a call regarding Creekwood Crossing lighting. Upon speaking with Kevin Markle of the Street Department, who investigated the matter, the developer never contacted NIPSCO to turn on the lights.

Director Steve King added that the developer contacted him a couple of months ago regarding the issue. All the lights had to be inspected, which was done by the inspectors. A letter was sent to Mr. Gorman of NIPSCO about a month ago regarding the inspection being completed. We are waiting for a status from NIPSCO.

PUBLIC SAFETY—HARDAWAY—Councilor Hardaway was absent.

Upon a question from President Bella regarding a report, Police Chief Nuses responded that there is nothing to report.

ELECTIONS, PUBLIC RELATIONS, & TOWN BEAUTIFICATION - NEAL- Vice President Neal had nothing to report.

Upon a question from Vice President Neal regarding the soil report for the Gateway sign, Director Steve King responded that the report is in, and the foundation for the signs has been designed. The signs will go up in the Spring.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT-PETTIT – Councilor Pettit reported that the Redevelopment Commission (RDC) meeting will be on January 27th at 6:00 p.m.

Town Council Meeting Minutes 01/13/26

When President Bella announced John Jordan as the new member for the Economic Development Committee, Councilor Pettit clarified that Katie Holderby, Chairperson of the Crossroads Chamber Board, will serve on the Economic Development Committee. John Jordan is no longer Chairperson of the Board for Crossroads Chambers.

UTILITY LIAISON –CHANDLER-FELTON – Councilor Chandler-Felton had nothing to report.

PARKS AND DEAN & BARBARA WHITE COMMUNITY CENTER - PETTIT – Councilor Pettit reported that the Park's Superintendent, Jerry McCartney, passed his certified Park and Recreation Professional exam. He also reported that the committee meeting will resume on the fourth Thursday of the month, depending on whether committee members are available.

SPECIAL COMMITTEES

ABANDONED-BLIGHTED PROPERTIES - HAYNES-EDWARDS & CHANDLER-FELTON– Councilor Haynes-Edwards had nothing to report.

SPECIAL TOWN PROJECTS – HAYNES-EDWARDS – Councilor Haynes-Edwards reported on the following event:

- **2026 Black History Celebration** - The title is 100 Years of Black History Month, Our Time, Our Town, Our History. There will be a Black History Art Exhibit held on February 25th at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center. The Merrillville Community Schools will be participating in this event. At the end of this event, we will have three scholarship winners from an essay writing contest.

SEMI-QUINCENTENNIAL COMMITTEE - HAYNES-EDWARDS – Councilor Haynes-Edwards reported that the next meeting will be held on January 28th.

DEPARTMENT & COMMISSION REPORTS:

NORTHERN INDIANA REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION-HARDAWAY – Councilor Hardaway was absent.

LAKE COUNTY SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT - NEAL - Vice President Neal reported that the next meeting will be held on January 15th at 6:00 p.m.

THE SHARED ETHICS ENTITY-HARDAWAY – Councilor Hardway was absent.

FIRE TERRITORY BOARD - NEAL & HARDAWAY – Vice President Neal had nothing to report.

CLERK-TREASURER OFFICE - JANUARY – Acting Madam Clerk-Treasurer Joi Whiteside reported the following:

- **Business Licenses** – As of January 6th, the office had 890 businesses that renewed their business licenses. 311 businesses have not been renewed currently. We encourage businesses to renew online or come into the office because late fees have started and will increase every month until March 31, 2026

STORMWATER MANAGEMENT RESOURCES-LAKE – Director Matthew Lake reported on the following updates:

- **Upgrades to the Center** – We are adding a new natural gas generator to help us in power outages, and a lift to the garage to optimize the vertical space.
- **John Deere Tiger Mower with Tiger Attachment**– We will be taking delivery of this equipment later this month.
- **Contractor's Workshop** – This workshop will be held on February 17th at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center. We are anticipating about 300 -350 people at the workshop.
- **Resolution** – The Stormwater Board passed a resolution that supports the Pilot ordinance.
- **Fee Study** – We still need some detailed AV information for our fee study.

Director Lake also informed the council that, with all the rain, only a few of the projects had minor issues, such as leaves over the drains and other minor things.

Upon a question from Councilor Uzelac regarding Hendricks Drainage Analysis being completed, Director Lake responded that he has a draft set of plans. The draft plans are under review before the project goes out for bid.

SSCVA – DEANN PATENA - No Report

DEPARTMENT REPORTS/ TOWN MANAGER:

Director Jerry McCartney – Parks and Recreation Department

Director McCartney reported on the following:

- **Youth Winter Basketball League** – Registration is still open, and the first game will be on January 17th.
- **Family Fun Days** – We had the first one on January 10th, where families did different activities at the center. The remaining days are Saturday, the 17th and 24th.
- **Black History Month Dinner** – The dinner will be held on February 28th at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center. The advance tickets are currently \$20.00. The price will increase to \$25.00 after January 16th. Councilor Haynes-Edwards added that the dress code is after 5:00 p.m. attire.

Town Council Meeting Minutes 01/13/26

Police Chief Nuses– Police Department

Police Chief Nuses reported the following:

- **Recruitment Days** – The recruitment days will be on January 17th and February 7th at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center. The recruitment days will teach potential candidates how to fill out a police application and what is expected from police work. We are in the process of accepting applications for Certified Officers until January 23rd. Our regular hiring process for officers is ongoing until February 13th.
- **Merrillville School Corporation** – A meeting was held with the school safety committee of Merrillville Community School Corporation regarding the School Safe Program.

Director Shine – Building and Planning

Director Sheila Shine had nothing to report.

Director King - Street Department

Director Steve King reported on the garbage, furniture, and mattresses issues at Wickham Town Homes.

The council, Police Chief Nuses, and Attorney Svetanoff engaged in a discussion on how to manage these ongoing problems with Wickham Town Homes and other properties.

President Bella requested that Director Steve King call NIPSCO and find out why the Town is having so many power outages and inquire about the lighting in Creekwood Crossing.

Town Manager Griffin – Town Administration

Town Manager Griffin reported on the following:

- **Monthly Reports** – Town Manager Griffin reported that his Town Manager Report has been given to the council members and Acting Madam Clerk-Treasurer Joi Whiteside.

Town Manager Griffin explained two events listed on page five of his report regarding the impact of SEA 1. The bill that has altered public finance.

GENERAL ORDERS

A. Ordinances: (Discussion and Roll Call Vote):

Zoning: (Motion to adopt or reject; confer IC 36-5-2-10(d): **NONE**

First Reading: Ordinance (Discussion and Roll Call Vote): NONE

Second Reading: (Discussion, Public Comments Only If Required & Roll Call Vote):
NONE

B. Resolutions (Discussion and Voice Vote): NONE

OLD BUSINESS: NONE

NEW BUSINESS: NONE

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

The Town Council President announced the following:

- Town Council Meeting January 27th at 6:30 pm
- Town Council Workshop Meeting January 21, 2026, at 5:00 pm
- RDC Meeting January 27, 2026, at 6:00 pm

ADJOURNMENT:

Having completed all items on the agenda, the Town Council President announced the meeting had adjourned at 7:21 p.m.


Eric O. January, Clerk-Treasurer


Rick Bella, Town Council President

Respectfully Submitted By Angela Lewis