

Town Council Meeting Minutes 01/27/26



Town Council of Merrillville
7820 Broadway Ave - Merrillville, IN 46410
Town Council Meeting Minutes of the Regular Meeting of
January 27, 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 Robert Szoke of Impact Christ Church.

ROLL CALL of COUNCIL: – Present at the meeting were Councilors Rhonda Neal, Shauna Haynes-Edwards, Margaret Uselac, Keesha Hardaway, and Rick Bella. Clerk-Treasurer Eric Treasurer was present to memorialize the proceedings. A quorum was attained.

Councilor Leona Chandler-Felton was absent at roll call.

Councilor Shawn Pettit was absent due to illness.

Attorney Svetanoff was present to provide legal advice.

Councilor Leona Chandler-Felton entered the meeting at 6.43 p.m.

PETITIONS, COMMUNICATIONS, ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS, AND REMONSTRATIONS:

- **MHS Football Team Recognition:**

Councilors Shauna Haynes-Edwards, Keesha Hardaway, and Rick Bella read the declaration into the record:



It was moved by Councilor Hardaway and seconded by Councilor Haynes-Edwards to approve the declaration.

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

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Public comments were made at the meeting regarding speculative information about an ICE Processing Center in the Town of Merrillville and Data Centers. A copy of the video from the Town Council Meeting held on January 27, 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 27, 2026.
- Approval of Town Council Meeting Minutes of January 13, 2026,

It was moved by Councilor Uzelac and seconded by Councilor Haynes-Edwards 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

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STANDING & SPECIAL COMMITTEES REPORTS:

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS:

BUDGET & FINANCE—NEAL— Vice President Neal reported that a budget meeting will be held around the first week of March. The date will be determined later.

STREET DEPARTMENT & PARK MAINTENANCE - UZELAC— Councilor Uzelac reported that the Street Department has been busy with snow removal due to severe winter weather conditions. The crew worked 16 hours this past weekend to keep the roads and streets clear. The only problem was cars not adhering to the no-parking ordinance, therefore hindering the plowing of streets. The ordinance states the following:

- **Threshold:** 2 inches or more of accumulated snow.
- **Action:** No on-street parking allowed.
- **Consequence:** Vehicles violating this ordinance will be removed from the street.
- **Goal:** To allow the Street Department to clear roads effectively.

COUNCIL AFFAIRS—PETTIT—Councilor Pettit was absent.

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE- HARDAWAY- Councilor Hardaway had nothing to report.

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS- UZELAC – Councilor Uzelac asked Director Matthew Lake of Stormwater Management to explain Trash Rack Maintenance to the council and audience.

Director Lake explained that several of the regulated drains, which are main arteries for the Town, have Trash Racks that prevent larger debris from going into the underground infrastructure when it goes from an open channel into an enclosed pipe. Periodically, the Trash Racks get clogged up with branches and debris. We maintain them to prepare for the next storm event by regular debris removal using rakes, especially after storm events, to prevent clogging and reduce flow.

Upon a question from Councilor Uzelac regarding increasing the number of Trash Racks, Director Lake responded that retrofit detention is not cheap and happens on an as needed basis. He is looking at cost estimates for several projects regarding retrofit detention.

Upon a question from Councilor Uzelac regarding hearing from the Lake County Surveyor about the Hendrick Project, Director Lake responded that he has not heard from the Surveyor, but he is reviewing draft plans from VS Engineering. Everything for this project will be shared with the Lake County Surveyor.

PUBLIC SAFETY—HARDAWAY—Councilor Hardaway reported that a committee meeting will be held after an agreed-upon date has been established.

ELECTIONS, PUBLIC RELATIONS, & TOWN BEAUTIFICATION - NEAL- Vice President Neal reported that no further updates will be given until Spring. In the Spring of 2026, the beatification and installation of the new signs will take place.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT-PETTIT – Councilor Pettit was absent.

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

PARKS AND DEAN & BARBARA WHITE COMMUNITY CENTER - PETTIT – Councilor Pettit was absent.

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** - This year black history theme is 100 Years of Black History Month, Our Time, Our Town, Our History. There will be a dinner on February 28th for people 35 years old or older at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center. The dress code is after 5:00 p.m. attire. Advance tickets are \$20.00, and the regular price of tickets will be \$25.00. The tickets are available through the mymerrillville app.

The Town of Merrillville will also have a Black History Art Exhibit on February 25th at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center, which is free to the public. The Merrillville Community Schools will be participating in this event by providing the exhibits. We will also have three scholarship winners from an essay writing contest. A private ceremony will be held for the winners.

SEMI-QUINCENTENNIAL COMMITTEE - HAYNES-EDWARDS – Councilor Haynes-Edwards reported that the meetings will be held on February 5th, March 5th, and April 8th at Town Hall, 7820 Broadway, at 5:00 pm. If residents would like to participate in this committee, attend one of the meetings, or contact Councilor Haynes-Edwards at shedwards@merrillville.in.gov.

DEPARTMENT & COMMISSION REPORTS:

NORTHERN INDIANA REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION-HARDAWAY – Councilor Hardaway reported that the next meeting will be on February 19, 2026

LAKE COUNTY SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT - NEAL - Vice President Neal reported that a meeting was held on Thursday, January 22, 2026. A lot of information was disseminated. The Household Hazardous Waste Collection has been released for 2026. A copy has been given to Media Officer Chas Reilly to post on the Town's website, mymerrillville app, and social media accounts. The first collection will be on March 21, 2026, in Crown Point, Indiana.

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The Lake County Solid Waste Management District will also have the following activities:

- Field Trips
- Environmental Mobile will be visiting schools.
- Crafting Supplies – Free crafting supplies will be given away at the location.
- The Reuse Room will be open.
- Cap-a-Thon – Caps are collected to make park benches. Toddler tables will also be made this year. A meeting was held regarding the program.

THE SHARED ETHICS ENTITY-HARDAWAY – Councilor Hardaway had nothing to report.

FIRE TERRITORY BOARD - NEAL & HARDAWAY – Councilor Hardaway reported that a meeting was held on Monday, January 26, 2026. The South Firehouse on 73rd was discussed. The Project Manager for the construction of the firehouse will be CORE Construction. Staffing the firehouse will come before the Fire Territory Board. A re-grand opening date will be set for the North Station. Budgetary items such as lights being repaired were also approved at the meeting.

CLERK-TREASURER OFFICE - JANUARY – Clerk-Treasurer Eric January reported the following for December 31, 2025:

- **Ending Balance as of December 31, 2025** (Including Funds from Court, Fire Department, General Fund, Obligated & Non-Obligated Funds, Police Department, RDA, Stormwater, etc.) - \$84,120,339.51. Of that amount, the General Fund had \$5,922,786.83 that was not obligated.
- **Number of Employees – 280**
- **Food and Beverage Tax** – The Town received another Food and Beverage Tax check for \$135,328.17, which brings the fund balance to \$2,224,286.02. These funds can be used for tourism and development.
- **Senate Bill One** – The Town is projected to lose on the high end \$831,240.00, and the low end is \$110,000.00 in revenue. Clerk-Treasurer Eric January gave a synopsis of the effects of Senate Bill 1 and how to reduce the deficit for the Town of Merrillville that will be shared with the public later.

Upon a question from Councilor Uzelac regarding the projections, Clerk-Treasurer Eric January responded that the projections came from the Legislative Services Administration.

SSCVA – DEANN PATENA - No Report

DEPARTMENT REPORTS/ TOWN MANAGER:

Assistant Director Lisa Roberts – Parks and Recreation Department

Assistant Director Lisa Roberts reported on the following:

- **Youth Winter Basketball League** – Saturdays from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
- **Line Dancing** – Wednesday from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
- **Breakfast Bingo** – Tuesdays

- **NIPSCO** – The power was restored to the area, Erie Lackawanna Trail, and the lights have been installed.
- **Black History Month Dinner** – The dinner will be held on February 28th at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center. The tickets can be purchased through the rec desk.
- **Pipe** – The leaking pipe on the walking track has been repaired, and the track is now open.
- **Royal Heartland Cheer Competition** – The competition will be on Saturday, January 31, 2025. This is our 5th year hosting this competition at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center. The tickets are \$25.00 at the door. The center will be closed to the public for this event.
- **We Are Merrillville Wall** – The wall contains positive comments from people who visit the Community Center. You can post positive comments on the wall or take one of the comments posted.

Director Matthew Lake – Stormwater Management

Director Matthew Lake reported on the following:

- **Updating Stormwater Infrastructure Mapping** – We are taking all the as-builts from newer development, all their CAD files, and converting them into an ArcGIS file to be blended into our master files for our GIS system.
- **Engineer Estimates** – We are currently reviewing engineers' estimates on current projects and doing value engineering, which reduces the cost of the projects. The Independence Hill Third Addition Project was reduced by \$600,000.00; it may be \$1,000,000.00, which is about a third of the price of the original engineering.
- **FEMA CRS** – We have been automatically renewed, which reduces the residents' flood insurance rate by 10%.
- **MS4N Reports** – The reports are in progress for Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDM) compliance.
- **Little Calumet River Basin** – We are going to submit grant applications to get a 50% cost share on some of the projects for the Town of Merrillville.
- **Request for Bids** – We release a request for bids for detention pond maintenance. The requests were sent to more than ten contractors. The proposals are due back on February 13th.

Police Chief Nuses– Police Department

Police Chief Nuses reported the following statistics for December 2025:

- **Calls for Service** – 2,450, which resulted in 3,912 officers' responses.
- **Adult Arrest** – 77
- **Juvenile Arrest** – 1
- **Traffic Stops** – 285, which resulted in under 300 tickets and 214 warnings.
- **Recruitment** – The Merrillville Police Department is still hiring new police officers. The next recruitment day will be on February 7th at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center from 9:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. The recruitment days will teach potential candidates how to fill out a police application and what is expected from police work. Applications will be accepted until February 13, 2026.

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- **Traffic Unit Role**– The two officers' traffic unit is a dedicated unit to enhance road safety, reduce traffic collision and manage traffic flow through enforcement and education in the Town of Merrillville.

Director Shine – Building and Planning

Director Sheila Shine reported the following:

- **Contractor License Renewals** – Over 1,700 contractors have renewed their licenses. The renewal process is almost complete.
- **2026 Goals** – The goals for the Building and Planning Department are being established.
- **Plans** – The department is still uploading all the plans into Permitrax to reduce paper, and we are looking forward to the Summer 2026 construction season.

Director King - Street Department

Director Steve King was absent.

Town Manager Griffin – Town Administration

Town Manager Griffin reported on the following:

- **Monthly Reports** – Town Manager Griffin reported that the monthly report from Department Heads has been given to the council members, Town Attorney, and Clerk-Treasurer Eric January.

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):

Resolution 26-01 (Discussion & Roll Call Vote)

A Resolution of the Town Council Authorizing and Approving a transfer of Property from the Town of Merrillville to the Lake County Parks and Recreation Department pursuant to IC 36-1-11-88.

Town of Merrillville
Town Council Resolution No. 26-01

A Resolution of the Town Council Authorizing and Approving a Transfer of Property from the Town of Merrillville to the Lake County Parks and Recreation Department, pursuant to IC 36-1-11-8.

Whereas, Indiana Code 36-1-11 et seq. generally governs the disposal of real property by municipal governments;

Whereas, IC 36-1-11-8 authorizes a transfer of real property with a governmental entity upon terms and conditions agreed upon by the governmental entities, provided the property body of each entity adopts substantially identical resolutions;

Whereas, IC 36-1-11-9 further provides that such transfers may be for any amount of real property, cash or other personal property as agreed upon by the entities;

Whereas, The Town Council of the Town of Merrillville, is the municipal legislative body, pursuant to IC 36-1-2-9(5) the municipal fiscal body pursuant to IC 36-1-2-6(4), the municipal works board, pursuant to IC 36-1-2-24(3), and pursuant to IC 36-3-2-9(2) it may hold and convey any interest in property;

Whereas, The Lake County Park and Recreation Board is the governing and administrative body of the Lake County Parks and Recreation Department, pursuant to IC 36-19-3 et seq., and may acquire and dispose of real property under IC 36-10-3-1(a)(4);

Whereas, The Town of Merrillville and the Lake County Parks and Recreation Department have identified a real estate parcel, owned by the Town of Merrillville, but adjacent to an existing 613 acre Lake County Park preserve, that the Lake County Parks and Recreation Department is interested in acquiring and that the Town of Merrillville is interested in conveying; and,

Whereas, The governmental entities identified herein now desire to take the steps necessary and desirable to allow the transfer of the property herein identified from the Town of Merrillville to the Lake County Parks and Recreation Department for the Lake County Park Preserve on terms agreeable to the entities all pursuant to IC 36-1-11-8;

Now Therefore, be it hereby resolved by the Town Council of the Town of Merrillville, Lake County, Indiana as follows:

Section 1. That the Town Council of the Town of Merrillville, now hereby makes the following findings and determinations:

A. That the Town of Merrillville, through its works board, owns a property, identified as follows:

- a. Site address 9140 VIGO APPR ST, CROWN POINT IN
- b. Parcel ID No.45-13-28-451-009 000-030
- c. Acreage 11.099792
- d. Sec. Twp. Rng: 28 35 N 07W

B. That property herein identified is primarily wetland, containing some high quality flora and fauna.

C. That the property herein possesses no developmental utility and would be of higher public benefit and utility as to land use if it is formally adjoined to the existing 613 acres Lake County Park Preserve, to which it is contiguous.

D. That the Town of Merrillville through its Town Council, wishes to transfer the property herein identified to the Lake County Parks and Recreation Department, according to the terms of this resolution.

E. That the Lake County Parks and Recreation Department through its Lake County Park and Recreation Board, wishes to accept the property herein identified, as transferred from the Town of Merrillville through its Town Council, acting as the works board, according to the terms of this resolution.

F. That the transfer of the property herein from the Town of Merrillville to the Lake County Parks and Recreation Department is a desirable measure serving a lawful public good and public utility;

Section 2. That the transfer of the property identified herein from the Town of Merrillville by its Town Council acting as the works board, to the Lake County Parks and Recreation Department by its Park

and Recreation Board, for a purchase price of five dollars (\$5) and other good and valuable consideration is authorized and approved.

Section 3. That this transfer is not perfected or completed unless and until the Lake County Park and Recreation Board passes and adopts a substantially identical resolution to this one, pursuant to IC 36-1-11-8 and IC 36-10-3-1(a)(4);

Section 4. That the proper officers of the Town of Merrillville are hereby authorized to take all lawful and necessary measures to carryout the transfer of this property, including the payment of the approved purchase fee in advance of board allowance, pursuant to the authority set forth in Section 3.10-10-1(A) (2) (b) of the Merrillville Municipal Code.

Duly, Resolved, Passed and Adopted by the Town Council of the Town of Merrillville, Lake County, Indiana this ____ day of _____ 2026.

TOWN COUNCIL of the TOWN of
MERRILLVILLE, INDIANA

Exhibit

Parcel Identification Number : 45-13-28-451-009.000-030
Owner : Town of Merrillville
Site Address : 9140 VIGO APPR ST CROWN POINT IN 46307
Mailing Address : 7820 Broadway Merrillville IN 46410
Tax Code : 030
Tax Description : Merrillville
Property Class : Exempt Municipality
Acreage : 11.099792
Sec Twp Rng : 28 35N 07W



President Bella informed the council that, due to Councilor Pettit being ill and the property being in his district, Councilor Pettit requested that the resolution be tabled until the next council meeting.

It was moved by Councilor Uzelac and seconded by Vice President Neal to table Resolution 26-01.

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Upon a voice vote, the motion passed. The resolution was tabled until the next council meeting.

Resolution 26-02 (Discussion & Roll Call Vote)

A Resolution of the Town of Merrillville, Lake County, Indiana, Opposing the Locating of a United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement Processing or Detention Facility in the Warehouses with the Town of Merrillville.

Clerk-Treasurer Eric January read into the record Resolution 26-02:



**RESOLUTION No 26-02
of the
TOWN of MERRILLVILLE, INDIANA**

A RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN COUNCIL OF THE TOWN OF MERRILLVILLE, LAKE COUNTY, INDIANA, OPPOSING THE LOCATING OF A UNITED STATES IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT PROCESSING OR DETENTION FACILITY IN WAREHOUSES WITHIN THE TOWN OF MERRILLVILLE

WHEREAS, on December 24, 2025, the Washington Post published an article in which it was indicated that the federal government produced a draft resolution that may seek private detention contractors for the conversion and use of industrial warehouses to process and detain U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement detainees; and

WHEREAS, according to the Washington Post article, the Town of Merrillville was identified as a potential municipality wherein there may be a plan to convert an industrial warehouse or warehouses into a detainee processing facility having at least 500 beds; and

WHEREAS, neither the town of Merrillville nor its officials have been informed, apprised, notified, required or solicited by the federal government for the placement of such a facility within the town of Merrillville; and

WHEREAS, given the lack of any communication or contact regarding the realistic potential of a plan to convert an industrial warehouse or warehouses into a detainee processing facility within the town, it is impossible for the Town Council to make informed policy decisions; and

WHEREAS, the prior approvals of the existing industrial warehouses within the town were in part, based upon the limited demand such facilities have for water and sewer and upon other public resources and services; and

WHEREAS, the town of Merrillville is committed to adhering to the laws of the State of Indiana and the town's ordinances, as well as those governing local planning and zoning; and

WHEREAS, the conversion of industrial warehouses within the town would place unanticipated demands upon the town's water, sewer, public safety services and other public resources in structures and areas not intended for human occupancy; and

WHEREAS, it is a primary objective of the Town of Merrillville to ensure the public safety and welfare of its residents, business community and visitors to the town; and

WHEREAS, it is the position of the Town Council of the Town of Merrillville that the Town of Merrillville is not an appropriate municipality for the placement of a detainee processing facility;

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8620 Broadway Merrillville IN 46410 merrillville.in.gov 219-769-5711 x303

WHEREAS, the Town of Merrillville and its police department have had longstanding important collaborative relationships with county, state, and federal law enforcement partners that rely on communication between the agencies to best protect the officers, agents and the public while performing their duties.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Town Council of the Town of Merrillville, Lake County, Indiana, as follows:

SECTION ONE: That the Town Council hereby unequivocally opposes the conversion of existing industrial warehouses within the town for the creation of a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement processing facility, or any other facility that disregards the town's land use and regulatory ordinances and creates unanticipated burdens upon the town's infrastructure, resources and services.

SECTION TWO: That if any section, clause, provision or portion of this Resolution shall be held to be invalid or unconstitutional by any Court of competent jurisdiction, such decision shall not affect any other section, clause, provision or portion of this Resolution.

SECTION THREE: That all existing Resolutions, or parts thereof, in conflict with the provisions of this Resolution, are hereby deemed null, void, and of no legal effect, and are specifically repealed.

SECTION FOUR: That this Resolution shall take effect and be in full force and effect from and after its passage and adoption by the Town Council.

Duly Resolved and Adopted this 27th day of January 2026, by the Town Council of the Town of Merrillville, Lake County, Indiana.

TOWN COUNCIL of the TOWN of
MERRILLVILLE, INDIANA

It was moved by Councilor Haynes-Edwards and seconded by Councilor Uzelac to approve Resolution 26-02.

Attorney Svetanoff stated the resolution sums up the position of the adequately and with full force. The Town Council will also be contacting the congressman's office to find out what the congressman is doing to make sure that this problem is addressed fully, not only here, but in Washington.

President Bella read Councilor Pettit's statement into the record.

As Ward 6 Councilman and Chairman of the Redevelopment Commission, I strongly oppose the establishment of an ICE processing or detention facility in Merrillville. This is not the vision I have for our industrial areas or for any part of our great town. When Merrillville provides incentives to support industrial development, it is with the clear expectation of job creation, economic growth, and meaningful benefits for our residents. A detention or processing facility delivers none of these. Instead, it represents a negative use that goes against economic development. Such a facility is unacceptable in any warehouse within our community and is especially inappropriate when proposed within a few hundred feet of a residential neighborhood.

Upon a roll call vote, there were six affirmatives and no negatives. Councilors Rhonda Neal, Shauna Haynes-Edwards, Leona Chandler-Felton, Margaret Uzelac, Keesha Hardaway, and Rick Bella voted in the affirmative. There were no negatives. The motion passed. The resolution was approved.

OLD BUSINESS: *NONE*

NEW BUSINESS: *NONE*

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

The Town Council President announced the following:

- Town Council Meeting February 10, 2026, at 6:30 p.m.
- Town Council Workshop Meeting February 18, 2026, at 5:00 p.m.
- RDC Meeting February 24th at 6:00 p.m.
- Town Council Meeting, February 24th at 6:30 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT:

Having completed all items on the agenda, the Town Council President announced the meeting had adjourned at 7:58 p.m.



Eric O. January, Clerk-Treasurer


Rick Bella, Town Council President

Respectfully Submitted By Angela Lewis