



Town Council of Merrillville
7820 Broadway Ave - Merrillville, IN 46410
Town Council Meeting Minutes of the Regular Meeting of
August 25, 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 Christian Church.

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

Town Attorney Joseph Svetanoff was present to provide legal advice.

PETITIONS, COMMUNICATIONS, ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS, AND REMONSTRATIONS:

- **Swearing in of the New Police Officer Edgar Favela:**

Police Chief Nuses expounded on Officer Favela's experience and qualifications. Clerk-Treasurer Eric January administered the oath.

In response to a question from President Bella regarding vacancies in the Merrillville Police Department, Police Chief Nuses responded that there are two or three vacancies.

- **Statement from the Town Council President Rick Bella Regarding the August 11th Storm, the Town's Response, and Recovery:**

President Rick Betta's Statement — August 25, 2026, Town Council Meeting

Before we begin tonight's meeting, I want to take a moment to recognize the extraordinary weather event that affected Merrillville and communities throughout Northwest Indiana on August 11.

What we experienced was not simply a severe thunderstorm. It was what is known as a derecho — a widespread, long-lived windstorm associated with a fast-moving line of severe thunderstorms. Sometimes called an "inland hurricane," a derecho can produce destructive straight-line winds of 58 miles per hour or greater, with some gusts exceeding 100 miles per hour, across a path hundreds of miles long.

This certainly puts August 11 into perspective.

Here in Merrillville, we experienced widespread power outages, downed trees and utility lines, blocked roadways, property damage, flooding and thousands of disruption to our residents and businesses.

Our police officers, firefighters, public works employees, emergency management personnel, utility crews, the crews and countless volunteers worked around the clock to help our community recover.

Thank you to everyone who stepped up.

And thank you to the residents who checked on neighbors, helped clear debris and simply helped one another. That is what a strong community does.

Events like this remind us that while we cannot control the weather, we can control how we respond to it.

Was our response perfect? Of course not. How could it be under circumstances like these?

But I believe we demonstrated that Merrillville was prepared, that our people responded and that our community came together.

I also want to thank my fellow Town Council members.

Our communication with one another and with our department heads kept us informed about what was happening, where it was happening and what was coming next. That allowed each of us to better serve our constituents and share information throughout our district.

I was also impressed by the ideas and willingness of everyone to help. Thank you for the teamwork.

And, of course, we helped some.

Of course, cleanup starts continue.

Of course, some residents and businesses are still waiting for power to be restored.

Of course, there is outside town restoration work that needs to be completed.

And of course, we understand how frustrating it is to be without power and waiting for life to return to normal.

During the August 11 event, every member of this Council lost power. Some got it back sooner than others. And even today, some of our residents are still waiting.

And then there is another important part of this story.

Of course, we were still recovering from the June 11 tornadoes when August 11 happened.

Some residents had just begun rebuilding their homes and businesses when another devastating storm hit.

We know what that means to those families, and we feel for them.

And, of course, we will learn from these events.

We will be working on the cleanup and the power restoration. We will be working on the cleanup and the power restoration. We will be working on the cleanup and the power restoration.

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PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Several public comments were made regarding the Law Suite, Data Centers' Generators, NIPSCO Power Outages, Donations, Community Needs. Communication between Residents and Town Council Members, Trees, Speeding, Railroad Tracks, and Easements. The video of the Town Council Meeting held on August 25, 2026, can be viewed here:

<https://www.merrillville.in.gov/our-government/meeting-calendar-minutes-and-video>

MOTIONS ON THE TABLE: NONE

CONSENT AGENDA:

- Accounts Payable Register Voucher Approval for August 25, 2026.
- Approval of "Special" Town Council Meeting Minutes of August 18, 2026.

It was moved by Councilor Pettit 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

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS:

BUDGET & FINANCE—NEAL— Vice President Neal reported that the committee met on Monday, August 17th, and the next meeting will be in September.

STREET DEPARTMENT & PARK MAINTENANCE - UZELAC— Councilor Uzelac reported that the Street Department started on the curb cuts on Whitcomb Street. The paving will soon start on Whitcomb Street.

COUNCIL AFFAIRS—PETTIT—Councilor Pettit reported that he has set a Council Affairs meeting for Tuesday, September 1, 2026 at 5:00 p.m. before the Plan Commission Workshop.

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE- HARDAWAY- Councilor Hardaway reported that employment opportunities for the Street (until the positions are filled) and Park Departments (until September 1st) are posted on the Town's website at <https://www.merrillville.in.gov/our-government/job-opportunities/> and on the mymerrillville app (Apple and Google Play Stores). If anyone is interested and has the qualifications, please do not hesitate to apply.

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS- UZELAC – Councilor Uzelac reported that Pastor Dennis Walton of Faith Temple of Christ Church has been helping with the recovery effort from the August 11th storm in partnership with Eight Days of Hope in Ward 4 and Gary, Indiana.

PUBLIC SAFETY—HARDAWAY—Councilor Hardway reported that a meeting will be held at a later date regarding the disasters of June 11th and August 11th. The committee will concentrate on shoring up the Town of Merrillville Emergency Preparedness Plan.

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

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT-PETTIT – Councilor Pettit had nothing to report.

UTILITY LIAISON –CHANDLER-FELTON – Councilor Chandler-Felton reported that NIPSCO is operating in Emergency Status Mode until August 28th. As of tonight's meeting, we still have 35 residents without power, down from 30,000.

PARKS AND DEAN & BARBARA WHITE COMMUNITY CENTER - PETTIT – Councilor Pettit reported that the regular committee meeting will be held on Thursday, August 27, 2026 at 5:00 p.m. Councilor Pettit will work with Town Manager Griffin on the meeting agenda to discuss the park's budget and open positions in the Parks Department.

SPECIAL COMMITTEES

ABANDONED-BLIGHTED PROPERTIES - HAYNES-EDWARDS & CHANDLER-FELTON – Councilor Haynes-Edwards reported that due to the storms of June 11th and

August 11th, there are a lot of blighted properties. The disaster recovery teams have been out helping with trees and debris removal.

Councilor Haynes-Edwards also impressed upon residents to make sure the branches and trees are on the curb. If anyone needs help moving the debris to the curb, please contact 8 Days of Hope, Team Rubicon, or 211. The contact information is online.

SPECIAL TOWN PROJECTS – HAYNES-EDWARDS – Councilor Haynes-Edwards had nothing to report.

SEMI-QUINCENTENNIAL COMMITTEE - HAYNES-EDWARDS – Councilor Haynes-Edwards reported that the activities that were cancelled due to the storm on July 4th will be rescheduled for another day after recovery from the August 11th storm.

DEPARTMENT & COMMISSION REPORTS:

NORTHERN INDIANA REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION-HARDAWAY – Councilor Hardaway reported that the next meeting will be held in November to discuss the 2027 budget.

LAKE COUNTY SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT – NEAL - Vice President Neal reported that there are only two more months remaining, September and October, for the Lake County Solid Waste Management (LCSWM) Household Hazardous Waste Collection. The next one is September 12th at Hammond Public Works from 9:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. Paper shredding will be available at this location for up to four paper grocery bags of paper materials.

Councilor Neal also stated that the next meeting is on September 17th.

THE SHARED ETHICS ENTITY-HARDAWAY – Councilor Hardaway reported that the Shared Ethics Entity meets only when necessary. There is no monthly or quarterly standing meeting.

Councilor Hardaway also announced that the Northern Indiana Regional Planning Commission meeting is quarterly, not monthly.

FIRE TERRITORY BOARD - NEAL & HARDAWAY – Councilor Hardaway reported that the Fire Territory Board is not a standing meeting. The board meets when necessary.

In response to a question from President Bella regarding an update on the construction of the new Fire Station 73 on 9189 Colorado Street, Councilor Pettit responded to the question about an incident that happened to the workers at the site due to the storm.

CLERK-TREASURER OFFICE - JANUARY – Clerk-Treasurer Eric January reported on the following:

- **Food and Beverage Tax** – Since the last meeting, the Town received two more checks that totaled \$307,520.00, which brings the fund total to \$2,158,229.93
- **Town Combined Funds** - \$75,102,371.70. It may look like a lot of money, but the majority of the funds are obligated. We have approximately \$12,000,000.00 in annual debt payments that we pay every year. We have sixteen different obligations that the Town currently has in debt. If we included all properly, it would be \$95,409,020.76. \$3,082,557.75 will retire within two years. \$1,200,000.00 will be retired in January 2027.
- **Land** – The Town has land value over \$10,000,000.00.
- **Artwork** – The Town has artwork valued at \$135,00.00

Clerk-Treasurer Eric January added that the Town will be losing over \$2,700,000.00 over the next two years, and we have to make it past that period. He also thanked everyone involved in the Community Meal preparation and distribution held at Town Hall on Friday, August 21st.

SSCVA – DEANN PATENA - No Report

DEPARTMENT REPORTS/ TOWN MANAGER:

Superintendent Jerry McCartney – Parks and Recreation

Superintendent Jerry McCartney reported the following updates regarding the D&BWCC:

- **Sunset Market** – Thursday, August 27th from 4:00 p.m. until 9:00 p.m. There will be food truck vendors, merchant vendors, yard games, and live Karaoke at this community event.
- **Erie Lackawanna Bike Trail** – Cameras are installed and fully functional in the tunnel. Lights have also been installed. We are going to cover the graffiti and coat it once the mural is completed in the tunnel.
- **Parks Maintenance Manager** – We conducted interviews for the Parks Maintenance Manager position and hope to add the person to our crew by next week

Superintendent McCartney updated the council on other activities regarding the Parks and Recreation Department.

Director Matthew Lake – Stormwater Management

Director Matthew Lake reported on activities at Stormwater Management:

- **97th and Grand** – The culvert has been installed and will fill the existing one to keep it in place.
- **Large Projects**– We are looking to break up some of the larger projects into smaller critical projects because they involve public safety.
- **Ordinance** – We have an ordinance on tonight's agenda for fee adjustment.

Director Lake updated the council on several other projects.

Police Chief Nuses– Police Department

Chief Nuses reported that the renovation has started at the Police Department, and staff has been moved to the following location:

:

- **Records Department** – 5750 Tyler Street. You have to pick up police reports or anything of that nature at this location.
- **Telephone Number** – Emergency Calls 911 and Non-Emergency Calls (219) 660-0001

Chief Nuses also stated that officers are still patrolling and available when a call is made.

Chief Nuses also reported on the storm recovery from August 11th and how unsavory characters are trying to take advantage of the victims. He stated that residents having any work done on their property need to make sure the contractor has a permit from the Town of Merrillville for tree cutting, roofing, and any other repairs. Residents can contact the Planning and Building Department at (219) 769-3631 to check the status of a contractor.

President Bella informed the council and audience that Public Safety was a must during the times when the streets were pitch black, and the Merrillville Police were patrolling the areas. He thanked them for their dedication to public safety.

Director Shine – Planning and Building

Director Shine was absent.

Town Manager Griffin – Town Administration

Town Manager Griffin reported on the following:

- **Monthly Reports** – Town Manager Griffin reported that the Department Heads' report compiled by Linda Rosas has been given to the council members 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):

Ordinance 26-22 (Discussion & Roll Call Vote)

An Ordinance of the Town of Merrillville, Lake County, Indiana, Amending Stormwater Utility User Fees and Policies for the Town of Merrillville, Indiana.

SECTION TEN: Revised Cumulative Ordinances. All existing Town of Merrillville Ordinances, or parts thereof, in conflict with the provisions of this Ordinance, are hereby rendered null, void and of no legal effect, and are specifically repealed.

SECTION ELEVEN: Passage. This Ordinance shall take effect, and be in full force and effect, from and after its passage by the Town Council of the Town of Merrillville, Lake County, Indiana.

ADOPTED AND ORDAINED THIS DAY OF _____, 2026.

TOWN OF MERRILLVILLE TOWN COUNCIL

SECTION ONE: Purpose and Intent. The purpose of this Ordinance is to amend the Stormwater Utility User Fees and Policies for the Town of Merrillville, Indiana, to ensure that the fees are fair and equitable and that the policies are consistent with the Town's goals and objectives.

SECTION TWO: Definitions. The following definitions shall apply to this Ordinance:

- Stormwater Utility User Fee:** A fee levied on property owners for the collection and treatment of stormwater.
- Stormwater Treatment Facility:** A facility designed to treat stormwater before it is discharged into a water body.
- Stormwater Management Plan:** A plan developed by a property owner to manage stormwater on their property.

SECTION THREE: Stormwater Utility User Fees. The Stormwater Utility User Fee shall be levied on property owners at the following rates:

Property Type	Fee Rate
Single-Family Residential	\$100.00
Multi-Family Residential	\$200.00
Commercial	\$500.00
Industrial	\$1,000.00

SECTION FOUR: Stormwater Policies. The following policies shall apply to this Ordinance:

- Stormwater Management Plan:** Property owners with commercial or industrial properties shall be required to develop and submit a Stormwater Management Plan to the Town of Merrillville.
- Stormwater Treatment Facility:** Property owners with commercial or industrial properties shall be required to install and maintain a Stormwater Treatment Facility.
- Stormwater Discharge:** Property owners shall not discharge stormwater into a water body without a permit from the Town of Merrillville.

SECTION FIVE: Enforcement. The Town of Merrillville shall enforce the provisions of this Ordinance through its Stormwater Department.

SECTION SIX: Severability. If any provision of this Ordinance is found to be invalid, the remaining provisions shall remain in effect.

SECTION SEVEN: Repeal. This Ordinance shall repeal any and all existing ordinances that conflict with its provisions.

SECTION EIGHT: Effective Date. This Ordinance shall take effect on the date of its adoption by the Town Council.

SECTION NINE: Title. The title of this Ordinance shall be "An Ordinance of the Town of Merrillville, Lake County, Indiana, Amending Stormwater Utility User Fees and Policies for the Town of Merrillville, Indiana."

Town Manager Griffin explained the ordinance and informed the council that, with their permission, the ordinance would be amended to prepare it for codification. He would like permission from the council to work with Town Attorney Svetanoff and Mr. Meyer. We will take the adopted ordinance and sequence it in such a way that it will instruct our codifier so that it can be submitted by the Clerk-Treasurer's Office.

It was moved by Vice President Neal and seconded by Councilor Haynes-Edwards to approve Ordinance 26-22 on the second and final reading.

Upon a roll call vote, there were seven affirmatives and no negatives. Councilors Neal, Haynes-Edwards, Chandler-Felton, Uzelac, Pettit, Hardaway, and Bella voted in the affirmative. There were no negatives. The motion passed. The ordinance was approved on the second and final reading.

Resolutions (Discussion and Voice Vote):

Resolution 26-44 (Discussion & Voice Vote)

An Exigent Resolution Providing for the Transfer of Appropriation Balances from and Among Major Budget Classifications in the Municipal Cumulative Capital Development Fund as Requested by The Proper Officer and Forwarded to the Town Council for Its Action Pursuant to I.C. 6-1.1-18-6.

**RESOLUTION No. 26-44
TOWN OF MERRILLVILLE, INDIANA**

AN EXIGENT RESOLUTION PROVIDING for the TRANSFER of APPROPRIATION BALANCES from and AMONG MAJOR BUDGET CLASSIFICATIONS in the MUNICIPAL CUMULATIVE CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT FUND as REQUESTED BY THE PROPER OFFICER AND FORWARDED to the TOWN COUNCIL for its ACTION PURSUANT TO I.C. 6-1.1-18-6.

WHEREAS, It has been determined that certain exigent conditions have developed since adoption of the original budget and it is now necessary to transfer certain appropriations into different categories than were initially appropriated for the various accounts the Municipal Cumulative Capital Development Fund;

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

Section 1. That for the expenses of said municipality, the following appropriations are hereby transferred and set apart out of the funds hereinafter named for the purposes specified, subject to the laws governing the same, such sums herein transferred unless otherwise stipulated by law;

Section 2. It has been shown that certain existing unobligated appropriations of the MUNICIPAL CUMULATIVE CAPITAL FUN, which are not needed at this time for the purposes for which originally appropriated, and may be transferred to a newly authorized category of appropriation in order to satisfy an existing need and further that a new as follows:

Decreases:	
4402010453 -- CCD/Other Equip	<u>\$ 119,000.00</u>
Total Decreases:	\$ 119,000.00
Increases:	
4402010394.006 -- CCD/Contractual Services	<u>\$ 119,000.00</u>
Total Increases:	\$ 119,000.00

Section 3. That the Clerk-Treasurer shall take steps needed to execute the changes set forth in this appropriation transfer resolution as this change to the budget.

DULY RESOLVED and ADOPTED by the TOWN COUNCIL of the TOWN of MERRILLVILLE, LAKE COUNTY, INDIANA, this 25th day of AUGUST 2026.d

**TOWN COUNCIL of the TOWN of
MERRILLVILLE, INDIANA**

It was moved by Councilor Haynes-Edwards and seconded by Vice President Neal to approve Resolution 26-44.

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

Resolution 26-45 (Discussion & Voice Vote:
Disaster extension resolution.

TOWN of MERRILLVILLE
TOWN COUNCIL/WORKS BOARD
RESOLUTION No. 26-45
DECLARATION of the MUNICIPAL LEGISLATIVE BODY

FINDING, DETERMINING AND FURTHER EXTENDING AND EMERGENCY PROCLAMATION OF THE MUNICIPAL EXECUTIVE AS WELL AS OF THE TOWN COUNCIL AND TO PERMIT FUNDING BY THE MUNICIPAL CUMULATIVE CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT FUND, PURSUANT TO IC 10-14-3-29 AND IC 36-9-15.5-8(c).

Whereas, From time-to-time circumstances exist such that an exigency occurs that could not reasonably be foreseen and that threatens the public health, welfare, or safety and requires immediate action; and

Whereas, The Town of Merrillville, through its Town Council President, as the principal executive officer did previously to issue a finding and determination that an emergency exists sufficient to support the declaration of a *Local Disaster Emergency*, dated August 11, 2026, all pursuant to IC 10-14-3-29, as regards the Tornado related weather incident of August 11, 2026;

Whereas, IC 10-14-3-29 limits the period of an emergency proclamation of the Executive to seven days, unless extended by action of the Legislative body, which was taken at special meeting of August 18, 2026, included in Resolution No. 26-43, at which the emergency was extended until August 25, 2026;

Whereas, The Legislative Body desires to further extend the emergency period for the limited purpose of addressing the damaged trees and branches located in easements and public ways, that require further trimming to mitigate the risk of harm; and

Whereas, There were certain costs incurred in connection with the response to the correcting damages which were incurred in consequence of the emergency and weather incident of August 11, 2026, as well as the costs of response and recovery, the Town desires to use resources on deposit to the credit of the Municipal Cumulative Capital Development Fund, pursuant to IC 36-9-15.5-8(c) to support some of the costs associated with the disaster costs,

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

Section 1. That the Executive Emergency Proclamation issued by the Town Council President pursuant to IC 10-14-3-29, in which he determined

and proclaimed that there existed a local disaster emergency in the Town of Merrillville, Lake County, Indiana, to be continued for a period not to exceed seven (7) days from the date of its entry, is hereby further reaffirmed, approved and extended beyond the seven-day limitation as follows, in the following seven-day or less day's increments, including those approved in Resolution 26-43:

August 12, to August 18, 2026;
August 19, 2026, to August 25, 2026;
August 26, 2026, through September 1, 2026;
September 2, 2026, through September 8, 2026;
September 9, 2026, through September 15, 2026;
September 16, 2026, through September 22, 2026;
September 23, 2026, through September 29, 2026 and
September 30, 2026.

Section 2. That having affirmed and extended the Town Council President's original Emergency Proclamation, finding that the public health, welfare, or safety is in exigent danger such that it requires the expenditure of money in the Municipal Cumulative Capital Development Fund, and such other funds as may be required, provided such expenditure shall be for purposes to protect the public health, welfare, or safety in this emergency situation that demands immediate action, it is hereby authorized and approved for the expenditure of resources from the fund for costs associated with the August 11, 2026 incident, pursuant and IC 36-9-15.5-8(c).

DELY PASSED AND ADOPTED pursuant to and under the authority of IC 10-14-3-29. Entered this 25th day of August 2026 by the Town Council of the Town of Merrillville, Lake County, Indiana.

TOWN COUNCIL, acting as the
WORKS BOARD of the TOWN of
MERRILLVILLE, INDIANA

It was moved by Councilor Uzelac, and seconded by Councilor Chandler-Felton, to approve Resolution 26-45.

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

The Town Council President announced the following:

- Town Council Meeting September 8, 2026, at 6:30 p.m.
- Councilor Haynes-Edwards thanked everyone involved in the Town of Merrillville Recovery efforts, especially the Town Council of Merrillville, Merrillville Police Department, Merrillville Fire Department, Stormwater Management, Street Department, Merrillville Residents, and Ross Township Trustee.

ADJOURNMENT:

Having completed all items on the agenda, the Town Council President, Rick Bella, announced the meeting had adjourned at 7:29 p.m.


Eric O. January, Clerk-Treasurer


Rick Bella, Town Council President

Respectfully Submitted By Angela Lewis