

TOWN OF MUNSTER
MINUTES OF A REGULAR MEETING OF THE TOWN COUNCIL
DECEMBER 2, 2024

A meeting of the Munster Town Council convened at 7:00 p.m. on Monday, December 2, 2024. Ordinance 1830 is the basis for holding electronic meetings. The announced meeting location was Munster Town Hall, 1005 Ridge Road, Munster, Indiana. Councilors, Staff, and the public had the option to participate via Zoom meeting technology.

Councilors George Shinkan, Joseph G. Hofferth, Jonathan Petersen, and David B. Nellans were physically present at Town Hall. Also present in Town Hall were Clerk-Treasurer Wendy Mis, Controller/Interim Town Manager Patricia Abbott, Police Chief Stephen Scheckel, Town Attorney Dave Westland, Director of Operations Bob Valois, and Hammond Sanitary District representative Mike Hawkins. Councilor Chuck Gardiner was present virtually and visible throughout the meeting. Representatives from the media were present.

President Nellans presided and opened the meeting with a moment of silence, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

PUBLIC HEARING: WATER RATE INCREASE

Council had first read on Ordinance 1969 to increase the water rates at the November 7, 2024, meeting, and the public hearing was scheduled for this evening. Questions and concerns were raised at that time. Since then, Council has had the opportunity to meet with Baker Tilly who performed the rate study to get many of their questions answered.

In addition, it is important to note that at the time the 2021 NewGen study was done, and the current rates set, the Council made the decision to obligate \$2.5 million in ARPA funds to water infrastructure. This was done specifically to reduce the rates that otherwise would have been necessary. The America Rescue Plan (ARPA) funding was a one-time distribution from the federal government with specific eligible uses. There are no remaining ARPA funds to obligate.

Furthermore, the existing rates assumed a certain amount of capital projects. The current staff would like to do more work. This cannot happen without the proper rates in place. The proposed rates represent a 9.24% increase in rates over three years, meaning an approximate 3% rate increase is needed in each of the years 2026, 2027, and 2028. Ordinance 1969 has been drafted for this purpose and will be considered later in the meeting.

President Nellans opened the public hearing.

Mr. Robert Thomas, 8445 Manor, questioned why the rate for multi-family units is higher.

Ms. Donna Chefalo, 9516 Walnut, shared that since she moved to Munster her water rate has doubled. She expressed her concerns about the water rate increase.

Ms. Christine Fortney, 9128 White Oak Avenue, is concerned about the water rate going up.

No other member of the public came forward to speak, the public hearing was closed.

PUBLIC COMMENT

The Town of Munster accepts public comments submitted both in-person and electronically. The public was informed, via the agenda posted at munster.org, that questions or comments about an item on the agenda were to be emailed to wmis@munster.org. All in-person public comments are limited to two minutes and limited to a total of twenty minutes for the public comment section.

Mr. Robert Thomas, 8445 Manor, sent a video regarding safety on railroad tracks to Clerk-Treasurer Mis to be forwarded to the Town Council. He is requesting a fence along the new South Shore train line.

Ms. Cara Wilson, Hammond, expressed significant concern about one of the recent police department hires and his past conduct on other departments.

Mr. Terrance Rogers, 17560 Washington Avenue, wanted to raise awareness and concern regarding a recent police department hire.

Rabbi Michael Ben Yosef, Chicago, referencing a recent newspaper article he shared concern for the Town of Munster and the recent hire in the police department. He discussed the financial impact of his actions had on a previous community.

Ms. Nicole Anderson, 10217 New Devon, wants to understand more regarding the police department hire and expressed concern about the financial exposure to the Town.

No one else rose to the floor.

CONSENT AGENDA

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Minutes of a regular meeting held on November 18, 2024

ACCOUNTS PAYABLE VOUCHER REGISTERS

Confirmation of Voucher Register #24-11I dated 11/21/24 totaling \$650,180.21

Confirmation of Voucher Register #24-11J dated 11/27/24 totaling \$1,258,150.64

Confirmation of Voucher Register #24-11K dated 11/29/24 totaling \$532,319.12

Approval of Voucher Register #24-12A dated 12/02/24 totaling \$358,820.14

TREASURER'S REPORT

The October 2024 Treasurer's Report was presented.

WATER LEAK ADJUSTMENTS 2024-54 THROUGH 2024-55

Staff received requests for adjustment under the leak adjustment policy adopted by the Town Council on April 8, 2013. The customers have completed the required form, and the requests meet all the criteria for adjustments as follows:

Adjustment Number	Average Usage	Actual Usage	Length of Time	Original Bill	Requested Adjustment Amount	Adjusted Bill
2024-54	26,000	53,000	1 month	\$ 333.57	\$ 162.36	\$ 171.21
2024-55	8,000	38,000	2 months	\$ 254.22	\$ 143.37	\$ 110.85

Councilor Petersen requested invoices for Westland and Bennet be voted on separately.

Councilor Shinkan moved, with a second by Councilor Hofferth, to suspend the rules, waive the readings, and adopt the Consent Agenda as amended. Councilors Shinkan, Hofferth, Gardiner, Petersen, and Nellans voted in favor; none voted against. Motion passed.

Councilor Shinkan moved, with a second by Councilor Hofferth, to approve the invoices from Westland and Bennett. A brief discussion ensued regarding the status of the zoning code. Councilors Shinkan, Hofferth, Gardiner, and Nellans voted in favor of payment of the Westland and Bennett invoices as presented in Voucher Register #24-12A; Councilor Petersen voted against. Motion passed.

OLD BUSINESS

ORDINANCE 1969: WATER RATE INCREASE

Introduced ORDINANCE 1969 is AN ORDINANCE AMENDING SCHEDULE “A,” A NON-CODIFIED PORTION OF THE MUNICIPAL CODE, AMENDING FEES FOR WATER UTILITIES. This matter was the subject of a public hearing earlier this evening.

Councilor Shinkan moved, with a second by Councilor Hofferth, to adopt Ordinance 1969 on second reading as presented.

Councilor Petersen expressed concern about putting an increase in place without a detailed project list available. Councilors Shinkan, Hofferth, Gardiner, and Nellans voted in favor; Councilor Petersen voted against. Motion carried.

ORDINANCE 1970: STORMWATER RATE INCREASE

Introduced ORDINANCE 1970 is AN ORDINANCE AMENDING SCHEDULE “A,” A NON-CODIFIED PORTION OF THE MUNICIPAL CODE, AMENDING FEES FOR SEWER AND STORMWATER UTILITIES. At the November 7, 2024, meeting, Council heard Ordinance 1970 on first reading. The ordinance will set stormwater rates for fiscal years 2026, 2027, and 2028. The rates will increase by approximately 4.00% each year.

Council met with Baker Tilly to discuss the results of their study. These rates will fund the ongoing operations and capital improvements needed to maintain the stormwater system. The new rates will go into effect with the bills due in March of each fiscal year.

Councilor Hofferth moved, with a second by Councilor Shinkan, to adopt Ordinance 1970 on second reading as presented. Councilor Petersen expressed concern about putting an increase in place without a detailed project list available. Councilors Shinkan, Hofferth, Gardiner, and Nellans voted in favor; Councilor Petersen voted against. Motion carried.

ORDINANCE 1971: SOLID WASTE RATE INCREASE

Introduced ORDINANCE 1971 is AN ORDINANCE AMENDING SCHEDULE “A,” A NON-CODIFIED PORTION OF THE MUNICIPAL CODE, AMENDING FEES FOR SOLID WASTE COLLECTION. At the November 7, 2024, meeting, Council heard the ordinance on first reading. The ordinance will set solid waste collection rates for fiscal years 2025, 2026, 2027, and 2028. This fee is charged to residential utility customers and must cover the cost of weekly garbage and recycling collection, branch and leaf collection, and the ongoing costs required for the maintenance of a closed municipal landfill.

The current rate of \$29.36/month is not sufficient to meet the needs of the Solid Waste Management Fund. This user fee is the primary source of revenue for the fund. Baker Tilly has performed their analysis and recommended an 8% increase in 2025 with 3.50% increases in the years 2026, 2027, and 2028. These increases would happen with the bills due in March of each year.

Council met with Baker Tilly to discuss their process and suggestions.

Councilor Shinkan moved, with a second by Councilor Hofferth, to adopt Ordinance 1971 on second reading as presented. Councilors Shinkan, Hofferth, Gardiner, Petersen, and Nellans voted in favor; none voted against. Motion carried.

ORDINANCE 1972: 2025 SALARY AND PAY PLAN

Introduced ORDINANCE 1972 is AN ORDINANCE ESTABLISHING THE 2025 PAY PLAN FOR THE TOWN OF MUNSTER, INDIANA (2025 SALARY ORDINANCE). Council held first reading on this matter at the November 18, 2024, meeting. Compensation of elected officials must be fixed, and the Police Pension Base must be certified before January 1 of the ensuing year. Proposed Ordinance 1972 has been prepared for that purpose, and it includes other annual authorizations related to payroll.

Since first reading, Staff has had the opportunity to study and discuss their new pay system. During this process, changes have been made to meet the needs of each department. Some positions needed to be placed in different grades than originally presented. The maximum of one grade was increased to accommodate the wages of those employees currently in the position. These measures have eliminated the need to give anyone a stipend.

As originally planned, employees in line to make a Step increase under the existing system had that taken into account when their 2025 rate was established. All employees will receive at least 3.00% increase to their base pay.

Councilor Shinkan moved, with a second by Councilor Hofferth, to hear Ordinance 1972 on second reading as amended. Councilors Shinkan, Hofferth, Gardiner, Petersen, and Nellans voted in favor; none voted against. Motion carried.

NEW BUSINESS

RESOLUTIONS 2141 AND 2142: SIGNING AUTHORITY WITH INDOT

Proposed RESOLUTIONS 2141 and 2142 are RESOLUTIONS GRANTING AUTHORITY TO SIGN DOCUMENTS WITH INDOT. The Town has been awarded \$660,442.49 in 2024-2 Community Crossing Matching Grant funds for Cardinal Drive, Heather Drive, Oakwood Court, Broadmoor Avenue, and Woodlawn Avenue. INDOT administers the CCMG projects and requires a resolution to authorize

someone to sign the contract and related documents for the project. The CCMG program runs on a tight timeline and having authority to sign is critical to the process. Throughout the year, the Council President has been named the signer. These documents will not be available for signature until next year.

The Pedestrian Bridge Project connecting Munster and Highland needs a similar authorization to be put into place. Again, the documents will not be available until next year.

Resolution 2141 has been drafted to authorize Patricia Abbott to sign the CCMG 2024-2 documents. Resolution 2142 has been drafted to authorize Patricia Abbott to sign the Pedestrian Bridge over Hart and Cady Marsh Ditches (DES #1173597).

Councilor Shinkan moved, with a second by Councilor Hofferth, to adopt Resolution 2141 as presented. Councilors Shinkan, Hofferth, Gardiner, Petersen, and Nellans voted in favor; none voted against. Motion carried.

Councilor Shinkan moved, with a second by Councilor Hofferth, to adopt Resolution 2142 as presented. Councilors Shinkan, Hofferth, Gardiner, Petersen, and Nellans voted in favor; none voted against. Motion carried.

ORDINANCE 1973: ADDITIONAL APPROPRIATIONS (7)

Proposed ORDINANCE 1973 is AN ORDINANCE FOR THE ADDITIONAL APPROPRIATION OF FUNDS FOR THE YEAR 2024 (7). There are three funds in need of additional appropriations.

Payroll costs for the General Fund increased beyond what was anticipated when the 2024 budget was created. Furthermore, the General Fund is absorbing some of the costs normally attributed to the Solid Waste Management Fund. The total appropriation request for the General fund is \$150,000.00.

The Water Deposit Fund needs appropriations customer deposit credits and refunds. The total appropriation request for the fund is \$12,000.00.

Additional invoices were received in 2024 for software support than were anticipated when the budget was created. The total appropriation request for the Technology Fund is \$75,000.00.

The procedure for securing additional appropriations requires a public hearing, scheduled for December 16, 2024, and the adoption of an ordinance by the Town Council. The General Fund is a controlled fund. Once the ordinance is adopted, the request will be submitted to the Department of Local Government Finance which will issue its determination within ten days. The others are considered reporting only funds, and the appropriations will go into effect upon passage of the ordinance.

Councilor Shinkan moved, with a second by Councilor Hofferth, to hear Ordinance 1973 on first reading, and schedule a public hearing and second reading for December 16, 2024. Councilors Shinkan, Hofferth, Gardiner, Petersen, and Nellans voted in favor; none voted against. Motion carried.

ORDINANCE 1974: 2024 SALARY ORDINANCE AMENDMENT #5

Introduced ORDINANCE 1974 is AMENDMENT #5 TO THE 2024 SALARY ORDINANCE. This matter was the subject of a public hearing earlier this evening. A ministerial amendment to include Resolution 2140 in the Salary Ordinance is needed. This is the most recent resolution for the Interim Town

Manager position. Because there are salary and benefit components to the resolution, it must be made part of the annual salary ordinance.

Councilor Hofferth moved, with a second by Councilor Shinkan, to hear Ordinance 1974 on first reading, and schedule second reading for December 16, 2024. Councilors Shinkan, Hofferth, Gardiner, Petersen, and Nellans voted in favor; none voted against. Motion carried.

DISPOSAL OF PROPERTY

Council approved the purchase of a new generator for the landfill to convert the methane gas to electricity. The generator is scheduled for shipment early in December. In anticipation of its arrival, Staff is preparing for the disposal of the existing generator.

Councilor Shinkan moved, with a second by Councilor Hofferth, to declare the Jenbacher JMC320 generator surplus and authorize its disposal. Councilors Shinkan, Hofferth, Gardiner, Petersen, and Nellans voted in favor; none voted against. Motion carried.

PURCHASE OF SQUAD CARS

At the February 19, 2024, meeting, Council authorized the purchase of take-home vehicles for police officers. The Council later approved the department to increase its sworn strength from forty-four to fifty sworn officers. In order to provide take-home vehicles to all the officers authorized, an additional six squads are needed. Bloomington Ford has these vehicles currently available.

Two vehicles will be purchased at a cost of \$48,647.25 and four vehicles will be purchased at a cost of \$48,547.25 for a total purchase of \$291,483.50. The cost difference is due to the add-on of noise suppression bond straps which have already been installed on two of the vehicles. Additional equipment will need to be purchased in order to fully equip each vehicle. That information will be presented later. Both the vehicles and the necessary equipment will be paid from the TIF Allocation Fund.

Councilor Shinkan moved, with a second by Councilor Hofferth, to authorize the Pulice Department to purchase six additional take-home vehicles from Bloomington Ford. Councilors Shinkan, Hofferth, Gardiner, Petersen, and Nellans voted in favor; none voted against. Motion carried.

TERRACE DRIVE LANDSCAPING

On September 5, 2024, Council adopted Resolution 2138 to permanently close Terrace Drive at the State Line. Staff and officials from Munster and Lansing, Illinois agreed it was in the best interest of the community to permanently close this location. A request for proposals was emailed to three landscapers for a raised landscaping bet with trees, grasses, and perennials to be constructed at Terrace Drive and State Line. This would not only provide a permanent barrier to traffic but also would be attractive to the neighborhood. This project is to be completed before year-end. Proposals were received as follows.

G & G Landscaping, Crown Point, Indiana	\$46,068.44
Redbut Landscape Services, Cedar Lake, Indiana	\$48,276.27
L2 Incorporated, Crown Point, Indiana	\$53,734.29

This project will be paid from Riverboat and Motor Vehicle Highway funds.

Councilor Shinkan moved, with a second by Councilor Hofferth, to approve G & G Landscaping to perform the Terrace Drive Landscaping for a total cost of \$46,068.44. Councilors Shinkan, Hofferth, Gardiner, Petersen, and Nellans voted in favor; none voted against. Motion carried.

REPORTS

Council President recognized the Town of Munster achieving #2 in the nation for our National Night Out 2024 in cities or towns between 15,000 – 50,000 in population and we are the only town in Indiana to be recognized.

Clerk-Treasurer Mis invited everyone to attend the Light the Nighth celebration on Thursday, December 5, 2024, for the 4th annual tree lighting.

PORTFOLIO REPORTS

No reports were presented.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

(Unless stated otherwise, all meetings of the Town Council begin at 7:00 p.m. at Munster Town Hall.)

The Town Council will hold a regular meeting on Monday, December 16, 2024. The Redevelopment Commission will hold a regular meeting immediately following.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Council, and upon a motion by Councilor Shinkan and seconded by Councilor Hofferth, the meeting adjourned at 8:11 p.m. by voice vote.

David B. Nellans, President

ATTEST:

Wendy Mis, Clerk-Treasurer