

**Enrolled Memorandum of the Meeting  
Study Session/Meeting (In person)  
Thirtieth Town Council of Highland  
Monday, May 12, 2025**

The Thirtieth Town Council of the Town of Highland, Lake County, Indiana met in a study session on **Monday, May 12, 2025**, immediately after the adjournment of the April 28, 2025 Plenary Meeting (7:50 O'clock P.M)., in the regular place, the Highland Municipal Building, 3333 Ridge Road, Highland, Indiana.

\*This meeting was convened as an in person meeting and lived streamed to the Town of Highland Facebook. Facebook permits the public to observe and record the proceedings but allows no interaction between and among the Town Council and members of the public. The public is able to participate in person. All Councilors were simultaneously seen and heard. Councilor Georgeff, Councilor Turich, Councilor Robertson, Councilor Black and Councilor Philip Scheeringa all participated in person. .

**Silent Roll Call:** Councilors George Georgeff, Doug Turich, Alex Robertson, Tom Black, Philip Scheeringa, were present in person as indicated. The Clerk-Treasurer, Mark Herak was present to memorialize the proceedings. *A quorum was attained.*

*Officials Present:* IT Director Ed Dabrowski, Metropolitan Police Chief Ralph Potesta, Redevelopment Director Maria Becerra were in person.

**x. Discussion: Appointments.**

*Unless otherwise noted, all terms expire on the 1<sup>st</sup> Monday in January 2025 and or until a successor is appointed or qualified, not exceeding ninety (90) days.*

**• Statutory Boards and Commissions**

*Executive Appointments (May be made in meeting or at another time)*

***Regional Statutory Appointments.***

- 1.. **Lake County Convention and Visitors Bureau Board of Directors.** (1) Appointment by Town Council President. (NOT DUE UNTIL JUNE 30 2025) (Currently serving Christine Cash) Appointing authority must give sole consideration to individuals who are knowledgeable about or employed as executives or managers in Hotel, Motel, Banking, Real Estate and hospitality. Cannot hold an elected or appointed political office

Home Rule Commissions or Boards

***Legislative Appointments***

1. **Advisory Board of Zoning Appeals:** (1) appointment to be made by Fiscal Body.  
(Note: Currently held by David Helms, term ending 1<sup>st</sup> Monday January 2025). Term is for three (3) years.

#### Regional Statutory Appointments

1. **Main Street Bureau Board:** (17) appointments to be made by the Town Council. (Note: Current Appointees are: Diane Barr-Roumbus, James Roumbus, Sandy McKnight, Al Simmons, Sandy Ray, Ben Tomera and Desiree Biro, term ending 1<sup>st</sup> Monday January 2027). Term is for two (2) years.
- x. Discussion: Update of the Clerk-Treasurer's May 9<sup>th</sup> meeting to discuss a unified strategy in regards to SB1.

The Clerk-Treasurer passed out and reviewed a sheet containing some of the suggestions discussed at Friday's meeting with elected Clerk-Treasurer's.

#### Suggestions from the Clerk-Treasurer's meeting of May 9, 2025

- 1). Local income – max 1.2%. most reluctant to pass on a tax but considering. The problem is that the department of revenue, which supplies the revenue numbers, only has 4 of 88 counties complete. They are not required to complete until the end of 2026.
- 2). Food & beverage tax – some are looking at 1%. Hammond (projected \$2m) & Merrillville have adopted. Crown Point started and the residents came out with pitch forks against.
- 3). Wheel tax – not certain if continued Community Crossings funding tied into a wheel tax
- 4). Eliminate perk such as eliminating free golf for employees or coffee
- 5). Eliminate PPO and force all employees to take HSA
- 6). Raising employees contribution for health insurance to 15%, 17%, 20% (Highland is 1%, 2%, 3%), eliminate the \$2 per month or increase to \$5 per month on health insurance
- 7). through attrition reduce employee count & offer early retirement
- 8). No raises but us stipend
- 9). Eliminate summer sewage discounts
- 10). increase cost of services (building permits, refuse, water, sewage)
- 10). Encourage all residents to pay utility bills via ACH, which is free
- 11). Have department heads, not touching the 100 series, look at 200, 300 services and reduce their budget by 5%
- 12). Combine services with other communities
- 13). Newer generation does not like to have to physically come in and sign up for services but do everything on line. Let residents be able to sign up for water, set up a final read on line, get building permits on line, be able to pay on line.

Arrange for Town Council presidents, Clerk-Treasurers and Town managers meet to discuss the next steps.

Placeholders:

- x. Discussion: Lamar Advertising, Shawn Pettit will attend the study session to discuss the non-binding letter of intent to purchase an easement from the Town.

Shawn Pettit of Lamar Advertising, pass out a revised Non-Binding Letter of Intent to Purchase Easement.



May 12, 2025

Town of Highland  
% Mark Herak  
Clerk/Treasurer  
3333 Ridge Road  
Highland, IN 46322-2085

RE: Non-Binding Letter of Intent to Purchase Easement

Dear Mr. Herak,

On this 15th day of April, 2025, this letter of intent represents the basic terms for an agreement that shall be considered non-binding whereby TLC Properties, LLC ("TLC") and the undersigned ("Seller") agree to enter into an agreement to purchase and sell a perpetual easement over and on the real property located at **West of 10024-42 Wicker Avenue (U.S. 41) #45-07-32-281-008.000-026, ("Property")**, for a cash purchase price of **\$600,000.00**. TLC and Seller shall use their reasonable best efforts to close this transaction by **June 30, 2025**, subject to timely acceptance of this offer by Seller and TLC's completion of diligence.

This pending transaction is contingent upon TLC, in its sole discretion, being satisfied that the Property may be used for the construction, operations, and maintenance of an outdoor advertising structure and all applicable governmental permits to be obtained for said use. TLC must also be satisfied with the current title of the Property as evidenced by title search, and certified survey of the Property to be performed by TLC at its sole expense prior to closing. Should TLC determine that the Property does not suit its business needs for any reason whatsoever, the undersigned acknowledges that TLC will not move forward with the purchase and this Letter of Intent shall be null and void.

Nothing contained herein shall be binding on either party unless and until a Purchase Agreement has been fully executed by both parties. By counter signing this Letter of Intent, you are warranting that you are the fee simple owner of record of the Property. Please sign and date below if the above information meets your approval and outlines our understanding.

Sincerely,



Shawn Michael Pettit  
Real Estate Manager, Chicago/Northwest Indiana  
Lamar Advertising Company  
spettit@lamar.com

Agreed to on this \_\_\_\_\_ day of April, 2025

By:

Seller Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Shawn Pettit then began addressing the Council. He said he is on the Merrillville Town Council and is president of the Redevelopment Commission. He said he is the Real Estate Manager for Lamar advertising. He said Mark and I have been talking on the phone and we submitted a letter. Lamar is based out of Baton Rouge, Louisiana and I see no familiar faces, from the last time I was here negotiating the original contract. Originally, the Town of Highland allowed Lamar to build 2 digital billboards. One on town property at the water tank and one with Bob Campbell at Bill's mover and storage. These both have been very successful. Lamar recently launched an easement purchase program on leases that have less than five (5) years left. The lease with the town expires in 2026. He believed it August 31. We did a 15 year lease when Mark was on the council. Some of your former colleagues were Konnie Kuiper, Dan Vassar and Michael Griffin was your Clerk-Treasurer. By the way, thank you very much. Michael has been an absolute godsend to the Town of Merrillville as our new Town Manager. What Lamar would like to do, is to offer to the Town of Highland, a lump sum of \$600,000 to buy an easement. Mr. Reed, Lamar would do all the surveying, title work, closing. All the Town of Highland has to do is collect a check for \$600,000 and you gentlemen can decide whatever you want to do with that money. Here's the catch. The one-time, lump sum will extinguish the lease. There will be no more lease payments to the Town of Highland. You will get it all in one lump sum and decide what you want to do with it. Right now, you are getting an annual lease payment of \$40,000. The last lease payment will be in 2026. He said Lamar works on a 13 month calendar. If you don't accept this offer, he

will come calling probably around July of this year. At that time, he will send out a lease renewal proposal to the Town for that location. I think, it's been pretty successful from our billing standpoint. I believe the Police Chief has used it for hiring notices. We've had some of the Council of Community Events on there. We sell 8, 10 second slots on each of those panels. If they're not sold out, we offer the advertising to the community. He said he will provide a revised letter of intent. If you gentlemen have any questions let me know as we are wanting to close by the end of June. He told Attorney Reed that they use Chicago Title and DVG Engineering. If Highland doesn't accept the buyout option, a new lease option would be offered. It's a matter of economics. \$600,000 in a lump sum or \$40,000 trickling in annually. In the new lease, it would be for a flat 15 years, starting out at \$40,000. When the first lease was signed, it started out at \$30,000 annually and escalated to \$40,000. He said typically, they do not offer escalation clauses unless the landowner asks for it. They don't normally offer an escalator clause because of the money Lamar has invested in each sign. When you consider the steel involved and the two (2) digital signs, the cost to Lamar is close to \$400,000. He said Lamar has a substantial investment in the Town of Highland, so they'd like to continue.

Attorney Reed ask Shawn if the Town would continue to own the fee right?

Shawn answered yes. Lamar would own a permanent easement. He explained that Lamar likes to have what is called a blanket easement and the easement would be around the sign so Lamar's personnel can access the sign via the easement and the utility or power lines to power the sign. You would have a sign easement of visibility. He said Lamar will draw up the legal description for the Town to review. I have a letter which I will give to the Clerk-Treasurer. He said Lamar has given the managers the right to negotiate with the property owners but they want us to start out at the lower end but they do give us some wiggle room. He said Indianapolis is a five (5) lane road and is crazy with traffic, which is why we use a back to back digital. He said the highest he can go is \$600,000. He said he respects the Council's decision as he's been in the same seat as them.

Attorney Reed said the Town would like to see the actual footprint of the easement because there's might be some access issues with that property. And although he doesn't see that we are talking about a giant area, we just want to just make sure that it doesn't landlock that site too much so it can't be developed.

Shawn said he would need a signed letter of intent, which shows the Town is committed before he can spend soft costs with Chicago Title and DVG.

Attorney Reed maybe we could put in a contingency subject to the approval of the footprint itself. He then asked Mr. Pettit is he has a copy of the footprint?

Shawn said he did, as he printed it off the County's GIS. He described the tank and then their sign is on the L shaped property. He said he would email a copy of the survey to the Clerk-Treasurer. He said Mr. Mika may have a copy of the survey when they took out a building permit to erect the sign. He asked Attorney Reed if Attorney Reed was looking

for a cross access agreement. He said Lamar wouldn't have a problem as long as, the agreement doesn't interfere with the workings of the sign, maintenance or utility work.

Attorney Reed said we wanted to be careful not to landlock the parcel and like you said Shawn, it is a super high traffic road and whereas there is access to it now, we may need more. Route 41 is a limited access highway and we want to make sure that we don't hamstring ourselves.

Shawn said you are primarily concerned about access into and out of for the utility side of it to the traffic signal. Utilize that intersection.

Attorney Reed said yes. He said he doesn't see it being a problem but we'd rather be safe.

Shawn said he would send the survey over to the Clerk-Treasurer. He said when he gets in the office tomorrow, he will send a copy to the Clerk-Treasurer. He said the initial survey was done by 1<sup>st</sup> Group Engineering. If the survey is acceptable and you sign the letter of intent, he will send it to Baton Rouge and then they'll instruct me to order the title work and get an updated survey and then we'll create a three (3) page grant easement. After Attorney Reed approves, Mr. President you can sign it. After signed, I will forward to the Town of Highland a check for the \$600,000.

Attorney Reed said it probably makes sense to have the Town Engineer review the survey.

x. Discussion: Revisiting plans about a new town hall

Councilors Turich and Robertson provided an update to the Council on their public Safety building tour. Councilor Robertson began that there was quite a lot of underutilized space in between the basement and that second floor. He said Councilor Turich brought something to measure all the rooms with. He said their objective was not trying to dictate exactly where and how these spaces need to be filled but there exists office and storage space that is under-utilized. He said they estimated total under-utilized available space is 3,500 square feet, of which 2,500 square feet could be utilized for office space and personnel and with the other 1,000 square feet to be used for storage space within the public safety building.

Councilor Turich said he thought this is a conversation worth having, be it a short term solution or a long term solution. These changes would take a minimal investment compared to building a new town hall or expanding the police station to accommodate a new town hall.

Councilor Georgeff said he was aware of some safety and security concerns over allowing civilian personnel in areas of the public safety building.

Chief Potesta said there's gonna be a lot of security and safety issues.

Councilor Turich said another consideration was behind the public works facility where you've got the park department building that is in serious need of some upgrades. He said there is space over there but maybe we consider a different style building to improve that area. The park department has left over bond money that could be used to build a new building that is sorely needed. We should seek proposals for a new pole barn on the current site for the park department with a small addition to make office space for a department if we choose to move them down there. He said it makes sense to expand the existing footprint. He said we could use that building for a potential Town Hall space. There's plenty of parking access and the current building is in need of rehab. The pole barn would support the activities for the park department storage and then on the north side of that building you would put some office space in there for the park employees that reside in that building and then on the south side of that building, which abuts the parking lot for the Sharp Athletic Complex, you would build another set of offices to house a department from the Town Hall. He felt it was definitely something we want to discuss. It would allow the public to walk from the parking lot into the office. Additional office space in the building could be used by Trever and his team.

Councilor Georgeff asked Councilor Turich if he had discussed this idea with the Park Board?

Councilor Turich said he had not but he thought they would be happy with the improvements to their existing facility. He said the current facility doesn't even have running water. If you go south on Kennedy into Schererville, past Avenue H, there are some really nice metal buildings that have been enhanced and are appealing to the eyes.

Councilor Scheeringa said he talked with Public Works Director Knesek and Mark Knesek has concerns about reconfiguring the garage area to house office space for one of the departments currently located in the Town Hall. He said Public Works just replaced the roof, overhead and service doors.

Councilor Turich said that is a separate topic and he agreed that Mark Knesek said there wasn't space there to reconfigure office space to house a department from the Town Hall but when he and Councilor Robertson walked into the pole barn used by the park department, they noticed there's a lot of opportunity to help the park department with their storage space needs and build additional office space for park employees and moving a department from the Town Hall down there. He said the plans he was talking about are a fraction of the cost of building an addition to the police station to house a new Town Hall.

Councilor Scheeringa said he would still like to receive input from the Park Board. He felt that the Park Board should be included in the discussions.

Councilor Turich said why can't we be leaders and hire a design engineer, get a preliminary design and cost, with a section for Town Hall employees and then propose the idea to the park board? He said Ken Mika and his employees would be relocated at the new facility and the Clerk-Treasurer and his staff, as well as, the Redevelopment Director and her staff would be relocated to the public safety facility.

Councilor Scheeringa said the building department works closely with the Clerk-Treasurer's office and the Redevelopment Director. He felt it was vital that Building & Inspection, Redevelopment and the Clerk's office be located in the same building. He said there is constant communications between those three (3) departments. He asked Councilor Turich if he had discussed his thoughts with Mr. Mika?

Councilor Turich answered he had not but added aren't we as leaders supposed to drive the best solution at the cheapest cost for our residents?

Councilor Black said his only concern is that for years we've been talking about trying to move public works and let a developer come in and develop that site. He asked how far do we want to go with this. If we make the improvements discussed and then a developer approaches the Town, do we simply walk away? He too said, he would like to hear Mr. Mika's and the Park Board's comments.

Councilor Turich said at the last meeting, I thought we agreed that we were not considering moving the public works facility but rather improving the softball fields and improve other amenities to the Homestead complex. Regardless of what is decided, something needs to be done with the pole barn. He said if you are improving the pole barn, since construction would already be underway, the cost should be minimal to add additional office spaces. He said he thought the Town should start working with an engineer. He asked if anyone knew of any engineers who did that type of work? He said we've already identified under utilize space in the public safety building. We need an engineer who can determine how many cubicles or desks could be put in an area. We need to have a concept design not only for the public safety building but also at the pole barn behind the public works facility. He felt it was important to have a design concept completed and rough costs before making proposals to Mr. Mika or the Park Board. He asked is there anything wrong in overcoming obstacles and challenges and trying to get some hard numbers? Talk with contractors to get ballpark figures? He said we spend a little money on concept design but we could save a lot more by not having to build a new town hall.

Councilor Black asked if these could be viewed as 2 separate projects. The public safety building could be one project and a new pole barn with offices the second project.

Councilor Turich said in order to save money, these two (2) projects should be rolled into one. One engineering firm and one contractor.



Councilor Black said he didn't see a problem with getting hard numbers but only after the Park Board and Mr. Mika have been asked their opinion. He said he would be comfortable exploring both options.

Councilor Georgeff said we have already gone through this exercise. We did several weeks ago when James Estetes was here. We did it several years ago when there were discussions of a new town hall. I'm sure the plans are here on a shelf somewhere. He said we didn't ask you to go out and plan for every office.

Councilor Turich said I thought this meeting was to bounce ideas off each other as an alternative to the big price tag of expanding the public safety building for a new Town Hall. He asked Councilor Georgeff what was his vision for the next step?

Councilor Georgeff said he felt some engineering needed to be done to get hard numbers to look at all options but before proceeding talk with the Park Board and Mr. Mika and get their input. Depending upon their input would determine the next steps.

Chief Potesta said that when he and Commissioner Danko walked with Councilors Robertson and Turich, they expressed their concerns to Councilors Robertson and Turich. He said he doesn't know the big picture but originally he was told it temporary and we are more than willing to work with you but you have to keep in mind that the building was built as a police station. Now were hearing there is talk of putting civilians on the main floor. He said the police main evidence room is on that main floor. He said our patrol supervisor's office is located on the main floor. They have to have their own office. Our armory and jail cells are on the main floor. God forbid you had a prisoner overtake an officer while they're booking the prisoner and the prisoner gets a hold of the keys. He in the main hall way where there are discussions of putting town hall employees. He said I want to bounce any plans off the prosecutors office to make sure there aren't any issues as we don't want to lose a case because of credibility issues with civilians walking down our hallways.

Councilor Robertson said a third option is to reinvest in the existing Town Hall. I heard from some that it would be more expensive to rehab than build new. Any alternative should include that option he said. He said it would be worth getting some fresh eyes to look at rehabbing this building

Councilor Georgeff said the study was done several years. All the plumbing is in the block walls. It's all galvanized pipe and the electrical is substandard and out of code. This was that way 15 years ago. The other problem dealt with bringing the town hall up to ADA codes, which would require an elevator. He said the roof would need to be redone and the boiler is operating on borrowed time. He said this building was built for \$500,000 in 1969 and was paid off in ten (10) years. He said at that time, the cost to rehab this building cost more than building a new facility. You can speak with former Councilman Dan Vassar. The costs were exorbitant as compared to adding on to the public safety building because the public safety building was designed to put 3 walls up in a roof and build out the offices as needed.

Councilor Scheeringa said we have to be careful as we will have to bond and anything over \$4m will require a referendum and he wanted to be sure our department heads are included in the conversations because I don't know their jobs and what their needs are.

Councilor Turich said the plans he suggested shouldn't cost over \$4m. He felt confident it wouldn't be anywhere close. He then brought up the fire station. He felt the plans discussed with the architect were over inflated. In his view, all that is needed now is adding onto the side of the existing building but not adding all of these extravagant things talked about in that meeting with the architect. We need to rehab the west side of the bay, clean it up and make it livable. Nothing has been done to that building since the addition was put on in the 70's. He said, we don't have the right facilities at the fire department. We have female firefighters that don't have locker rooms to clean themselves up after a fire. He said he is talking more than taking some paneling down and putting up some drywall. They need to reconfigure how the layout looks, so that we can get the proper amenities for all of our firefighters.

Councilor Scheeringa said he thought the plans discussed with the architect would bring the station up to current ADA standards, which required a new building on the east side of the building.? He didn't think the wall had to be torn down but he said he could be wrong.

Councilor Turich asked where do we go from here? Can we get some design concepts to present before the Council on building a pole barn with offices and reconfigure space within the police department and scale down the vision of the fire department? Can we get some information in a few weeks? It nice to talk about construction but that is five (5) or six (6) steps down the road but engineering is number one (1).

Attorney Reed said what was being discussed is a service contract and nothing prevents you to go out to several firms, explain your concept and let them give you an idea of what they would charge.

The Clerk-Treasurer said he will supply a list of engineers to Councilors Robertson and Turich

x. Discussion: Restructuring the Police Commission

Police Commission Liaison Scheeringa to meet with FOP President Glidewell and then report back to the Council on subjects that need the attention of the Council.

Councilor Scheeringa said he has been in contact with James Glidewell, FOP President and they will be setting up a meeting

- x. Discussion: Attorney Reed to meet with the Clerk-Treasurer to draft a middle ground proposal to present to the Council on how to comply with the new state law regarding parking over a sidewalk and exempt those with driveways that are too short to allow the homeowner to be in compliance. Some driveways in the older section of Highland won't accommodate one car.

**Proposed Ordinance No. 1818:** An Ordinance to Amend Title X of the Highland Municipal Code relating to Stopping, Standing, and Parking, and the Ordinance Violations Bureau, providing for the Enforcement Thereof, Repealing all Ordinances in Conflict Therewith:

Proposed

**Section 10.20.070 Vehicles Parked on Sidewalks**

**Section 1.** That Section 10.20.070, "*Vehicles Parked on Sidewalks*" of the Highland Municipal Code be amended by repealing section 10.20.070 and replacing it with a new section to be styled as 10.20.070 which shall read as follows: The driver of any vehicle shall not park over any public sidewalk. Penalty, see

Currently

**Section 10.20.070 Vehicles Parked on Sidewalks**

The driver of any vehicle shall not park over any sidewalk area except at a permanent or temporary driveway.

Due to time constraints (executive session was scheduled for after the study session), this topic was not discussed but referred to the next study session.

**x. Discussion:** Shared Ethics Membership Renewal.

Cal Bellamy called and offered to meet with the Council to answer any questions the Council might have as he would hope they wouldn't leave Shared Ethics. He said they are in the process of updating their training curriculum. They are working in conjunction with IUN to create new and meaningful exercises for the trainers, who will then train the Town's employees. Highland's trainer is Maria Becerra.

Due to time constraints (executive session was scheduled for after the study session), this topic was not discussed but referred to the next study session.

- x. **Discussion:** disclaimer to be read before each meeting that is be live streamed and recorded. Before we begin, we are advising that this meeting is being recorded and livestreamed. If you are uncomfortable with being recorded, we ask you to leave the meeting, otherwise, your continued attendance is your consent to be recorded.

Due to time constraints (executive session was scheduled for after the study session), this topic was not discussed but referred to the next study session.

- x. **Discussion:** posting of positions internally for five days

Attorney Reed said he would have something prepared by the next study session meeting.

- **Plenary Business Meeting of Tuesday May 27, 2025**

- Minutes of the Meeting of Monday, May 12, 2025
- Appointments
- Additional appropriation hearing – Downtown Redevelopment District
- Ordinance 1808-E
- Payroll Docket