

**Enrolled Minutes of the Fifty-Second Regular Meeting or Special Meeting
For the Thirtieth Highland Town Council Regular Plenary
Business Meeting (In person) Monday, January 26, 2026**

The Thirtieth Town Council of the Town of Highland, Lake County, Indiana met in its regular plenary session on Monday, January 26, 2026 at 6:30 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. Councilor Georgeff, Councilor Doug Turich, Councilor Alex Robertson, Councilor Tom Black and Councilor Philip Scheeringa all participated in person.

Pursuant to HMC Section 2.05.130(A)(2), the Town Council considered and reviewed the agenda in an informal proceeding in the plenary meeting room before the president called the meeting to order.

The Town Council President George Georgeff presided over the meeting. The Town Clerk-Treasurer, Mark Herak, was present to memorialize the proceedings. The meeting was opened with Councilor George Georgeff reciting the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America and offering a prayer.

Roll Call: Present on roll call were Councilors George Georgeff, Doug Turich, Alex Robertson, Thomas Black, Philip Scheeringa were present. Clerk-Treasurer, Mark Herak was also present. A quorum was attained.

Additional Officials Present: Tim Diamond, CPRP, Superintendent of Parks and Recreation; Metropolitan Police Chief Ralph Potesta; Redevelopment Director Maria Becerra; Glenn Schlessler, Fire Chief; Ed Dabrowski, Director of Information Technology, Kenneth J. Mika, Building Commissioner, Mark Knesek, Public Works Director; Attorney Scott Bilse were present. John Reed, Attorney with JPR Legal Services was absent.

Guests: Theresa Badovich (remotely) and Robin Carlascio (remotely) of the Idea Factory were also present.

Minutes of the Previous Meetings: The minutes of the January 12, 2025 Plenary meeting were approved by general consent.

Special Orders:

1. **Consideration of Proposed Additional Appropriations:** (controlled and non-controlled funds): Proposed Additional Appropriations in Excess of the 2025 Budget for the Legacy Foundation Grant Fund in the amount of \$17,500.00.

(a) Attorney verification of Proofs of Publication: Gateway

- (b) Public Hearing.
- (c) Action on **Appropriation Enactment No. 2026-01:**

An Enactment Appropriating Additional Moneys in Excess of the Annual Budget for the **Legacy Foundation Grant Fund**, all pursuant to I.C. 6-1.1-18, and I.C. 36-5-3-5

**requires 2 readings if the Council desires to pass it on the first night*

The Clerk-Treasurer shared with the Council an email from the DLGF advising that with the new process, they are not sure why the additional appropriation request disappeared from the system. They will look into it and get back to him. The Clerk-Treasurer asked that no action be taken until the DLGF gets back to him.

Mark Herak

From: Bucy, Miranda <MBucy@dlgf.IN.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, January 20, 2026 7:12 AM
To: Mark Herak
Cc: Jim Higgins
Subject: RE: additional appropriations

With this new process I'm not sure. I have reached out to see if we can't find out what happened and if anything needs to change. I will let you know what I find out when I do



Miranda Bucy
Budget Specialist
Department of Local Government Finance
100 N Senate Avenue, Room N1058, Indianapolis, IN 46204
mbucy@dlgf.in.gov | www.in.gov/dlgf
317.232.0651



* Please let us know about the quality of our service by taking this brief [customer survey](#)

From: Mark Herak <mherak@highland.in.gov>
Sent: Monday, January 19, 2026 6:14 PM
To: Bucy, Miranda <MBucy@dlgf.IN.gov>
Cc: Jim Higgins <Jim.Higgins@LWGCpa.com>
Subject: additional appropriations

EXTERNAL EMAIL: This email was sent from outside your organization. Exercise caution when clicking links, opening attachments or taking further action, before validating its authenticity.

Miranda, I hope you had a good holiday. I have a question for you as I might have done something wrong. I went into Gateway and uploaded an additional appropriation hearing for the 26th of January. I did this on the January 9, 2026. When I go into gateway, to see if approved as this is the first time I'm doing it this way, it ways nothing has been uploaded. See attached. Let me know if I did something wrong. Thank you.

**Town of Highland
Appropriation Enactment
Enactment No. 2026-01**

AN ENACTMENT APPROPRIATING ADDITIONAL MONIES IN EXCESS OF THE ANNUAL BUDGET for the LEGACY FOUNDATION GRANT FUND, ALL PURSUANT TO I.C. 6-1.1-18, and I.C. 36-5-3-5.

WHEREAS, Following a public hearing advertised pursuant to I.C. 5-3-1, it has been determined that it is now necessary to appropriate more money than was appropriated in the annual budget for the **Legacy Foundation Grant Fund**;

WHEREAS, It has been determined that such additional appropriations as may be approved by this enactment, will not increase the levies set under I.C. 6-1.1-17, all pursuant to I.C. 36-5-3-5;

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

Section 1. That for the expenses of said municipality, the following additional sums of money are hereby appropriated and ordered set apart out of the **Legacy Foundation Grant Fund** herein named and for the purposes herein specified, subject to the laws governing the same:

Legacy Foundation Grant Fund

Acct. No. 2404-0000-46006 Main Square Improvements	\$17,500.00
<i>Total 400 Series:</i>	\$17,500.00
Fund Total:	\$17,500.00

Section 2. That the Clerk-Treasurer is hereby authorized and instructed to inform the Department of Local Government Finance of this action and that these monies be made available for expenditure pursuant to I.C. 6-1.1-18.

Section 3. That in satisfaction and for the purposes of the provisions set out in I.C. 36-5-2-9.6, I.C. 36-5-3-5, I.C. 36-5-4-2, this enactment shall be deemed properly filed and introduced before the Town Council at a regular or special meeting, properly called and convened pursuant to I.C. 5-1.5-14 *et seq.*

Introduced and Filed on 12th day of January 2026. Consideration on same day or at

same meeting of introduction sustained a vote of in favor and opposed, pursuant to IC 36-5-2-9.8.

DULY ORDAINED AND ADOPTED this 9th Day of February 2026, by the Town Council of the Town of Highland, Lake County, Indiana, having been passed by a vote of in favor and opposed.

TOWN COUNCIL of the TOWN of
HIGHLAND, INDIANA

George Georgeff, President (IC 36-5-2-10)

ATTEST:

Mark Herak
Clerk-Treasurer (IC 33-42-4-1; IC 36-5-6-5)

Comments from the Public or Visitors: None

Staff Reports: nothing filed.

Communications:

Restaurant Crawl January 27th

All on-street parking is banned when there is more the 2 inches of snow

Appointments:

• **Statutory Boards and Commissions**

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

Regional Statutory Commissions or Boards

Home Rule Boards and Commissions

1. **Main Street Bureau Board of Directors.** Town Council President appointment. (1) Appointment. Town Council Representative must be a member of the Town Council. *Term co-extensive with term of appointee. (Note: Currently serving is Alex Robertson)*

Action. The Town Council President as municipal executive announced the reappointment of **Alex Robertson**, 2914 Highway Avenue, Highland as the Town Council Representative to the Main Street Bureau Board of Directors.

10. **Tree Board.** (2) Appointments to be nominated by the Town Council but appointed by the Town Council President. (*Note: Currently held by Richard Underkofler and Blane Roberts, term ending 1st Monday January 2025). Term is for three (3) years Richard Underkofler; Blane Roberts*)
 - a. Nomination by the Town Council. (*The council would pass a motion to nominate.*)
 - b. Appointment by executive. (*If nominee is acceptable, the Town Council President may appoint.*)
 - **Tree Board Chairperson.** The Town Council President also appoints the Chairperson to be selected from the membership of the board. (See HMC Section 8.25.030 (C)) (*Currently held by James Colias.*)

Councilor Robertson moved to nominate for the Town Council President's consideration Blane Roberts as Chairperson of the Tree Board for the year 2026, seconded by Councilor Turich. Upon a roll call vote, there five (5) affirmatives and no negatives. The motion passed. Blane Roberts was nominated for consideration by the Town Council President as Chairperson of the Tree Board for the year 2026.

Town Council President's Executive Action. The Town Council President, serving as municipal executive, acknowledged the Town Council nomination of **Blane Roberts**, 8842 Branton Avenue, Highland as Chairperson of the Tree Board for the year 2026.

Legislative Appointments

1. **Municipal Plan Commission** (*Note: Appointees may be elected or appointed official or employees of the Town. No action necessary as incumbents continue to serve unless the legislative body acts to change.*
Currently serving: Morgan Wright (municipal employee); Bernie Zemen (appointed official, he is a member of the Water Board); Doug Turich (elected official). The term of office of a member (who is appointed from the membership of a legislative body, a public board or commission or as an employee) is co-extensive with the member's term of office on that body, board, or council, or term of employment, unless the appointing authority appoints, at its first regular meeting in any year, another to serve as its representative. (Pursuant to IC 36-7-4-217)

Action. The Town Council President as municipal executive noted that he was making no changes to the three (3) members currently serving: Morgan Wright who serves in the capacity as municipal employee, Bernie Zemen who serves in the capacity as appointed official and Doug Turich who serves in the capacity as elected official.

2. **Park and Recreation Board.** (2) appointments to be made by the Town Council. (*Note: Current appointee is Omar Torres (R), term ending 1st Monday January 2026) Term is for four (4) years. Nick Russo (D), term ending 1st Monday January 2027). (Current composition is 2 democrats and 2 republicans. Not more than 2 members may be of the same party.)*

- 3. Town Board of Metropolitan Police Commissioners.** (1) appointment to be made by the Town Council. (Note: Current appointee is Terry Krooswyk (D), term ending 1st Monday January 2026). Term is for three (3) years. (Current composition for these five citizen positions is three democrats and two republicans)

Regional Statutory Commissions or Boards

Home Rule Commissions

- 4. Main Street Bureau Board:** (17) appointments to be made by the Town Council. Term: Two years ending 1 Jan 2027. Currently only 8 of 17 appointed.

General Orders and Unfinished Business:

- 1. Proposed Ordinance No. 1837:** An Ordinance to Amend Chapter 3.21, of the Compensation, Benefits and Personnel Program of the Municipality to be known as the Compensation and Benefits Ordinance commonly known as the Employees Handbook, entitled Promotions, pursuant to IC36-1-3 and other relevant statutes.

**requires 2 readings if the Council desires to pass it on the first night of introduction.*

Attorney Reed was absent from the Town Council Meeting but had asked Councilor Scheeringa to ask the Council to delay Proposed Ordinance No. 1837 to the February 9, 2026 meeting. By general consent Proposed Ordinance No. 1837 was moved to the February 9, 2026 plenary meeting.

New Business:

- 1.** Begin proceeding to Eminent Domain the property at 8401 Indianapolis Boulevard, commonly known as Ultra. The 30 day waiting period has expired with no response from the property owner. The property can be eminent domain if the project will promote economic development, create jobs or benefit a community as a whole. The project must provide some genuine public advantage. The property owner is entitled to 120% of the fair market value.

Councilor Scheeringa moved to retain Attorney Reed as the attorney for the eminent proceedings of the property located at 8401 Indianapolis Boulevard and for Attorney Reed to move forth with the proceedings. Councilor Black seconded. Upon a roll call vote, there were five (5) affirmatives and (0) negatives. The motion passed.

Comments from the Town Council:

(Good of the order)

- **Councilor Doug Turich:** *Metropolitan Police Commission • Liaison and Plan*

Commission Member • Advisory Board of Zoning Appeals Liaison • Liaison to Building & Inspection Department

Councilor Turich acknowledged Building Commissioner Ken Mika who gave the following report:

1/26/26 Highland Town Council Meeting/B&I Report

- BZA will meet this Wednesday. No business except for selection of officers for 2026. Petitioner that was to have been on agenda did not get their legal in on time.
- P.C. No Report.
- Nothing further.

Ken Mika.
Town of Highland
Building Commissioner/Zoning Administrator

Councilor Turich then acknowledged Metropolitan Police Chief Ralph Potesta, who gave the following report:

Town Council Meeting Notes for 01/26/2026 – Police Department – Month of January so far

0 – Burglaries / Robberies / Rapes

2 Auto thefts:

1 residential – 2900 block Garfield – 2019 Kia stolen – recovered in East Chicago

1 from dealership – Purchased with fraudulent checks – CID working on leads

2 vehicles broken into:

1 residential – Groceries / Meds stolen

1 at Ellendale Plaza on 45th – cash stolen

7 Assaults with 2 arrests

Responded to 27 Domestic Disturbances – 2 arrests made

4 DUI arrests made

65 Accidents handled

21 Retail Thefts:

19 arrests

\$6.00 - \$1178.00 in merchandise

14 suspects from Illinois / 2 Highland residents (76 year old male and 22 year old female) / all other suspects from surrounding communities

Had 4 reports of residents receiving phone calls from subjects identifying themselves as police officers informing our residents that their grand child had been arrested and they needed to send money immediately.

2 residents suffered losses of \$350 and \$1,000.

1 case – bank teller stopped

1 case resident became suspicious and did not send money.

89 Snow route violation tickets issued by our officers as well as Officer Orth in Code Enforcement.

Our social worker Halie Gonlag continues to work with our officers, residents and also school system staff where she assists students and their families. In the 6 months she was here in 2025 she has had a total of 606 contacts.

ORTW

CODE STATS 15 DAYS WORKED

24 SCHOOL ASSIGNS

- Follow SCHOOL BUS
- 40th + Kennedy NO LEFT TURN - 7 stops
- RECESS

143 TOTAL CASES FOR MONTH

16 SNOW TICKETS

TODAY 1-26-26

143 TOTAL

10 junk VEHICLES

13 parking comps

- **Councilor Alex Robertson:** *Fire Department Liaison • Redevelopment Commission Member • Public Works Liaison • Liaison to Main Street Bureau • Liaison to the Tree Board • Liaison to the Highland Neighbor for Sustainability.*

Council Robertson acknowledged Public Works Director Mark Knesek who said the public work crews put in 387 hours man-hours spent plowing the snow. He said each time they thought the snow had stopped, it started snowing again. He said all the streets were completed by 7:00 o'clock this morning. Councilor Georgeff said he was under the impression that the Governor declared this latest snow as a State of Emergency. He asked all of the department heads to keep track of their expenses so they can be turned in for reimbursable.

Councilor Robertson then acknowledged Fire Chief Glenn Schlessler who said they have experienced several runs every night in this cold. He said facility maintenance is on the top of his list this month. He said the EOC is 95% complete and waiting for a couple of more things to arrive to complete the project.

- **Councilor Tom Black:** *Redevelopment Commission Liaison and Member • Member of the Lake County Solid Waste Management District Board • Member of the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIPRC) • Shared Ethics Representative • Liaison Traffic Safety*

Councilor Black acknowledged Redevelopment Director Maria Becerra who gave the following report:

REDEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
Maria Becerra

JANUARY 12, 2026

Eliminating blight

8430-8436 Kennedy - The abandoned gas station - we have a closing for tomorrow 1-27. Redevelopment Commission will be making decisions on how to make improvements to make it a greenspace for now.

Annual Reporting - The Redevelopment staff is working on Annual Report and several upcoming reporting requirements for the year.

Commercial Grants Just a reminder through the Redevelopment funds, the Commercial Improvement Grants are still available. Any business interested in improving the exterior or interior of their building can be eligible for 30% reimbursement of their investment. Contact the Redevelopment.

Homeownership Forgivable Loans are available for the Town's Police Officers and Fireman along with full time Municipal employees. Sixty thousand was approved for \$10,000 each participant. This program is being funded with Gaming funds that the Town receives. The Redevelopment office will be overseeing this program.

The Home Guidelines were sent to several lenders in Highland for their internal reviews.

Main Street – Restaurant Crawl is tomorrow with the \$7.00 specials for the participating businesses.

He too thanked the public works employees on the fine job they did clearing the street after this past weekend snow.

• **Councilor Philip Scheeringa:** • *Park Board Liaison* • *Information Communications and Technology Department Liaison* • *Redevelopment Commission Member*

Councilor Scheeringa acknowledged IT Director Ed Dabrowski, who said Card System Upgrade Projects is meeting a new milestone. He said, this week, the payroll department will use a file generated from the Public Works Department which is basically the time card data in a file format. This will eliminate the need for time cards and the manual calculations of hours by the supervisors. He said Public Works has all of their rules created and Park is working on theirs. He said the BS&A cloud project is still on schedule for March 9th. He said the police department just completed a Wi-Fi upgrade. He said the officers should see a faster response time. This was required with the new equipment. The upgrade also provides better firewall protection. He said he is working with the Fire Department on the EOC upgrade. He said they are getting new equipment as the present equipment is outdated. He is working with Public Works, Midwestern Electric and Pure Illumination on repairing the downtown lighting after a car hit the transformer. He said zones are coming back on line, a little at a time. He said when its 10 degrees outside and moisture accumulates in the lights or snow gets piled onto the lights, you will get normal wear and tear.

Councilor Scheeringa then acknowledge Park Superintendent Tim Diamond who said the next Park Board Meeting is on Thursday, February 19th at 7:00 o'clock p.m. and they are still looking for input from the public regarding the five (5) year master plan. He said the survey is still on-line and he encouraged residents to read it before coming to the Park Board Meeting and commenting. He said they have a place in the agenda for public input regarding the five (5) year master plan as it is part of the requirements of the DNR for acceptance of the five (5) year master plan. He reminded everyone that the Lincoln Center walking track is open every day and open to the public and its free.

Councilor Scheeringa congratulated Jordan Steele for setting the all-time scoring record for Highland High School girls basketball. He too thank the public works employees on the fine job they did removing this past weekend's snow. He said tonight, the VIPs had their annual dinner. He thanked them for their service as they are volunteers and so often go unappreciated.

• **Councilor George Georgeff:** *Town Executive (I.C. 36-1-2-5-(4); I.C. 36-5-2-2; I.C. 36-5-2-7);* • *Board of Trustees of the Police Pension Fund, Chair (By Law)* • *Budget Committee Chairman* • *Redevelopment Commission Member* • *Liaison to the Board of Water Works* • *Liaison to the Sanitary Board*

Councilor Georgeff complimented Mark Knesek and the Public Works Department on their fine job of snow removal from the streets while at the same time dealing with water main breaks. He commented that one of the plow trucks broke a drive shaft.

That concluded comments from the Council and President Georgeff then turned it over to comments from visitor's or residents, reminding them to limit their comments to 2 minutes.

Comments from Visitors or Residents:

Wayne Hays, Highland, made the following comments regarding areas the Council could look to help offset the budget shortfalls created by SB1:

Budget short fall due to state funding cut

Ideas
to raise
funds
COUNCIL

WHEEL Tax
Food & Beverage tax
income tax

Please consider some alternatives that tax
Commercial entities

① Corporate / business tax

② Charge for each employee a highland business
has : 1176 licensed businesses in town

Source
2023 US Census Bureau
Karoly Jacewiski
via Maria
Becerra

- 10,155 employees
- 8,874 of which live outside Highland 87 1/2%
- 1271 live & work in Highland

@ \$100/head = \$1,015,500
- Residents pay no tax = \$887,400

③ 1000 fee for each house sold in highland
- split between broker & sales agent

- 50 houses / mo = 600 / yr
- \$600,000 Revenue

④ TAX on ~~dealer~~ car dealer floor plan inventory

Terry Steagall commented on the death of Alex Pretti and read a statement from Alex's parents:

To the Town Council,

Please read the following statement into the council minutes and include Alex Pretti in the Town prayer.

Statement from Michael and Susan Pretti, Parents of Alex Jeffrey Pretti:

"We are heartbroken but also very angry.

Alex was a kindhearted soul who cared deeply for his family and friends and also the American veterans whom he cared for as an ICU nurse at the Minneapolis VA hospital. Alex wanted to make a difference in this world. Unfortunately, he will not be with us to see his impact.

I do not throw around the 'hero' term lightly. However, his last thought and act was to protect a woman. The sickening lies told about our son by the administration are reprehensible and disgusting. Alex is clearly not holding a gun when attacked by Trump's murdering and cowardly ICE thugs. He had his phone in his right hand and his empty left hand is raised above his head while trying to protect the woman ICE just pushed down, all while being pepper sprayed.

Please get the truth out about our son. He was a good man. Thank you."

Please tell the truth about Alex Pretti for standing up for our constitutional rights and democracy upholding life, liberty and the right to protest in America!

In Solidarity for Justice and Peace,
Terry Steagall

Councilor Georgeff asked if there were any other comments. Hearing none, he closed comments from the public and brought it back to the Council. He then asked for a motion to pay claims.

Payment of Accounts Payable Vouchers. There being no further comments from visitors or residents, Councilor Robertson moved to allow the vendors accounts payable vouchers as filed on the pending accounts payable docket, covering the period January 14, 2026 through January 27, 2026, and the payroll dockets with the exception of the Fire Department Quarterly payroll. Councilor Scheeringa seconded. Upon a roll call vote, there were five (5) affirmatives and no negatives. The motion passed. The accounts payable vouchers for the vendor docket were allowed, payments allowed in advance were ratified, the payroll dockets were ratified with the exception of the Fire Department Quarterly payroll and for all remaining invoices, the Clerk-Treasurer was authorized to make payment.

Councilor Robertson then moved to approve the Fire Department Quarterly payroll for the payroll docket payday by fund of January 23, 2026 and the payroll docket for payday of January 23, 2026. Councilor Scheeringa seconded. Upon a roll call vote, there were four (4) affirmatives, no negatives and one (1) abstention, with Councilors Georgeff, Robertson, Black and Scheeringa voting in the affirmative and Councilor Turich abstaining.

Accounts payable voucher January 14,2026 to January 27,2026, in the amount of **\$1,454,337.26**

General Fund, \$501,829.88; **MVH Fund**, \$58,297.63; **LR&S**, \$2537.70; **LAW Enforcement Continuing Education Training and Supply Fund**, \$1,1847.97; **Public Safety Income**, \$32,137.08; **Donation**, \$6,250.00; **Corporation Bond**, \$357,000.00; **MCCD**, \$6,921.99; **Solid Waste**, \$1,047.93; **ICT Fund**, \$16,334.90; **Police Pension**, \$69860.18; **Insurance Premium**, \$400,935.00

Payroll Docket for payday of January 23, 2026, by fund:
General, \$381,941.92

Payroll Docket for payday of January 23, 2025:

Office of Clerk-Treasurer, \$15,936.05; Building and Inspection Department, \$9,345.57; Metropolitan Police Department, \$200,836.27; Public Works Department (Agency), \$82,417.79; Fire Department, \$6,304.99 and Information and Technology Department, \$4,437.37
Total Payroll: \$319,278.04

Payroll Docket for payday of Jan 30,2026 by fund:
Total Payroll by fund: \$84,141.11

Payroll Docket for payday of January 30,2025:
Boards & Commissions. \$14,028.68; Police Pension, \$64,457.57
Total Payroll: \$83,118.57

Fire Department Quarterly:

Payroll Docket for payday of January 23,2026 by fund:
Total Payroll by fund: \$63,610.42

Payroll Docket for payday of January 23,2026:
Fire Department Quarterly. \$59,090.00
Total Payroll: \$ 59,090.00

Adjournment of Plenary Meeting. There being no further business on the agenda, the Town Council President declared the regular plenary meeting of the Town Council of Monday, January 26, 2026, adjourned at 7:04 o'clock p.m.

Mark Herak
Clerk-Treasurer

Approved by the Town Council at its meeting of February 9, 2026.