



Town Council of the Town of North Judson
Regular Meeting Minutes

May 19, 2025 – 6:30 PM

The North Judson Town Council met in Regular Session at the North Judson Town Hall, 310 Lane Street, North Judson, IN on the above date and time with the following present: Council President Rowe, Council Vice President Brown, Councilmember Lewandowski, Banks, and Windbigler. Clerk-Treasurer Rowe and Town Manager Leszek were present as well.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Council President Rowe asked for approval of the agenda. Council Vice President Brown moved to approve the agenda. Councilmember Banks seconded the motion, and all Councilmembers present concurred.

Council President Rowe asked for approval of the Minutes from the Regular Council Meeting on May 5, 2025. Council Vice President Brown moved to approve those Minutes. Councilmember Windbigler seconded the motion, and all Councilmembers present concurred.

Old Business:

Planning Commission/BZA – Vacancy Letter of Interest

The Commission now has one remaining open seat. A potential candidate, Andrew Hughes, had expressed interest in getting more involved. The Council discussed the process of considering new appointees for the vacancy. It was mentioned that several members are already familiar with Hughes and would be able to reach out directly if further clarification is needed. Rowe stated that he would leave the Planning Commission on the agenda for the next meeting. The Council will also decide at the next meeting whether interviews are needed and how to process depending on the interest received.

New Business:

Nicole Grzybowski – Baker Tilly Municipal Advisors: 2025 Comprehensive Financial Plan

Nicole Grzybowski was present on behalf of Baker Tilly Municipal Advisors. Grzybowski began with an overview of historical data from the town and the projections & expenditures used in the financial report. The report showed that there was a decline in circuit breaker credits from 2022 to 2025. It is anticipated that with the passing of SB1, circuit breaker amounts may begin to increase after 2025. There is an inverse relationship between assessed value (AV) and the property tax rate: as AV increases, the tax rate tends to decrease. The Town currently receives two types of Local Income Tax (LIT): certified LIT and economic development LIT. Supplement LIT is determined annually and is not guaranteed; thus, it is not included in

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the base report. Historical budget usage is close to the target range. Previous budgets show 96% of the budget being used in 2022 and 94% of the budget being used in 2023. Ideal usage is within the 90-95% range, indicating a balanced budget. The full financial impacts of SB1 are still unclear, as the Department of Revenue has not provided exact monetary figures.

The primary change for the Town will affect LIT and begin in 2028. The town may petition the county to adopt a LIT rate of up to 1.2%, as its population is under 3,500. If approved, there is potential for a larger share of LIT for the Town, especially since other districts are no longer in the same revenue bracket. SB1 eliminated excess levy appeals, which in the past allowed for a slight increase in the property tax base. The Town had previously been near eligibility for this appeal. Eligibility is vague and not clearly defined yet, but if applications are open this year, it may not be an option during next year's budget cycle. If North Judson is eligible, she advised to proceed with the application process regardless. The excess levy would indicate the Town is growing faster than the state average. This status impacts reporting, particularly for Local Income Tax projections. Changes related to SB1, and excess levy status do not affect the 2026 budget, as those changes begin in 2028. For projection purposes, the report assumes 25% of the current LIT levels. The next action items would be to check for excess levy applications, monitor post-budget actuals to update projections, track SB1 implementation development for impact on future LIT distributions, and prepare for potential capital funding gaps and utility rate review in 2028-2029.

Grzybowski went on to present the Fund Balance Health Reports. She stated that all Town funds maintain healthy reserves above the critical thresholds. They will continue to monitor all fund reserves. Grzybowski also discussed the Town's capital spending. She stated that the unused annual capital budget can be carried forward in the next year.

The Baker Tilly Advisors explained that the average water/sewer bill is \$97.61/month, which is below the state average. The statewide average is \$100.33/month. Many statewide rates are mid-phase and will increase in coming years.

Town Schedule of Fees – 2025 Update

Clerk-Treasurer Rowe presented the draft ordinance for the updated Schedule of Fees. The ordinance covers nearly all building and property improvement-related activities within Town limits. Equipment and labor fee, permits, applications, and miscellaneous charges have been updated and included in the packets. The new ordinance will be reviewed by the Council so that they may provide feedback. Council President Rowe suggested hosting a special meeting to go over the scheduled changes. Rowe and Leszek would get together to discuss a date to host the meeting.

Recognition of Guest

Anita Goodman was present but had nothing to discuss at this time.

Donna Henry was present on behalf of the Mint Festival Committee. Henry stated that the Mint Festival Pageant was this past Saturday at the Heartland Christian Center. She informed the Council that they had 34 participants registered which was the highest number in several years. Overall, the event was smooth and well-attended. Henry mentioned that the Mint Festival Committee was awarded a \$3,000 grant that will be going towards children's programming. Councilmember Lewandowski stated that they have a scheduled meeting coming up that will be establishing clear procedures and responses to emergency plans ahead of major events. Leszek also mentioned that the electrical issues have been addressed and should be ready to go before this year's festival.

Wanda Smolek was present on behalf of the Methodist Church. Smolek proposed adding flowers, shrubs or trees to improve the stairway area across from the church. She stated that her daughter, who is a landscape architecture graduate, walked the site with her and gave her low-maintenance planting suggestions. She asked whether the Town could assist in fixing up the space or support the effort in some way. The idea was well received, but the challenge is execution and ongoing maintenance. Council President Rowe explained that the Town staff currently lacks the capacity to maintain new plantings. He recommended that they put together a volunteer group to lead physical labor. The Town can price out and order approved plantings and materials.

Terry and Deb Young were present but had nothing to discuss at this time.

Kelly Shepherd was present but had nothing to discuss at this time.

Kaden Shepherd was present but had nothing to discuss at this time.

Department /Representative Reports

Clerk-Treasurer - Andrew Rowe

Clerk Treasurer Rowe presented the annual insurance policy from Liberty Mutual. The Council was able to review the Accident and Sickness policy renewal that covers the Fire Department. This policy renews annually on July 1st. This year's packet included new deductible and coinsurance options not previously presented in prior renewals. The Council expressed interest in maintaining consistency with past selections, unless a compelling reason to change arises. Rowe confirmed that he would review past policy selections and bring that information back to the Council. Then they will make a final selection on deductible and coinsurance options based on that review.

Clerk Treasurer Rowe presented the following Customer Adjustment Requests:

- Account No. 6988003: Utility Customer filled their pool and is requesting to be charged their average wastewater amount. Credit will be \$54.58.
- Account No. 5650006: Utility Customer filled their pool and is requesting to be charged their average wastewater amount. Credit will be \$68.12.
- Account No. 3080008: Utility Customer filled their pool and is requested to be charged their average wastewater amount. Credit will be \$78.55.
- Account No. 50001: Utility Customer filled their pool and is requesting to be charged their average wastewater amount. Credit will be \$35.20.
- Account No. 6050000: Utility Customer filled their pool and is requesting to be charged their average wastewater amount. Credit will be \$124.08.
- Account No. 6743001: Utility Customer filled their pool and is requesting to be charged their average wastewater amount. Credit will be \$1.76.

Council Vice President Brown made a motion to approve the following Customer Adjustment Requests:

- Account No. 6988003: Utility Customer filled their pool and is requesting to be charged their average wastewater amount. Credit will be \$54.58.
- Account No. 5650006: Utility Customer filled their pool and is requesting to be charged their average wastewater amount. Credit will be \$68.12.
- Account No. 3080008: Utility Customer filled their pool and is requested to be charged their average wastewater amount. Credit will be \$78.55.

- Account No. 50001: Utility Customer filled their pool and is requesting to be charged their average wastewater amount. Credit will be \$35.20.
- Account No. 6050000: Utility Customer filled their pool and is requesting to be charged their average wastewater amount. Credit will be \$124.08.
- Account No. 6743001: Utility Customer filled their pool and is requesting to be charged their average wastewater amount. Credit will be \$1.76.

Councilmember Windbigler seconded the motion, and all members present concurred.

Rowe informed the Council of a new public art initiative in collaboration with the Starke County Community Foundation. The project involves a jury call for sculpture design ideas, with selected works receiving a grant award and being exhibited for three years. Rowe suggested that Norwayne Field being a hosting location for the display, which would have the art be installed at ground level near a bench area, avoiding the hilltop, to maintain open space and sightlines. A kickoff event is scheduled for July 11th to promote the project and engage local artists.

Rowe presented the following Purchase Orders for Council Approval:

P.O. 2805 to 1st Choice Insurance Services for Policy Endorsement 01/10/2025 – 01/10/2026, Renewal 06/04/2025 – 06/04/2025, Invoice 20972 and 21222, in the amount of \$13,720.00.

Councilmember Lewandowski made a motion to approve the following Purchase Orders:

P.O. 2805 to 1st Choice Insurance Services for Policy Endorsement 01/10/2025 – 01/10/2026, Renewal 06/04/2025 – 06/04/2025, Invoice 20972 and 21222, in the amount of \$13,720.00.

Councilmember Banks seconded the motion, and all members present concurred.

School Board – Doug Wilde

Superintendent Kelly Shepherd stated that the school year is wrapping with the final student attendance being Thursday, May 22nd. The Graduation Commencement will be held on Sunday, June 1st at 2:00 p.m. on the football field.

An update was provided on a potential joint project between the Town, School, and Park Board to repurpose a dead tree near the trailhead/cross-county trail. The idea involves removing the tree and turning it into a wood carving representing the community/school-themed carving. Leszek had reached out to Bear Hollow Wood Carvers and a local tree contractor, but he is still waiting for a response. It was emphasized that this project would be a strong candidate for grant funding due to the multi-agency collaboration and visible location. The discussion acknowledged the value of student participation, particularly as students will need to complete community-based hours under new graduation pathway requirements.

Building Inspector – Todd Jackson

Building Inspector Todd Jackson stated that a drive-through survey was conducted by Town Officers to identify dilapidated properties. A total of 10 properties were noted – some newly identified and others previously flagged. Photos have been taken and forwarded to the Town Attorney for formal enforcement action. One property on High Street has already received an unsafe structure notice, and an inspection warrant was filed in court earlier in the day. Upon approval of the warrant, Town Officials will conduct a full inspection of the property and document all code violations. The Council will then determine whether to pursue remediation by the property owner or recommend demolition, depending on the severity of the issues. Attorney Schramm advised that seeking corrections of code enforcement is typically a faster and more straightforward legal process than pursuing demolition. A lien may be placed on the property

following fines, allowing the town a legal claim. In some cases, mortgage holders may intervene to remove liens and take possession. If the property owner resolves the violations and pays the fines, the process will be reset and begin again if violations reoccur. Legal notices and enforcement actions issued through Schramm's office carry greater weight in court proceedings. The property at the corner of Lane and Main Street has also received an unsafe letter, and photos have been submitted for legal action. The Council expressed concern about the hazardous awning on this property, citing potential danger to pedestrians. Jackson is continuing to monitor and address additional properties as needed.

Code Enforcement – Town Marshal Frank Thomas

Town Marshal Thomas stated that there was a house that had been abandoned and had reportedly gone back to the bank. The property is currently being handled by a property management company. Initial communication with the property management firm was prompt; they expressed intent to resolve issues quickly to avoid fines. However, there has now been a 25-day gap in communication, with no visible progress on-site. Follow-up emails have been sent, including reminders of potential fines to encourage compliance. Over the last 30 days, 28 property visits were conducted regarding various ordinance violations. While there have been visible improvements at several locations, other properties remain unchanged despite repeated efforts.

Unsafe Hearing

Nothing presented.

BZA/Planning Commission

Clerk-Treasurer Rowe suggested scheduling a meeting for early July.

Redevelopment Commission

Clerk-Treasurer Rowe stated that there may be a need to meet Monday, June 2nd, otherwise the Commission will meet prior to the second monthly meeting.

Park Board – Nick Radtke

Nothing Presented.

Police Department – Town Marshal Frank Thomas

Thomas mentioned that they had a total of 569 calls which included a mix of routine patrol logs, extra patrols, business checks, 911 responses, and assistance calls. He then went into more detail about each type of call they had made over the last month. Thomas explained that the officers generated a significant amount of proactive service logs, especially during nighttime hours, for preemptive policing.

Fire Department – Fire Chief Todd Jackson

Jackson stated that the annual Fish Fry would be on June 7th at the Fire Department.

Utility Department – Utility Supervisor Kimberly Kapp

Utility Supervisor Kapp stated that a pump had to be pulled due to a blockage. After some maintenance, it was reset and resumed operation successfully. She also mentioned that a test run of the splash pad was conducted. All systems functioned as expected during the trial. Official startups are pending; performance will be monitored closely. The mosquito sprayer was calibrated and successfully passed inspection. The equipment is ready for use at the start of the season.

Utility Supervisor Kapp presented the following Purchase Orders for Council Approval:

P.O. 2800 to Republic for Removal of Sludge Dumpsters (2), Invoice 0717-001664072, in the amount of \$4,325.46.

P.O. 2801 to Utility Supply for Water Meter/Value Supplies, Invoice 1520490, in the amount of \$2,342.24.

P.O. 2802 to H&T Electrical for Labor to Bypass Switch and Install New, Transfer Switch, Invoice 2947, in the amount of \$13,756.04.

Council Vice President Brown made a motion to approve the following Purchase Orders:

P.O. 2800 to Republic for Removal of Sludge Dumpsters (2), Invoice 0717-001664072, in the amount of \$4,325.46.

P.O. 2801 to Utility Supply for Water Meter/Value Supplies, Invoice 1520490, in the amount of \$2,342.24.

P.O. 2802 to H&T Electrical for Labor to Bypass Switch and Install New, Transfer Switch, Invoice 2947, in the amount of \$13,756.04.

Councilmember Windbigler seconded the motion, and all members present concurred.

Town Manager – Joe Leszek

Town Manager Leszek mentioned that Doug Wilde from the NJSP School Board visited to discuss a potential school expansion project. The proposed location is behind the new bus garage. Zoning and infrastructure questions were addressed by Town Officials. The project is still in the early stages. He also mentioned that the recertification for chemical handling and application was completed with the Indiana State Chemist's Office.

Leszek received a quote from HWC regarding the video and audio equipment for the Town Hall. This update is necessary to meet the state compliance deadline in July. He stated that the quote was for a total of \$9,408.47.

Council Vice President Brown made a motion to approve the quote of \$9,408.47 from Focus Audio for Town Hall meeting audio/video recording. Councilmember Windbigler seconded the motion, and all members present concurred.

Clerk-Treasurer Rowe explained that there had been a double payment that had been sent to Peerless Midwest, Inc. The second payment will be returned. A resolution will be made for a future meeting to document to address the adjustment formally. Rowe explained the process of identifying and resolving uncashed or checks written in error.

Leszek presented the following Purchase Orders for Council Approval:

P.O. 2803 to North Judson Ace Hardware for 20 gallons of Paint, Invoice 5391/2, in the amount of \$989.82.

P.O. 2804 to Gary & Sons for Mowing and Weed Eating of Highland & Pioneer Cemetery, Invoice 05082025, in the amount of \$2200.00.

Council Vice President Brown made a motion to approve the following Purchase Orders:

P.O. 2803 to North Judson Ace Hardware for 20 gallons of Paint, Invoice 5391/2, in the amount of \$989.82.

P.O. 2804 to Gary & Sons for Mowing and Weed Eating of Highland & Pioneer Cemetery, Invoice 05082025, in the amount of \$2200.00.

Councilmember Banks seconded the motion, and all members present concurred.

Legal Updates – Town Attorney Justin Schramm

Nothing Presented.

Additional Business Deemed Necessary by the Council:

Council President Rowe asked if there had been any updates regarding the employee picnic. Leszek stated that they were looking at dates in July. It was suggested that the picnic should be in the mid-afternoon depending on the weather and availability. The park would be the primary location, but the firehouse will be the backup in case of excessive heat or inclement weather. The Town Hall staff will coordinate with town employees to finalize the date and logistics.

Payment of Claims:

Council Vice President Brown made a motion to pay Payment of Claims in the amount of \$139,134.07. Councilmember Banks seconded the motion, and all members present concurred.

Council Vice President Brown made a motion to adjourn, Councilmember Windbigler seconded the motion, and all members present concurred.

Meeting adjourned at 8:20 P.M.



John Rowe, Council President

Attest:



Andrew J. Rowe, Clerk-Treasurer

Next regular scheduled meeting – Monday, June 2, 2025 at 6:30 P.M.