

**October 16, 2018**

**TOWN OF GRIFFITH TOWN COUNCIL MINUTES**

Council President Rick Ryfa called the October 16, 2018 meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**POLICE OFFICERS KILLED IN THE LINE OF DUTY**

Council Member James Marker read the names of the Police Officers Killed in the Line of Duty

- Sergeant Terrence Carraway, Florence Police Department, SC

**ROLL CALL:**

James Marker  
Lawrence Ballah  
Rick Ryfa  
Tony Hobson  
Melissa Robbins

**ALSO ATTENDING:**

John C. Volkmann- Clerk Treasurer  
Greg Mance – Chief of Police  
Steve McDermott – Building Commissioner  
Sheri Bradtke-McNeil – Attorney for the Town  
Roy Schoon – Fire Chief -Absent  
Don Hill – Asst. Fire Chief  
Rick Konopasek – Director of Public Works

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

Council Member Melissa Robbins made a motion to approve the minutes of the October 2, 2018 meeting as presented, seconded by Council Member Tony Hobson. Motion carried 5 in favor, none opposed.

**APPROVAL OF CLAIMS:** Claims No. 19938 – 20179, \$1,650,722.31 (One million, six hundred fifty thousand, seven hundred twenty-two dollars and thirty-one cents). Council Member James Marker made a motion to approve the claims as presented, seconded by Council Member Lawrence Ballah. Motion carried, 5 in favor, none opposed.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

1. There will not be a Town Council Meeting on Tuesday November 6, 2018 because of elections.
2. The next council meeting will be on Tuesday, November 13, 2018 at 7:00 p.m. There will be a study session at 6:30 p.m. and one will follow if necessary.
3. There will not be a Town Council study session on Tuesday, October 23, 2018.
4. There will be a Redevelopment Commission meeting on Tuesday, October 23, 2018.
5. The Budget Adoption meeting will take place on Tuesday, October 30, 2018 at 6:30 p.m. in Town Hall.

**COMMUNICATIONS:**

1. Council President Rick Ryfa announced that Sears/Kmart has filed bankruptcy and they will be closing the Kmart in Griffith Park Plaza. It is hoped that this will pave the way for future development of this site.

**REPORTS:**

- Public Works – Director of Public Works Rick Konopasek reported that the leaf vac program will begin on October 22, 2018.
- Police – No Report
- Fire – No Report
- Building Commissioner – No Report
- Finance – Clerk Treasurer John Volkmann opened the public hearing for the proposed 2019 budget. He announced that following this meeting, any ten or more taxpayers may object to a budget, tax rate or tax levy by filing an objection petition with the proper officers of Griffith Civil Town not more than seven days after the hearing. The objection petition must identify the provisions of the budget, tax rate, or tax levy to which taxpayers object. If a petition is filed, Griffith Civil Town shall adopt with the budget a finding concerning the objections in the petition and testimony presented. Following the aforementioned hearing the proper officers of Griffith Civil Town will meet to adopt the budget.

**PENDING ITEMS:**

**TOWNSHIP ISSUES:** Calumet Township Secession update: Council President Rick Ryfa announced that Reedy Financeil Group would give an update later in this meeting.  
Golf Course: The Town is still in negotiations with the EPA and the Army Corps of Engineers.

Interceptor Project: The project is a little ahead of schedule and is still under budget.

**PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS:**

Kathy Rueskin stated that she is very pleased with the Council and likes the way they are leading the charge.

**BUSINESS FROM THE COUNCIL:**

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS: None**

**NEW BUSINESS:**

- a. Council Member Lawrence Ballah opened a bid for three new trucks for the Public Works Department. The only bid was from Lake Shore Ford Motors of Chesterton in the amount of \$131,225.00. Council Member James Marker made a motion to forward the bid to the Town Attorney and the Director of Public Works for review and recommendation. Motion carried, 5 in favor none opposed.
- b. Eric Reedy of the Reedy Financial Group gave an update on the financial aspects of moving to either St. John Township or North Township. He compared the Tax Rates of Calumet Township (Calumet) to St. John Township (St.John) and North Township (North). Calumet tax rate:0.3470; St. John tax rate: 0.0111; North tax rate: 0.0789. He spoke about Revenue Impacts, Projected Taxing District Rates, Certified Assessed Values (A.V.), annual A.V. growth for the Town of Griffith. He also compared the tax rates for Griffith, Lake County and Calumet. Lake County and Calumet show increased tax rates for the last four years while the Town of Griffith has experienced a lowering of tax rates for the last four years. The entire analysis will be available on the Town Website and at the Clerk Treasurers Office.

Public Comment on the Township issue: There were many comments on the issue some of which are: several residents asked about the property tax impact on their homes. The analysis provided by Reedy used several actual properties in the Town (no actual addresses or names were in the study, all parcels were identified by parcel number) the example of a home with an assessed value of \$141,000 would save \$142.00 if in North and \$178.00 if in St.John. If the home is valued at \$150,000 or more there would be no reduction other that the property tax will be capped at 1% in 2020. Another resident asked about other benefits that each township provided and if there were specific criteria to be met in order to receive those benefits. Frank Mrvan, North Township Trustee, was in the audience and addressed this. He stated that North has many amenities to be offered to residents, the "Dial a Ride", which is free and provides transportation within North, senior luncheon, senior trips etc., poor relief is also provided but certain income levels must be met, if you receive \$200 for assistance on a utility bill you are expected to perform "work fare" for this assistance. "Dial a Ride" may have to charge a fee in the future to help offset the cost. North also works with other service agencies like the Red Cross and Catholic Charities to assist residents. North also has concerts and a golf course at Wicker Park. Another resident asked about assessments and how they are conducted, North uses a private assessment company and St. John uses its own assessors. A resident asked about the schools. The school situation would remain the same regardless of which Township we join. Griffith residents would still be in Griffith schools. A resident asked if the 1%, 2%, 3% was going to disappear in 2020. She was advised that no it would not disappear but would be the rule going forward. At present the assessment contains a caluculation for school and Town debt, in 2020 this will no longer be the case, a homestead would only be assessed at a rate of 1% of the assessed value of the home. She also asked Mr. Mrvan about the concerts and other events that North sponsors and how much it costs to attend. Mr Mrvan explained that they have a multi-level payment plan that is determined by where a person lives, in the township or out. Which Township will we go into. The Town will pass a resolution addressing the issue, one will be sent to St. John and one to North, whichever Township Board responds favorable first will be the

one that we will be obligated to join. If neither Township accepts us we will have to stay in Calumet Township. We are hoping to have a decision by the end of the year. If it is not completed by the end of this year it will cost the Town over \$2.2 million dollars in Township payment to Calumet. Another resident asked if any numbers had been run on the Township. Rick Ryfa replied that yes there were: the AV for Griffith in 2014 was \$445 million and was \$628 million in 2018. This shows tremendous growth in the Town and is one of the reasons why the Property Tax Rate has been going down for the last 5 years. There should be no circuit breaker impact on North or St. John. A resident asked if anyone from the Town had spoken to anyone from either Township. Rick Ryfa replied that "no, no one had spoken to anyone from either St. John or North, we wanted to have this meeting first and get some public feedback. Many residents are in favor of St. John because of the low tax rate, however, North has many positive things to offer for just a few dollars more. The email to voice an opinion on which Township to apply to is: [towncouncil@griffith.in.gov](mailto:towncouncil@griffith.in.gov). Someone asked if it was possible to have a vote on which township people preferred. Rick Ryfa responded that there wasn't enough time to put together another special election. Another resident asked if we are accepted by another Township before the end of the year which tax rate would we pay. Rick Ryfa advised that whichever Township accepted us we would be obligated to pay their tax rate. Both St. John and North have already adopted their 2019 budgets, as a result whichever one accepts us would have to file a budget appeal with the DLGF in order to make the appropriate adjustments to their budget. Someone asked if information on both Townships could be included in the water bill so that people without computer access would know what the benefits of each Township were. She was advised that a newsletter would be mailed soon with much of the information about each Township. Why would a Township not want us. Rick Ryfa answered he could not think of a reason why not, the Town offers many positives to whomever would accept us, steadily increasing AV, good growth and declining tax rate. A rough vote was taken as to which Township we should go with and it was about even. Someone asked if there would be any cost involved with joining another Township. They were advised that there could be some additional costs involved, the DLGF has the ability to fine up to \$100,000 or 5% of the budget increase being asked for. Frank Mrvan was asked if North would still be open to us if we were rejected by St. John. He said that yes he would be open to that dialogue, North offers direct and indirect relief. Tony Hobson added that we don't mind helping other communities out but when there is such a large difference in the amount of taxes being paid and what we get in return is what we have issues with. Rick Ryfa stated that this is the first time in the State where a community has made a decision to leave one township and join another. We appreciate the support of the Town in this matter. The Town would also like to thank Glen Gaby and George Jerome for all of their hard work on this matter. There are many more comments on this matter that could not be listed here, there is a recording of this meeting that will be attached to this summary.

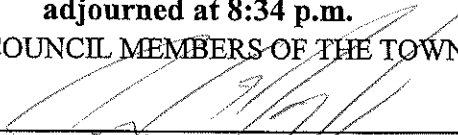
**PUBLIC COMMENTS:**


1. A resident commented on the condition of the sidewalks in certain areas of the town. Council President Rick Ryfa replied that we are looking into it for next budget year. It will depend on available funding, it would be a 75/25 or 50/50 plan depending on funding. We are also having an engineering firm rate the sidewalks and those in the worst condition would be the first to be addressed. The same resident asked if there were ordinances about how yards are kept, she sees homes with overgrown bushes, trees and lawns. She was advised to contact Code Enforcement for these issues. She was also advised that she could go to the "Griffith on the Go" app and report these issues. Another resident expressed concerns about the new LED lighting and how there are dark areas because of overhanging trees and limited street lights in some of the cul-de-sacs, especially near Jay St. and 39<sup>th</sup>. Rick Ryfa advised that it is a NIPSCO issue, but if it was a serious issue the Town would look into it. A resident asked about the trains and how they are longer and more frequent. She asked if there

could be a warning system installed that would alert drivers of backups due to trains so that they could take an alternate route. Rick Ryfa said that it was looked at in the past and maybe it could be looked at again. Another resident asked about trains sitting and idling and sounding their horn. Rick Ryfa acknowledged that this is an issue. Another resident who is an employee of the railroads stated because of ongoing crossing repairs the train engineers are required to sound their horn for safety reasons. A resident from the north side of town asked if there were going to be sidewalks around the new park near the north Fire Station. She was advised that the Town would look into it. Another resident asked if their neighbor has a tree whose limbs grow over the adjoining property is this allowable. She was advised that it is allowable but the home owner whose property the tree overhangs has the right to trim the branches up to the property line. A resident asked about the recent restrictions on what can and cannot be recycled. She was advised that due to recent changes by the Chinese, they will now only accept recycled materials that are 99.5% pure, it has put a lot of pressure on U.S. recyclers to restrict what can be recycled.

**There being no further business to come before this Council, the meeting was adjourned at 8:34 p.m.**

COUNCIL MEMBERS OF THE TOWN OF GRIFFITH, LAKE COUNTY, INDIANA


  
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**Rick Ryfa – President**

  
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**Larry Ballah – Vice President**

  
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**James Marker**

  
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**Tony Hobson**

  
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**Melissa Robbins**

  
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**Attest: John C. Volkmann – Clerk Treasurer**