

PORTER TOWN COUNCIL MINUTES SEPTEMBER 22, 2026

The Town Council of the Town of Porter, Indiana met in a regularly scheduled session on Tuesday, September 22, 2026, at the Porter Town Hall, 303 Franklin Street, Porter, Indiana. The meeting was called to order by Town Council President Bill Lopez at 7:00 p.m.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Roll Call

William "Bill" Lopez..... Present
Kelly Karriman Present
James Burge Present
Don Craft..... Absent
Laura Madigan Present

A quorum was attained. Clerk-Treasurer Corinne Peffers was also present.

Additional Officials Present

Police Chief Dan Dickey, Fire Chief Jay Craig, Building Commissioner/Director of Development Michael Barry, and Attorney Christopher Willoughby. Public Works Superintendent Jamie Spanier was present via telephone for a portion of the meeting.

Approval of Minutes

Council Member Burge moved to approve the minutes of the September 8, 2026, and the September 14, 2026, Executive Session; Council Vice President seconded. Motion carried by all in favor voice vote.

Consideration of Claims and Sewer Adjustments

Council Member Madigan moved to approve the claims and sewer adjustments; Council Member Burge seconded. Motion carried by all in favor voice vote.

Petitions & Comments from the Floor

Council President Lopez opened the floor and asked that anyone wishing to address the Council step to the lectern and state their name and address for the record.

Kevin Zeck, Superintendent of Discovery Charter School, spoke in support of the School Resource Officer Memorandum of Understanding on the agenda. He said he became superintendent in January after spending his entire life and career in the Duneland community. He described the school's unique location, with about 500 students and about 400 cars coming in and out each day and said school safety needs have changed since the school opened 17 years ago. He said the school took up the SRO work his predecessors had begun, and he praised the school's partnership with the Town and the Porter Police Department. He noted that the Fire Department had responded to an incident at the school the previous Friday that involved a driver rather than students. He said this was an example of how having someone on site helps the school, and he thanked the Council for considering the MOU. Council President Lopez thanked him for attending.

There were no further comments, and that portion of the meeting was closed.

Reports

Clerk-Treasurer Report

Clerk-Treasurer Peffers updated the Council on MUST, a county-level task force created in 2026 following the 2025 property and income tax overhaul under SEA 1. She explained that the law delayed the effective date of the local income tax (LIT) changes to 2029, allowed cities and towns to opt into a countywide municipal services rate, and adjusted the formula for distributing that rate. The task force is a forum for the county and its cities and towns to discuss how future LIT rates should be split.

The county convenes the task force. Its members are one County Council representative and the fiscal officer of each city and town. The County Council formally convened the task force at its August 25 meeting and chose Council Member at Large Michelle Harris as its representative, for 12 members in total.

The first meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, September 30, from 3:30 to 6:00 p.m. at the County Administration Center in Valparaiso. The meeting is subject to the Open Door Law.

Any agreement requires a unanimous vote. The county would submit an agreement to the DLGF on a form the DLGF has issued, and the DLGF will compile the agreements into a report due to the legislature by December 1. Any agreement is prospective and non-binding and does not set any tax rates. If no agreement is reached, current statute governs, and the county still files a report summarizing the discussion. She asked Council members to send her any questions or input on what the Town should bring to the table.

Clerk-Treasurer Peffers requested Council direction on pay for Park Department employees who were reassigned to street and sewer emergency work after the August 11 storm. The Park Director proposed paying the lowest Unlimited Equipment Operator rate in the 2026 Salary Ordinance, Twenty-Four and 20/100 Dollars (\$24.20) per hour, for the street and sewer hours worked during the August 9–22 pay period. That payroll had already been processed at each employee's normal Park rate and stands as processed, so any action would be a separate, documented adjustment. She asked whether the Council intended for these employees to be paid at the Unlimited Equipment Operator rate for the hours they actually performed street and sewer duties, or at their normal rate.

Council President Lopez said the situation was unique and that the employees should be paid the higher of the two rates for the period they helped with the storm response. Council Member Madigan said the response happened too quickly for the Council to consider its intention at the time. She said she was grateful the employees stepped up to do work outside their normal duties, and she supported paying them the same rate as anyone else doing that work. Council Vice President Karriman agreed.

Clerk-Treasurer Peffers noted that the adjustment was originally proposed for only one employee but said she believed the same logic applies to both. Council Member Madigan said she believed the original difference was a miscalculation and not an intention by the Park Director to withhold the payment from either employee. The Clerk-Treasurer presented the recalculated adjustments:

- Part-time employee: Four Hundred Seventy-Nine and 70/100 Dollars (\$479.70), split between Motor Vehicle Highway (Two Hundred Nine and 30/100 Dollars (\$209.30)) and Sewer (Two Hundred Seventy and 40/100 Dollars (\$270.40))
- Full-time employee: Forty and 85/100 Dollars (\$40.85), split between Sewer (Twenty-Seven and 08/100 Dollars (\$27.08)) and Motor Vehicle Highway (Thirteen and 77/100 Dollars (\$13.77))

Council Member Madigan moved to approve the wage adjustments as presented; Council Vice President Karriman seconded. Motion carried by all in favor voice vote.

Clerk-Treasurer Peffers requested Council action on seven hours submitted by a police officer for a meeting with a prosecutor and a jury trial on August 25 and August 31. The officer asked to receive earned time off (ETO) for those hours instead of pay. The case arose from the officer's prior employment with another law enforcement agency and was not a Town of Porter case. The Town's personnel policy does not compensate witness duty for matters arising from a previous employer, so the hours were not approved, and the officer disputes how the policy applies. The Council discussed the matter in Executive Session on September 14, and the Town Attorney has also reviewed it. She asked the Council to either deny the seven hours of ETO for consistency with the Town's personnel policy, or approve them as a one-time exception to the policy.

Council Vice President Karriman moved to approve the seven hours of ETO as a one-time exception to the Town's personnel policy. The motion died for lack of a second.

Council Member Burge moved to deny the request based on the Town's personnel policy; Council Member Madigan seconded. Lopez – yes. Madigan – yes. Burge – yes. Karriman – no. Motion carried.

Attorney Report

Attorney Willoughby had nothing to report.

Police Department Report

Chief Dickey requested approval of an assemblage permit for the Crazy Legs race series 5K. The race starts at Hawthorne Park on Sunday, December 13, at 9:00 a.m., and all paperwork is in order.

Council Vice President Karriman to approve the permit; Council Member Burge seconded. Motion carried by all in favor voice vote.

Chief Dickey said he began working to strengthen the relationship between Discovery Charter School and the Town three school administrations ago, before an SRO was under consideration. He thanked Superintendent Zeck for attending, noting that Mr. Zeck had been his middle school math teacher. Chief Dickey said the MOU will be considered under New Business.

He said he had emailed the Council about a pay rate difference for the officer assigned as SRO. Any decision would require a salary ordinance amendment. He asked to discuss the matter with Council members before the next meeting and said he was not requesting action tonight. Council President Lopez said Council members would reach out to him with questions.

Fire Department Report

Fire Chief Craig reported on the 2026 part-time staffing, which he had presented to the Redevelopment Commission earlier that evening, and said he would forward the update to the Council. Part-time staff worked 75 days, mostly eight-hour shifts, including one Sunday over the Fourth of July weekend, and responded to approximately 140 calls for service.

He highlighted a call for a man in cardiac arrest. Because of the rapid response by police, EMS, and on-duty firefighters, the patient regained a pulse and was later released from the hospital. Staff also worked the disaster response, and one part-time firefighter had a large tree fall on his house during his shift but chose to finish the shift before going home. While part-time crews were on station, response times averaged under two minutes, which Chief Craig said is considerably faster than volunteers responding from home to the station.

Part-time staff also spent time on equipment repairs and maintenance. This included upgrading the training room's audio-visual equipment and repairing trucks, generators, and small motors. Maintenance hours were down from last year because of a busier call volume and because older equipment had been taken out of service. Equipment on the new ladder truck replaced most of the Department's small gas-engine generators and gas hydraulic pumps, although gas hydraulic equipment remains on the rescue truck. Much of the summer was spent upfitting the ladder truck, mounting equipment, and training firefighters to operate it.

Chief Craig explained that his original request covered part-time staffing from the day after Memorial Day to the Friday before Labor Day, and approximately Seven Thousand Four Hundred and 00/100 Dollars (\$7,400.00) remains of the not-to-exceed Forty-Five Thousand and 00/100 Dollars (\$45,000.00) approved by the RDC with TIF dollars. He had spoken with the RDC which agreed to his request to use some of the remaining funds for staffing during Fire Prevention Week school visits. Fire Prevention Week is typically the first week in October. Because of delays to the start of the school year, the visits this year are scheduled for the last week of October, Monday through Thursday. Extra staffing would give students more activities and learning opportunities. It would also keep emergency calls from cutting short or cancelling their visits.

In response to Council President Lopez, Chief Craig said three firefighters for one week at the maximum pay rate would cost no more than Two Thousand Four Hundred and 00/100 Dollars (\$2,400.00).

Council Member Madigan moved to approve part-time staffing for Fire Prevention Week, Monday through Thursday of the last week of October; Council Member Burge seconded. Motion carried by all in favor voice vote.

On behalf of the Park Director, Chief Craig encouraged residents to buy tickets online for Perfect Pint on October 3, held jointly by the Fire and Park Departments. He said last year's proceeds were largely spent on equipment for the ladder truck, which will be on display at the event. He noted that the silent auction will be smaller than in past years because donations were harder to obtain.

Public Works Department Report

Superintendent Spanier was absent, and Council Member Madigan reported for him. She referred the Council to his email about the emergency debris removal and said she did not believe action was needed. Council President Lopez noted that the Council needed to approve sending a letter of intent.

Superintendent Spanier joined by phone and confirmed that the Town could still withdraw after sending the letter. He reported that three companies had estimated the debris at between 30,000 and 50,000 cubic yards. The state contractor who inspected the site that day estimated about 11,000 cubic yards, which was closer to the Town's own estimate. The state is determining whether the debris staged at the brickyard can be chipped and spread on site, which would cost far less than hauling it away. The Town's share would be 6.25%, less amounts already contributed. The contractor would also remove split and hazard trees.

Superintendent Spanier explained that the contract would be with the state, not the Town. The state would act as the intermediary with FEMA, receive the reimbursement, and bill the Town for its share. He noted that the information he had received was verbal, and he encouraged Council members to contact the state director to confirm it. Council President Lopez noted that most debris throughout town had already been collected, that the program would also remove trees in the park, and that the work could be done sooner this way.

Council Member Madigan said she normally hesitates to commit to costs without written estimates. She supported sending the letter of intent because it is not a binding commitment and the Town could withdraw if the estimates came back too high. Clerk-Treasurer Peffers identified the contractor as Southern Disaster Recovery (SDR) and the monitor as Debris Tech.

Council Member Madigan moved to send a letter of intent and move forward with debris removal through the state program; Council Vice President Karriman seconded. Motion carried by all in favor voice vote.

Superintendent Spanier asked that the letter state a firm deadline after which the Town could no longer withdraw. Council President Lopez said the Town Attorney would review the letter before it is sent.

Council Member Madigan asked whether a cost per cubic yard had been provided. Superintendent Spanier said the state contractor estimated \$60,000 to \$70,000 total for 11,000 cubic yards if the debris is spread on site. Hauling would cost more, and no figure was given for it. Clerk-Treasurer Peffers reported that she had followed up with Larry at IDHS that day. IDHS's preliminary estimate was about 13,700 cubic yards at a total cost of \$662,000, which would make the 6.25% local share \$41,375. She said the figure was preliminary, with unknowns because of where the debris is placed at the brickyard and possible remediation or compliance issues. Superintendent Spanier said this differed from what he had been told and that the IDHS figure was likely correct.

Council President Lopez said the question of whether the debris will be hauled still has to be resolved. Attorney Willoughby suggested that the letter reserve the Town's right to withdraw within a set number of days after receiving the final estimate.

Park Department Report

Park Director Bugajski was absent, and there was no report. Council Member Madigan noted that Chief Craig had covered the fundraiser and encouraged residents to buy tickets.

Building Commissioner/Director of Development Report

Building Commissioner/Director of Development Michael Barry requested approval of eight (8) contractors who have met all their requirements and paid their fees.

Council Member Burge moved to approve the eight (8) contractors; Council Vice President Karriman seconded. Motion passed by all in favor voice vote.

Barry reported that he submitted the Town's 2027 Community Crossings Matching Grant application the previous Thursday. The application covers segments of Michigami Trail, Ottawa Trail, and Pottawattomie Trail. Because a previous stormwater study found little stormwater infrastructure in this area, the project includes installing it. Work will start at the east end, where drainage problems are worst, including the ponding near Ottawa Trail and Woodlawn Avenue, and will follow existing utility easements. The estimated project total is Six Hundred Nine Thousand Five Hundred Eighty and 00/100 Dollars (\$609,580.00).

He has received a proposal from Ellis to maintain the two newly installed generators. He has requested a proposal from another contractor to maintain all the Town's generators.

The Beam Street lift station on Mineral Springs Road backs up during heavy rain. Mr. Barry consulted the retired engineer who designed it and contacted Gasvoda, which will send someone with meters to measure the inflow. Changing the impellers would give little improvement. Replacing the two 7.5-horsepower pumps would be fairly simple, would not require IDEM involvement, and the pumps could

be reused in a future upgrade. Inflow and infiltration is entering somewhere in the system. He sent the Council a map of the area the station serves, which extends to Chellberg Farm, south to Worthington, and includes the Lake Charles area and Woodlake Springs. Because Woodlake Springs is fairly new, he does not expect infiltration there, but staff will check the pipes running into it to try to trace the source.

Council Member Madigan asked whether the Town's federal community project grant application was for an inflow and infiltration project. Mr. Barry said it was, for a different set of neighborhoods, to be done in phases: first Dunes Forest, then Waverly Heights, then a third neighborhood. The Town is working with Commonwealth Engineers, and the project was also submitted for Representative Frank Mrvan's community project funding. The Town has not yet heard back.

INDOT is installing traffic signals at US 12 and Mineral Springs Road and at US 12 and Waverly Road. Barry inspected the electrical components so that NIPSCO can install the meters. He will update the Council on when the signals will be activated, and the Town will then work to educate residents on how they operate. He will contact INDOT about the Oak Hill intersection. He noted that the storm had set the Town back about a month.

Old Business

There was no old business.

Public Hearing – 2027 Budget

Council President Lopez opened the public hearing on the 2027 budget at 7:47 p.m., and Clerk-Treasurer Peffers gave an overview. The Council cannot adopt the budget at the hearing and may not act on it until Tuesday, October 13.

The proposed budget totals Six Million Three Hundred Fifty-Eight Thousand Eight Hundred Fifty-Nine and 00/100 Dollars (\$6,358,859.00). It includes the operating funds reviewed by the DLGF, such as the General, Motor Vehicle Highway, Fire, and Park funds, along with locally controlled funds, grants, and donation funds. It does not include utility or TIF funds.

The Notice to Taxpayers (Form 3) shows a proposed levy of Four Million Six Hundred Seventy-Three Thousand Four Hundred Fifty-Five and 00/100 Dollars (\$4,673,455.00), compared with the current levy of Three Million Six Hundred Fifty-Six Thousand Two Hundred Sixty-Six and 00/100 Dollars (\$3,656,266.00). The Town advertises higher than it expects to levy so that it captures its full operating levy. The DLGF will reduce the operating levies to the certified maximum when it issues the budget order.

The debt service levy is higher because of debt the Town issued this year. That levy is set by the debt payment schedule and is not subject to the maximum levy. The Cumulative Capital Development fund was also advertised higher but will be reduced to its statutory cap of five cents. The Town is estimated to lose Six Hundred Thirty-Three Thousand Six Hundred and 00/100 Dollars (\$633,600.00) to property tax cap (circuit breaker) credits. This is revenue the Town is authorized to levy but will not collect because of the constitutional caps on individual tax bills.

Ten or more taxpayers may file an objection petition with the Town within seven days, by September 29. A petition must identify the specific budget, rate, or levy provisions being objected to. If one is filed, the Council must adopt a finding along with the budget. After the Council adopts the budget on October 13, the Town will submit it to the DLGF. The DLGF typically issues the certified budget order in late December or early January, and the levies and rates in that order will appear on 2027 tax bills. Complete budget details are available at budgetnotices.in.gov or at Town Hall.

Council President Lopez opened the floor for comments.

Jennifer Klug, of the 200 block of Franklin Street, spoke in favor of the budget. She said the Council, the Clerk-Treasurer, and the department heads had presented the budget in a way residents can understand, including through public workshops, which has not always been the case. She acknowledged that changes in state funding make it difficult to cover the Town's needs.

Ms. Klug urged the Town to follow the Police Department's guidance on replacing vehicles as needed. She said police vehicles are used differently from other departments' vehicles, including in pursuits. She added that mileage comparisons with the Indiana State Police are not apt, because ISP vehicles are driven mainly on highways and ISP has dedicated maintenance facilities. Chief Dickey confirmed that each ISP post has its own garage.

Ms. Klug cited the stated purpose of the Open Door Law, that government exists to serve the people, and thanked the Council for its open process. Council President Lopez thanked her and said the Council is reviewing the matter.

There were no further comments, and the public hearing was closed at 7:55 p.m.

New Business

Ordinance No. 2026-14, Appropriations and Tax Rates for the year ending December 31, 2027

The Council held a first reading of Ordinance No. 2026-14. Council President Lopez noted that the Clerk-Treasurer had presented the budget during the public hearing.

Council Member Madigan moved to set Ordinance No. 2026-14 for second reading for the October 13, 2026, meeting; Council Vice President Karriman seconded. Motion carried by all in favor vote.

School Resource Officer Memorandum of Understanding with Discovery Charter School

Council President Lopez thanked Superintendent Zeck for attending. Chief Dickey recognized two people: Deputy Chief Tom Blythe, for his work over the past several years building the relationship with the superintendent and the school, and Sergeant Tawni Komiscarcik, who was selected for the SRO position and has already been welcomed by the school's staff and students.

Chief Dickey then presented the MOU for Council approval. Council President Lopez clarified that the document is a memorandum of understanding between Discovery Charter School and the Town of Porter Police Department, not a resolution or ordinance.

Attorney Willoughby said he had reviewed the MOU and found it otherwise acceptable, but he raised two items. First, the Town normally includes a remedies provision that awards attorney's fees in any enforcement action. Discovery Charter School declined that provision in favor of the default rule that each party pays its own fees. The school did agree to a mutual indemnification provision covering specific acts outside the normal scope of the agreement, which he found acceptable. He recommended that any approval be subject to the Town's insurance carrier approving the indemnification provision, so that it does not affect the Town's coverage. Second, Article Four refers to Appendix A, a job description, that was not attached to the MOU in the packet. He recommended that it be inserted.

Council Vice President Karriman moved to approve the MOU subject to the insurance carrier's approval of the indemnification clause and the insertion of Appendix A (job description); Council Member Madigan seconded. Council Member Madigan said she was comfortable with the MOU. She said her earlier concerns had been addressed by mutual agreement, and she thanked Attorney Willoughby for raising the remaining items. Motion carried by all in favor voice vote.

Phone System Proposals

Clerk-Treasurer Peffers explained that the proposals were for town-wide phone service: one from GGNet Technologies, and the other from NITCO. The term of the current contract with Frontier runs from the date the phones were installed, February 28, 2024, rather than the date the contract was signed, October 13, 2023. Because it is a three-year term, the Town cannot act until early next year without early termination. She did not yet know the early termination fee and offered to obtain it for the next meeting.

Council Member Madigan asked whether the Police Department has a redundant phone line. Chief Dickey explained that the longstanding number, (219) 926-7611, is now for administrative purposes only. Since dispatch was consolidated with the county, the Department has relied on call forwarding after hours, and the phone system has been resetting itself at random. He said he knew of no incident in which someone could not reach the police, but called it a problem nonetheless. He thanked Town employee Amanda Gucciardo, who resolved the call forwarding that day so that after-hours calls now ring through to Central Communications. The Department's preferred solution is a phone tree.

Council President Lopez clarified that the issue does not affect 911. Chief Dickey said that anyone who needs a police officer should call Central Communications at (219) 477-3170. The Department's number is for administrative matters such as crash reports, records, vehicle checks, and impound releases.

Council Member Madigan asked whether Frontier was in breach of the contract if the phones are not working as they should. She said that since the Town is expected to uphold its end of the contract, she expects the same from Frontier. Chief Dickey said he had exhausted every avenue with his Frontier contacts.

Clerk-Treasurer Peffers said the Town would likely have to keep paying the monthly bill until the contract expires, so switching providers early would mean paying two bills. She noted that the problems also affect Town Hall. She said Sergeant Austin Haynes, who assists with IT and has done much of the work on the project, may be able to say what complications could arise with releasing the phone numbers. She will find out what Frontier would charge to end the contract.

Council President Lopez asked how long a new provider would need to install. Chief Dickey said it depends on the provider and that he would follow up. The Clerk-Treasurer said she believed GGNet's timeline is four to six weeks.

Council Member Madigan asked whether paying both providers would cost more than Two Thousand and 00/100 Dollars (\$2,000.00). The Clerk-Treasurer said she did not know without asking Frontier. Council Member Madigan suggested that the Town Attorney send Frontier a letter regarding its failure to provide adequate service. No action was taken.

Disaster Recovery Update and Consideration of Debris Removal

Council President Lopez reported that he, Clerk-Treasurer Peffers, and Superintendent Spanier had met with FEMA. The Clerk-Treasurer explained that the meeting covered Public Assistance, which reimburses the Town's labor and equipment costs for directly responding to the emergency. Debris removal is a separate program. FEMA has requested extensive information with firm deadlines.

Council Member Madigan asked whether the insurance deductible for the damaged lift station would be included. The Clerk-Treasurer said FEMA will determine what is eligible, but all costs related to the lift station will be submitted. Council President Lopez noted that the lift station may also be eligible for mitigation funding to upgrade it and prevent future problems.

Clerk-Treasurer Peffers said she has access to the grant portal and is gathering information to upload. There has been a slight delay because Superintendent Spanier and Park Director Bugajski are out. A follow-up meeting with FEMA is scheduled for Tuesday, September 29.

Council Comments

Council Member Burge reported that three Northwester Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC) finance staff had met with the Town the previous day. He said NIRPC is eager to help the Town through direct project funding or grant-writing assistance. NIRPC also provided a comprehensive report on the August 11 storm, including its economic impact, which was emailed to the Council.

He also reported speaking with Adam Parkhouse and Dan Buckley of the INDOT LaPorte District office about a key to override traffic signals during power outages. The key would be the Police Department's responsibility, and INDOT is to follow up with instructions. He asked Michael Barry to raise the matter with Mr. Parkhouse and said he would follow up otherwise. Council President Lopez thanked him and said the NIRPC presentation was very informative.

Adjournment

Council Vice President Karriman moved to adjourn. There being no further business on the agenda, Council President Lopez adjourned the meeting at 8:16 p.m.

Pursuant to IC 5-14-1.5-2.9, this meeting was livestreamed to <https://www.youtube.com/@porterindiana>. A recording of the livestream will remain publicly available at <https://www.youtube.com/@porterindiana> for a minimum of ninety (90) days following the date of the meeting. Meeting agendas, minutes, and any memoranda may be viewed at townofporter.in.gov.

Approved this 13th day of October, 2026.

TOWN COUNCIL OF THE TOWN OF PORTER

William Lopez, President
/s/ Kelly Karriman, Vice President
/s/ James Burge
/s/ Don Craft

ATTEST:

/s/ Corinne M. Peffers, Clerk-Treasurer