

SEPTEMBER 3, 2025

TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

Those present:

| | | | |
|----------------|----------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Jim Smith | Carrie Mugford | Shannon Carter | Maddie Schultz |
| Laura Rager | Matt Mize | Jennifer Hotchkiss | Tammy Wise |
| Allen Miracle | Nate Birch | Miriah Tobias | Valerie Clarkson |
| Gary Montel | Craig Walters | Dave McVicker | Bob Sklar |
| Chalmer Tobias | Cam Kissinger | Chris Harrison | |
| Adam Penrod | Ryan Shock | Jeremy Hardy | |

Those absent: None. A quorum was attained.

The September meeting of the North Manchester Town Council was held at the Public Safety Building, 709 W. Main Street, North Manchester, Indiana, on September 3, 2025, at 7:00 p.m., pursuant to notice duly given in accordance with the rules of the Council. The meeting was called to order by Council President Jim Smith, who presided.

MINUTES

Minutes of the 08/06/25 meeting were presented for approval. Motion to approve the minutes as presented: Tobias/Rager. Motion passes unanimously.

VISITOR COMMENTS

Bob Sklar, 116 W Main Street, asked for a response to alleged inappropriate conduct by a part-time police officer. Sklar also asked for an explanation of the new fire protection fee being implemented on the utility bill and if it will be in addition to the water and wastewater rate changes.

Valerie Clarkson, 403 State Road 13 W, read a prepared statement and thanked the council for the improvements being made in town. Clarkson expressed concern for low-income citizens regarding rising utility costs along with all other costs going up. Clarkson asked about the condition of the water improvement fund and whether those funds are being utilized to offset the cost of the new water meters. Clarkson remarked that fire protection is already paid for through property taxes and questioned the need for an additional fee on the utility bill. Clarkson asked the council not to approve the proposed water rate increase or the new fire protection fee.

PUBLIC HEARING

The public hearing for the 2026 budget was opened by Council President Jim Smith. Clerk-Treasurer Carrie Mugford provided an overview of the 2026 budget. Senate bill 1 and related legislation will have a dramatic impact on municipal finance. Our advisors and the Department of Local Government Finance are providing very conservative estimates at this time. Circuit breakers are estimated to increase from \$110,000 to over \$300,000. However, the next legislative session will bring corrections, revisions, and more changes. This budget is conservative with the understanding that the next few years will bring a lot of change. Mugford noted that assessed value grew approximately 18%, which will keep the tax rate at or below last year's rate. Bob Sklar asked for an explanation of the year over year budget increases. Mugford stated that there are increases in each category to compensate for rising cost of providing services in town and that the detail is available on the state transparency portal, Gateway. Hearing no further comments the public hearing was closed.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

1. 2026 Budget, GO# 6, First Reading – Clerk-Treasurer Mugford read the 2026 budget ordinance, general ordinance #6, verbatim, specifying the sums appropriated for the town for the year ending 12/31/26. This is the first of three readings. Motion to approve GO#6: Tobias/Rager. Motion passes unanimously.

2. 2025 Constitution Proclamation – President Jim Smith introduced Tammy Wise, representing the Francis Slocum chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Smith read a proclamation designating the week of September 17 -23 as Constitution Week, marking the 238th anniversary of the drafting of the Constitution of the United States of America. Wise thanked the council for acknowledging the Constitution's importance to all Americans.

3. Water Infrastructure Bid Approval, Commonwealth – Town Manager Penrod stated that bid opening for the water infrastructure project was held August 28. Penrod provided an overview of the project, which has been discussed for the last 2.5 years. The project addresses aging water mains, lead service line replacements, and town wide water meter replacements. The project areas encompass a lot of town, including: State Road 114 W, West Main Street, Wayne Street, Fifth Street, and East Street. Penrod noted that upsizing water mains will increase flow and improve fire protection. Jeremy Hardy, Commonwealth Engineers, reported that three bids were received ranging from \$9,200,000 to \$12,700,000. The low bid was submitted by Atlas Excavating, which was below the engineer's estimate of \$9,500,000. Hardy recommended the council accept the bid and issue a notice of intent to award the project. The official award will be at the October council meeting. The timeline for the project was discussed with an anticipated start of early 2026. There will be considerations for the bridge work being done on State Road 114 that may extend the timeline. Council Vice-President Laura Rager commended everyone who has been completing the due diligence on these projects. It has not been taken lightly. Rager acknowledged that the work being done is for the safety and well-being of the employees and residents because infrastructure requires repair or replacement to be efficient. Penrod confirmed that information is slowly being released from SFR about the upcoming bonds. So far, it has all been good news. Every effort is being made to minimize the impact on rate payers. Motion to accept the bid from Atlas Excavating and issue a notice of intent to award: Rager/Tobias. Motion passes unanimously.

4. Market Street Water Main Project Bid Approval, Jones & Henry – Town Manager Penrod stated that one bid was received for the South Market Street water main relocation. Wabash County is replacing the South Market Street bridge and the water main under the river is located too close for construction. The county will pay for the majority of the relocation costs. The lone bid came from Fox Contracting for \$368,702 which is approximately \$120,000 over engineers estimates. The new water main will start across from Mr. Dave's and be bored down under the river to a connection on the other side of the river. Penrod noted that even though the town didn't initiate this process, the new water main will be a benefit when it is complete. The relocation must be complete by March 2026. Penrod recommends approval of the Fox Contracting bid. Motion to approve Fox Contracting bid at \$368,702 for water main relocation: Rager/Tobias. Motion passes unanimously.

5. Water Rate Ordinance, GO# 7, First Reading – Clerk-Treasurer Mugford read general ordinance #7 verbatim. This ordinance amends the water rates and charges to cover necessary expenses, including maintenance, operating charges, and debt service. Penrod confirmed that SRF has provided favorable financing for the bond, including a \$3,000,000 forgivable loan, lower interest rate, and 0% interest on \$400,000. SRF will release the most current interest rates in October. This information will also impact rates. Penrod explained the results of the recent cost of service study that was done by Baker Tilly. The town has had a 6-tiered rate structure for many years to accommodate the largest industrial users. Over time, as industry decreased, the largest users weren't using the high volume of water and the burden shifted to residential user. The new 3-tiered system is more common and will even the financial burden across all users. Penrod emphasized the benefits of the projects being bonded and paid for with increased rates: up-to-date asset management plan identifying capital expenditure needs, better fire flow which will decrease insurance rates, required lead service line replacements, and implementation of an automatic water reading system. The new water meters use technology that immediately alerts the office to potential leaks, saving customers money and reducing costly repairs. Penrod included examples in the packet of the information received in the office each morning from the meters. So far, the response has been very good and customers are happy to be alerted immediately when there is a potential problem. Lastly, Penrod explained the shift to a fire protection fee. Water mains, service lines, water tower space, and hydrants are sized based on fire flow needs not consumption requirements. There are additional costs required to install and maintain larger infrastructure for fire protection. Penrod stated that the water portion of the bill will be broken into a flat fire protection fee and a consumption fee that will increase with usage over 3,000 gallons. The combined water portion of the bill is estimated to be approximately \$40 but could go down if SRF gives a lower bond interest rate. Smith emphasized that this is first reading of the water rate ordinance and there will be revisions before the final reading in November. Motion to approve GO#7 on first reading: Rager/Miracle. Motion passes unanimously.

6. Sewer Use Ordinance Amendments, GO# 8, First Reading – Clerk-Treasurer Mugford read the first page of the 21-page sewer use ordinance amendments. The full ordinance is available for review in the clerk's office during normal business hours. Penrod explained that the sewer use ordinance governs what can be put down the sewer and consequences if something is put into the sewer that is incompatible with the treatment plant. The sewer treatment plant ultimately drains clean water into the river and this ordinance protects that natural resource. The prior ordinance was found to be deficient by current standards. Penrod has worked with Commonwealth Engineers to create an up-to-date ordinance compatible with IDEM standards. Motion to approve GO#8 on first reading: Tobias/Rager. Motion passes unanimously.

7. Approval of Sewer Enforcement Response Plan – Town Manager Penrod explained that the sewer enforcement response plan goes hand-in-hand with the sewer use ordinance. This is not an ordinance, but a policy detailing the enforcement steps to take when there is a violation of the sewer use ordinance. Motion to approve the sewer enforcement response plan: Rager/Tobias. Motion passes unanimously.

8. APEX LCRS Contract for Market Street – Town Manager Penrod stated that this is part of the Manchester Mile project being paid for with the Lilly Grant. This contract with Apex, not to exceed \$15,000, is for a location control route survey on the Market Street segment from College Avenue to Main Street. This is an INDOT requirement because INDOT is funding \$1,500,000 of the Manchester Mile project through Stellar Pathways. Penrod noted that Apex has always been good to work with and recommends approval of the proposed contract which will be paid with Lilly grant money. Motion to approve the Apex LCRS contract: Montel/Miracle. Motion passes unanimously.

9. Eel River Commons Park Architect Contract, MKM – Town Manager Penrod presented another contract to be paid for from Lilly Grant funds. This contract is for MKM Architecture & Design to do the architectural design work for Eel River Commons. This project currently has a budget of \$7,000,000 but there may be up to \$2,000,000 of REDI funds for additional enhancements to the park. The MKM contract will cover design development, construction documents, construction phase, procurement phase, and permitting. The contract amount is \$715,000. This amount will be paid with Lilly grant money but the contract is approved by the town. Motion to approve the MKM contract as presented: Rager/Tobias. Motion passes unanimously.

10. Soil Boring Contract for Eel River Commons – Town Manager Penrod presented a contract for additional soil borings at Eel River Commons. Preliminary soil borings have been done, but changes in design and the addition of a pedestrian foot bridge require additional borings to ensure suitable soils for construction. The contract is for \$9,750 with GME Testing and will be paid with Lilly Grant funds. Motion to approve the soil boring contract with GME: Miracle/Tobias. Motion passes unanimously.

DEPARTMENTAL & COMMISSION REPORTS

Police Dept. – Report included in packet. Police Chief Nate Birch reported that Officers Roger Morrow Jr. and Ryan Skeens successfully completed the Indiana Law Enforcement Academy on August 22 and are now in FTO training. Four officers completed taser training and are certified to carry tasers.

Fire Dept. – Report included in packet. Fire Chief Cam Kissinger stated that the annual pump test was completed on August 28, with only minor issues noted on 601.

Building Commissioner – Report included in packet.

Plan Commission –

Board of Zoning Appeals –

Traffic Commission –

Parks & Recreation – Report in packet. Park Director Jennifer Hotchkiss reported that the pickleball courts were finished today. The ribbon cutting ceremony for the courts is planned for September 20 at 10:00 am. Work on the pool's dehumidification system is underway, with the new equipment scheduled to be lifted into place on the roof on Friday. The plaster repair company has started fixing the therapy pool. The plan is to start refilling the pools on September 10 and reopen the facility on September 15. The American Legion is holding a dedication for Holderman Park on September 13 from 3:00-5:00.

Town Life Center –

Tree Advisory – Minutes included in packet.

Grow Wabash County – Town Manager Penrod noted that the GWC annual dinner is scheduled for October 9 at the Honeywell. Penrod and Mugford recently accompanied GWC CEO Tenille Zartman on a tour of Intertech Products with Congressman Rudy Yakym. After the visit Rick Sereno announced that he will be retiring. Sereno has been with the company since the beginning and will be missed.

Redevelopment Commission – Town Manager Penrod reported that the RDC met August 13 and approved purchasing benches, picnic tables, and trash receptacles for the library. Manchester Public Library is doing a lot of exterior improvements with grant funds and this will be additional enhancements. The RDC also reviewed the request for proposals (RFP) for Chester Heights phase 2. The Chester Heights housing development is going very well and the RDC would like to keep the momentum going. RFP's will be opened at the October meeting.

MEDCOR – Town Manager Penrod reported that the offer to purchase a small 0.66 acre plot at the front of the industrial park has been rescinded. The company is now looking to purchase a larger parcel for a bigger building and more employees. MEDCOR will meet once an offer to purchase has been submitted.

Solid Waste – Nothing to add.

Storm Water Board – Town Manager Penrod reported that the Storm Water Board met and officially approved the draft storm water ordinance. The current ordinance is inadequate for new development and lacks technical standards. Commonwealth Engineers helped create the new ordinance that will be brought to council for approval in the coming months.

Public Works – Street Superintendent Craig Walters reported that the department has filled pot holes with 20 tons of hot mix. Fall clean up will be October 17 and 18 at the street barn.

Water Superintendent Ryan Shock reported that the water meter installation project is about 50% complete with approximately 1,000 meters installed. The north water tower has been cleaned, repainted, and had cathodic protection installed. It is refilled and waiting for samples to be returned and it will be back in operation.

Wastewater Superintendent Shannon Carter reported that Niblock is working on the lift station removing concrete and hopefully the new pumps will be installed on Friday. The new lift station should be running Friday afternoon or Monday.

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

Town Manager Adam Penrod reported that the office is working on transitioning to a new website through the state office of technology.

Daniel's Place will host a trunk or treat event in the town parking lot on October 18 from 5:00-8:00. The parking lot will be closed for this popular event.

CLERK-TREASURER'S REPORT

1. Financial Reports – Approved subject to audit.

2. Claims - The Town claim docket totaling \$1,022,377.09 and the Public Works docket totaling \$1,141,156.72 were submitted for payment. Motion to pay our obligations: Tobias/Miracle. Motion passes unanimously.

VISITOR COMMENTS

Valerie Clarkson, 403 State Road 13 W, suggested the town implement a trap, neuter, and release program to manage the feral cat population. Clarkson asked when construction will begin on the new Daniel's Place facility on Market Street. Penrod stated that the work will likely start in 2026 to coordinate with the federal funding.

Bob Sklar, 116 W Main Street, criticized the council's policy on answering questions at the next council meeting. Sklar then questioned financial policies and suggested additional cost saving measures.

Valerie Clarkson, 403 State Road 13 W, suggested the town implement a policy requiring reimbursement from employees who receive expensive training but leave employment after a short time.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Smith reiterated his appreciation for all the hard work involved in the many agenda items considered at tonight's meeting.

The next regularly scheduled town council meeting will be October 1.

Meeting adjourned at 8:11 pm.

TOWN COUNCIL, TOWN OF N. MANCHESTER

Jim Smith, President

Laura Rager, Vice-President

Allen Miracle

Gary Montel

Chalmer Tobias

ATTEST

Carrie Mugford, Clerk-Treasurer