

The regular meeting of the Hammond Common Council of the City of Hammond, Lake County, Indiana was held on January 13, 2025 in the Hammond City Council Chambers and was available to be viewed at gohammond on Facebook, gohammond.tv live and per Zoom.

Council President Scott Rakos presided.

City Clerk Robert J. Golec facilitated.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE was recited by all.
Moment of Silence was observed.

ROLL CALL

PHYSICALLY PRESENT: Alexander, Spitale, Venecz, Kalwinski, Salinas, Tyler, Emerson, Woerpel, Rakos

ELECTRONICALLY PRESENT PER ZOOM: None

ABSENT: None

TOTAL: 9

NOMINATION OF OFFICERS

Councilwoman Venecz nominated Councilman Woerpel for President.

Councilman Tyler nominated Councilwoman Alexander for Vice President.

Councilman Spitale nominated Councilman Salinas for Vice President.

Any other nominations? (x3) Nominations is closed.

Council President Rakos- So we will take the vote for Vice President of the Council. We have a sheet of paper. Write the name of the person that you want to do it and then the Clerk's office will take the ballots and we'll know who the Vice President is and I will at that time, relinquish to Councilman Woerpel.

Councilman Woerpel- Just as a point of order, don't we have to give President by acclamation?

Councilwoman Venecz- We all have to vote.

Councilman Woerpel- Yeah, we just nominated the President.

Council Attorney Berger- You can make motions to close the nominations, and have the Clerk do a unanimous vote for the ...

Councilman Rakos- Ok, I did close nominations for President.

Council Attorney Berger- I believe that's the way it is.

Councilman Woerpel- So we need to call for the vote on the President and then we can count the votes on the

*Prepared by
Robert J. Golec
Hammond City Clerk*

NOMINATION OF OFFICERS cont.

Councilman Woerpel cont.- Vice President.

Council President Rakos- Ok, call for the vote on the President by acclamation.

Council President Rakos - All in favor? All opposed?

AYES: ALL

Council President Rakos- Take over.

Council President Woerpel- Clerk Golec, go ahead and call out the votes for the Vice President.

Clerk Golec- The Clerk has the tally, are you ready, Mr. President?

Council President Woerpel- Yeah, I'm ready.

Clerk Golec- For Vice President, Councilwoman Alexander, 4, Councilman Salinas, 5. Councilman Salinas is the Vice President.

Council President Woerpel- Congratulations.

MAYOR'S ADDRESS

Mayor McDermott- Thanks, Councilman Woerpel. Congratulations, Councilman Salinas. Thank you very much, Councilman Rakos, for your service. Councilwoman Alexander, good race also. Hopefully we can move forward and continue to work together as we always have. Action items before the council tonight, I know you guys know this, just to review, Police and Fire salary ordinance is coming back to you all on amendment. If you'll remember last year, we weren't done with negotiations when we needed to pass the salary ordinance during last year, so we passed it. We put in 1 %, and we knew that was a holder until we came up with a final number. We have the final number for police, for fire, and for the civil city salary ordinances and we're putting them in for 3rd and final today to match the numbers that were actually negotiated. Speaking of negotiations, I know last time, I thanked my negotiation team, Tom Dabertin, Consultant for the City, Scott Miller, Chief of Staff, Kevin Smith, Corporate Council, Megan Tyler, our City Controller, and Tinisha Greenwell, did a great job representing the City of Hammond along with the Chiefs, along with the Department Heads. Everyone worked really hard. Police and Fire were done, we talked about them already. In regards to our Teamsters, our Water, and the Sanitary Departments signed and on January 7th in the Mayor's office, we held a public ceremony recognizing them and congratulating Water and Sanitary Department section of local 142. So they're up and done. Teamsters Local 142, we had a hiccup in mid December, we lost the vote, even though we had a deal struck with that Local, which put us in limbo, and we're still in limbo. We're trying to dig out of limbo. Right now, Public Works Local 142, that's Felix's crew, we treat them as though they're still in year 5 of a 4 year deal. They're still a Union, we still recognize them, they still have the same rules, seniority and everything as their previous contract did. We're just sort of in a negotiating limbo. Hopefully we'll get that rectified soon. I know that I have a meeting with the Local coming up very shortly here. Local 399, that's our Operating Engineers, Parks and Sanitary Departments approved on December 30th, and the Water Department approved this week. So Local 399 is all caught up. We are all good except for Local 142 in Public Works. Activity log,

*Prepared by
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MAYOR'S ADDRESS cont.

Mayor McDermott cont.- not as busy of a 2 week period as usual with the holidays and everything going on. We did have a Council Meeting on December 30th where I gave another report, so we did have a public signing ceremony with the Hammond Fire Department. Since that time, Local 556 celebrated in the signing of their 4 year contract. Hammond Fire Department's already had their ceremony. Police Department has as well. We filled the Hospitality Manager position at the Sportsplex with Crystal Gascon, and employee that worked for the Lost Marsh Golf Course. So she transferred from the Lost Marsh over to the Sportsplex and took over as the Hospitality Manager. We'll be posting her job at the Lost Marsh pretty soon. Held a public signing ceremony with the Hammond Water Department celebrating the signing of their new 4 year contract. Held a public signing ceremony with the Hammond Sanitary District celebrating the signing of their new 4 year contract. Held my Hammond Police monthly Captains meeting, where we meet with the Captains and the Chiefs from the Hammond Police Department regarding, crime, statistics, trends, and personnel issues. We did that this week. Saw the new tasers, that are really interesting. They're really a lot safer and a lot more accurate. That's gonna be getting deployed on our streets soon, which is nice. Met with a developer interested in a property on Sohl Street. I've been talking to Councilman Salinas about this proposal. It's an interesting proposal for about \$100 million dollar development coming to Hammond's 2nd District. Seems like Councilman Salinas' district is doing very well right now. We have another developer that's looking there right now. I've been in contact as I indicated. I met with the Festival of the Lakes marketing team to go over the 2025 fest. We have 3 of the 5 bands lined up already. We'll be unveiling them soon. That's all I got, unless you all have questions.

Councilman Kalwinski- Evening, Mayor.

Mayor McDermott- Evening, thanks, Councilman.

Councilman Kalwinski- Just following up on the BP issue.

Mayor McDermott- Yeah, I haven't heard anything.

Councilman Kalwinski- I appreciate the letter that you sent out.

Mayor McDermott- Thank you. I specifically copied you on that, Councilman Mark. It's a letter that basically spelled out what happened and the frustrations that we had in the city. I know we talked about that at the December 30th meeting, I believe, Councilman Mark, about how BP stonewalled, not just City of Hammond, but the City of Whiting and BP's in Whiting. They stonewalled everybody when it came to that stench that permeated Whiting/Robertsdale section of Hammond. BP just gave us the stiff arm and it's unacceptable. Hammond Fire Department didn't even know what was going on. It's unacceptable. We sent that letter out officially. I have copied the world including the local media on there. I'll let you know if I hear anything, Councilman Mark.

Councilman Kalwinski- I heard through the grape vine, there was a meeting that BP held for the community, but I didn't hear about it until after it happened.

Mayor McDermott- I think I heard about it through you. I didn't hear about it either, Councilman.

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MAYOR'S ADDRESS cont.

Councilman Kalwinski- It was unfortunate.

Mayor McDermott- It seems to me that whenever BP has an accident, which is like once a year, or twice a year now, they get used to not saying anything, and they have the public apology tour. I think they're on the public apology tour right now. You know BP has got big plans that are controversial, and there's a lot of people that are very worried about the big plans, a hydrogen hub and things of that nature. If BP can't even operate their damn plant in a safe manner currently, what makes us think that they're gonna be safe with this hydrogen hub? I think it's imperative for BP to start talking to the local communities, but during that emergency, I want to reiterate that BP specifically gave us the stiff arm. They didn't want us to know what was going on. They said we'll find out when they do a press release, Councilman Mark, which is unacceptable.

Councilman Kalwinski- It's just not right that we don't have current and immediate response about what's in the air.

Mayor McDermott- It's not good. I agree, Councilman Mark.

Councilman Kalwinski- Because our first responders are going out for calls during that time. They're treating people that are reacting to the chemicals in the air, and they can't give the report to the ER of what they inhaled. It's just wrong. So their treatment is slowed down or inaccurate, because we're not getting timely information for our first responders and for the residents and the concerns for the first responders too, they're out there in it. It takes them a couple days to tell us what it was? It's not right.

Mayor McDermott- It's not right. I agree, Councilman Mark. I know you were there. I was there. For those of you that didn't get the opportunity to experience that, I've never felt a stronger gasoline presence in my life. It permeated Robertsedale and Whiting. It wasn't really blocks, it was as soon as you smelt it, you felt it.

Councilman Kalwinski- It took a couple days for it to clear out.

Mayor McDermott- Yes, it's unacceptable. Unacceptable. And their response is unacceptable. I know if Hammond had an emergency like that, and we told everybody, we can't talk to them until we do a press release, I know that people would be upset about it. I'm glad you brought that up. I copied you specifically. I'll let you know. We've been following 31 41st also, and I'll make sure you're a part of that too, Councilman.

Councilman Kalwinski- I appreciate it.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Councilman Salinas, supported by Councilman Emerson, moved to approve the minutes of December 30, 2024 and place on file.

AYES: ALL

APPROVAL OF CLAIMS

Councilwoman Venecz , supported by Councilman Spitale, moved to approve the claims from January 3, 2025 through January 8, 2025. Claim #1 through claim #361, inclusive. In the amount of \$16,154,863.54.

ROLL CALL VOTE (claims)

AYES: Alexander, Spitale, Venecz, Kalwinski, Salinas, Tyler, Emerson, Rakos, Woerpel

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Motion carried

9/0/0

CLAIMS APPROVED

PUBLIC HEARINGS

None

COMMUNICATIONS

Councilman Tyler- I just want to announce the annual MLK Candlelight March that will take place next Monday, January 20th. Lineup begins at 6:30 a.m. at Freedom Plaza at MLK Park. As we always do, we'll march over to the Civic Center for the program to follow. Thank you.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Council as a Whole Committee - Councilwoman Venecz - Brought out 24-37, 24-38, and 24-39

Community and Crime Watch - Councilwoman Venecz - Upcoming meetings:

Mt Zion Pleasantview Plaza; Wed., Feb 12; 1 p.m.

Edison Community Watch; Edison School; Wed, Feb 5; 6:30 p.m.

Harrison Park Crime Watch; VFW on Hohman; Tues, Feb 4; 6 p.m.

Hessville Crime Watch; HC3 Community Center; Thurs, January 16; 6 p.m.

Irving Community Watch; Irving School; Tues, Feb 11; 9:30 a.m.

Whiting/Robertsdale Crime Watch; Calumet College; Thurs, Feb 13; 6:30 p.m.

South Hohman Ave Neighborhood Watch; will be sometime in April

ORDINANCE 3RD READING - FINAL PASSAGE

24-37 An Ordinance Creating New Funds (Fund # 2488, 2489, and 2490) for the FY 2025 Comprehensive Highway Injury Reduction Program (CHIRP) Grant Funds

Councilman Spitale, supported by Councilwoman Venecz, moved for final passage.

ROLL CALL VOTE (passage)

AYES: Alexander, Spitale, Venecz, Kalwinski, Salinas, Tyler, Emerson, Rakos, Woerpel

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Motion carried

9/0/0

ORDINANCE NO. 9661 PASSED

*Prepared by
Robert J. Golec
Hammond City Clerk*

24-38 An Ordinance Amending Ord. No. 9647, Being and Ordinance Fixing the Salaries And Wages of all City Officials and Employees of the City of Hammond, Indiana, other than those Fixed by Statute or by Ordinance Heretofore Enacted, and Fixing the Effective Date Thereof

ORDINANCE NO. 9662 PASSED

AMENDMENT ADOPTED

ORDINANCE NO. 9663 PASSED
(as amended)

INTRODUCTION OF ORDINANCES

None

RESOLUTIONS

None

NEW AND UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Council President Woerpel- I have the Capital Improvements Committee list for the Council Appointments, and so far there's 3 names on it; Councilman Salinas, Councilman Rakos, and Myself.

Councilman Rakos, supported by Councilman Salinas, moved to approve the appointments AYES: ALL

Council President Woerpel- Gaming Advisory Committee, there's 5 spots, and those 3 names are; Councilwoman Alexander, Melissa Farrell, and Councilman Salinas.

Councilman Tyler- I would like to add Brandon Dorsey to that list. He will serve as the representative from the 3rd District.

Councilwoman Alexander- Usually there's 3 Council Representatives, and then there's 2 that we have from the City on the Gaming Advisory Board.

Council President Woerpel- It's my understanding when this board was set up, it was Council people or Council appointments, so it always was 3. Am I correct on that? There was always 3 Council people on it?

Dave Hamm- No, there were more.

Council President Woerpel- 3 or more, yeah, but I mean, in the absence of 3 willing Council people, we are accepting one more spot.

Councilwoman Venecz- You can add my name to that.

Councilman Rakos, supported by Councilwoman Alexander, moved to approve the appointments AYES: ALL

PUBLIC EXPRESSION

Linda Verduzco- I've lived here for 59 years. I want to wish you all a Happy New Year. I wanted to thank the Lord that the Mayor and his wife are ok from the incident in New Orleans. I hope that Councilman Salinas' grandfather gets better.

Mary Levan- I've lived here for 96 years. I support the preservation of all 32 acres of Briar East Woods. Say no to Governor's Parkway.

Anthony Diaz- Congratulations on your raises. It would be nice to have residents on these boards. Harrison Park needs to be improved instead of being destroyed. The Governor's Parkway Project is not the answer. We need

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Hammond City Clerk*

PUBLIC EXPRESSION cont

Anthony Diaz cont. -an underpass like the one in Munster.

Ashley Williams- I want to commend you for your response to the BP leak. I'm here to ask for that same support for the preservation of the Briar East Woods. There are alternative solutions. This area is struggling from industrial toxins. The woods are home to many first experiences with nature, and animals. It's worth fighting for.

Daniel Heredia- Hammond is a second home to me. Green Spaces are important to me. Briar East Woods is similar to Bieker Woods in Munster. Those woods are a place you can go to forget you are in an urban area. Briar East Woods are the same. Bieker Woods hosts festivals and gatherings. Green spaces keep being taken away from us. Please preserve the woods, you have that power. We're all asking you for that.

Joseph Hinds- I joined the efforts to save the Briar East Woods in 2021. The woods are more than an ecosystem, they're a reflection of community. I've met several people by doing this. Tonight there are so many of us united. If we lose Briar East Woods, we don't just lose trees, we lose a hidden treasure that brings us hope. By standing here tonight, we show that this treasure is worth fighting for. Please reject the parkway project and let Briar East Woods remain a sanctuary for us future generations.

Andrea Jo Senters- I moved here in 2016. I had 2 therapy dogs, and while walking through the neighborhood I stumbled upon the Briar East Woods. I met tons of people there. I saw Mayor McDermott coming down Parrish Ave as I was walking my dogs, he asked me if I was a member of the town, and he asked me if I voted, and what I wanted to see to make the community better. I asked him to clean out the sand dunes, so people could gather and meet each other. Frank Mrvan was there as well. They said they would look into that. I can't go very far to be with nature. You have a duty and a right to make sure these woods stay where they're at. We clean up twice a year on our own.

Carolyn Marsh- I support the Briar East Woods. I can't imagine living here without the woods. It's precious and it's gotta be saved. I'm here about clean air. I'm also here about BP and the Mayor didn't mention BP. I'm glad the 1st District Councilman mentioned it. The 3 Mayor's need to get together and make BP stop having accidents and to tell us what they're putting in the air. I went to the BP meeting. They said they noticed the Police, Fire, and the Schools. He said he's willing to come talk to us. When I see the fires in California, all I can think of is BP on fire. Are we ready for that? We've got to act now and get everyone together and form an evacuation plan.

Sam Carpenter- I support the preservation of all 32 acres of Briar East Woods. I ask you to vote no to the parkway project. The project doesn't even properly address the issue at hand. The issue of flooding will increase ten fold. You know how bad flooding can be here already. It will destroy the homes and lives of all the animals.

Ken Rosek- I'm totally blown away by all the people that have shown up tonight. This is going to continue, and even blossom until somebody finally gets the point. I'm right about what these woods mean to our neighborhood. Between the expressway, Cline Avenue, I-90, train tracks, we are locked in, unlike any other place in the city. Think about it. Most of you live in other areas, but you can usually head out in any direction you want to. That's not the case in Hessville, we are blocked off. There's only 2 ways out if you're going east. These woods are very important. We have a better option that's less expensive. It doesn't serve the schools in

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PUBLIC EXPRESSION cont.

Ken Rosek cont.- the area. It only serves the hidden agenda to develop it. Nobody's talking about that out loud.

TJ Gaertig- 2024 is over, which ends the 4th year of your residents asking you to preserve Briar East Woods. Welcome to year 5. We live here and we're not going anywhere. 2025 starts with amazing news. We got a pedestrian overpass funded on Grand Avenue from the federal government. The Mayor talked so much about how it would take 10 years to get funding. It didn't take much. The FRA told us that Hammond is a priority because kids are climbing over trains. That was the whole point of Governor's Parkway. You all know it doesn't do a thing for it. We have talked to IDEM, INDOT, The FRA, Pete Buttigieg's office, Frank Mrvan, Lonnie Randolph, Carolyn Jackson, the list goes on and on, and they all say it's a local issue and to go to the City Council. They're the ones to do this because it's a local road. You guys need to solve this.

Casey King- The City of Whiting has air monitors, and the City of Hammond could buy those too. They're only a couple hundred dollars. In November of 2021, the Robertsedale community gathered several hundred signatures and had a mass showing at the Council meeting, to protest a plan sponsored by Councilwoman Venecz to build homes at Forsythe Square. Before the meeting even began, the Mayor apologized and ordered you to retract the decision. After that, we lined the park with trees and added two gardens with SCA. Trees are vital to any community. Briar East Woods is the largest piece of unprotected infrastructure we have here. No amount of tree plantings will make up for it's loss. Also in November of 2021, Governor's Parkway was discussed. Here we are in 2025, and the public's concerns have not been addressed.

Terry Steagull- I stand in solidarity with the people and the Briar East Woods. I'm here for another reason. It's about some more protection. I grew up in the 2nd district and they called us the Grand Calumet rats, because we lived along the polluted river. It had all that toxic sewage. We had the little league field across from the sewer treatment plant. The federal government has spent probably a billion dollars to clean that river up. They didn't do it totally, but they've done a lot of good work cleaning it where the Sanitary District was polluting it. I think I've sent emails to the Council about the issues with that water treatment plant. We need to take some serious steps on what we're gonna do and how we're gonna handle pollution. I moved to Highland and they gave me a bill for 70 million dollars saying we gotta put a new sewer pipe in to go over to Hammond. At the one meeting, Mayor was blaming Joe Biden's EPA. When Trump gets in, he'll fix it with his EPA. This is about the Clean Water Act. We need to respect it. We need to get it done. We can't keep polluting.

Trustee Blake-King- House Bill 1136 introduced by State Representative Jake Teshka, District 7. I'm coming before you to help myself and other school districts throughout this state to kill the bill. If a school district has 50 percent of kids attending a charter school, it will no longer be a public school district. It would automatically revert to a charter school district. The board would be dissolved, and a board would be appointed by the State. I'm asking the City Council to draft, propose, and adopt a resolution to kill this bill. House Bill 36. We need your help. Gary Indiana would be the number 1 target. School City of Hammond is no where near that number, but if they can pass it this year, they can certainly next year bring it to 40, 30, and 20 percent, and that is where the School City of Hammond is currently at. Secondly, I wholeheartedly support the preservation of all 32 acres of Briar East Woods. I ask this City Council to say no to Governor's Parkway. It negatively impacts public safety when it comes to the students of School City of Hammond. It will continue to negatively impact our students more hazardously. It will unsafe and unhealthy in terms of walking paths that's been established by the state. In 2027 we might not have any more funding for transportation. Please look at this. These children are

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Robert J. Golec
Hammond City Clerk*

PUBLIC EXPRESSION cont

Trustee Blake-King cont.- your constituents as well. They will be voters one day. I will remind them of what happened with this City Council, yes or no.

Ken Davidson- I'm speaking in support of the Briar East Woods. I watched kids climb over the trains for years and I was astounded when they came up with the solution of an overpass on Parrish Avenue. This is not a project that we want. It has nothing to do with the school kids.

Carl Wolf- I grew up in Miller, and it was an idyllic childhood. We had Marquette Park, a marsh, a beach, and dunes. It was a wonderful place to grow up. I'm sure many of you have experienced this in Briar East Woods or other parts of Hammond. We have these natural spaces that are full of wonder, animals, and trees. It's a part of childhood that makes us better people. We're marching toward environmental catastrophe. To consider tearing down more trees, and further the environmental catastrophe, is wrong headed.

Jeff Boles- I do not support the Mayor's project. I've heard so much said about this project, that I don't know what there is that I could say to convince you if you're not already convinced. I just want to thank you for listening to us. I wish the Mayor were here. You have so many people here who have shared with you. When you look at this project overall, objectively, is it really the best decision for that land? I ask that you all just be honest with yourselves and not just be a politician.

Councilwoman Alexander, supported by Councilwoman Venecz, moved to take a recess.

AYES: ALL

Council President Woerpel called the Council back into the chambers.

ROLL CALL

PHYSICALLY PRESENT: Alexander, Spitale, Venecz, Kalwinski, Salinas, Tyler, Emerson, Rakos, Woerpel

ELECTRONICALLY PRESENT PER ZOOM: None

ABSENT: Alexander

TOTAL: 8

PUBLIC EXPRESSION cont.

Grace Tafolla- I work with SCA planting trees, and I'm a certified tree steward. I'm very familiar with this line of work, and I just want to make a few points that I've already made every time I've been here. One of those points is the flooding issues that Briar East solves that you are already handling and failing to solve. People are losing money actively in the community due to flooding problems that Briar East Woods soaks up. We're asking for preservation of all 32 acres of Briar East Woods, even though the parkway only takes away 12.2 acres of those woods. Every inch of the woods is important. Destroying 12.2 acres of woodland would release 88 million gallons of storm water that has no where to go that you're not prepared to handle. \$3 million dollars less for an underpass to be built and then leave us with the flooding damages. The 2024 tree canopy survey shows we only have a 16 percent tree canopy left, compared to our neighbors who all have at least 20 percent or higher.

Linda Anguiano- I support the preservation of all 32 acres of Briar East Woods. I ask this Council to do the right thing and say no to the Governor's Parkway project. I want to know what's next. So if this bridge goes up, what

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PUBLIC EXPRESSION cont.

Linda Anguiano cont.- are you gonna do about all the animals that are going to be displaced? The toads, the frogs, the chipmunks, the squirrels. They're gonna be running out into the streets and into the apartment complexes. What about the coyotes and the eagles? What are you gonna do about the oxygen? Ship in oxygen generating machines? Plant trees in other parts of Hammond? What are you gonna do to preserve our air quality? The Noise? Those trees absorb a lot of noise from Cline Ave and the Expressway. We could have solved this years ago.

Scott Miller- I just wanted to let everybody know, mostly in the room that we have paused the live stream. We're going to edit out the medical issue that a community member had to protect their privacy. It was obviously a very vulnerable moment for that person. I saw some people with their cell phones out filming it. I would ask that you not post those things on social media. Obviously, it's your right to do what you want, but out of respect for the community member that had the medical issue, I ask that you not do that. We will have the video with every speaker posted as soon as possible after that footage is edited out. Thank you.

Councilwoman Venecz, supported by Councilman Salinas, moved to adjourn.

AYES: ALL

2025 HAMMOND COMMON COUNCIL ATTENDANCE RECORD OF
ELECTRONIC AND PHYSICAL PRESENCE

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
	13	27	10	24	10	24	14	28	11	25	8	22
Katrina Alexander	P											
Dan Spitale	P											
Janet Venecz	P											
Mark Kalwinski	P											
Pete Torres	P											
Barry Tyler	P											
Bill Emerson	P											
Scott Rakos	P											
Dave Woerpel	P											
Initials												

E=ELECTRONIC


P=PHYSICALLY

PRESENT

A=ABSENT

If the member qualifies for an exemption from the "Consecutive - 50" requirements, draw a circle around the E for that meeting/ member.

ATTEST:



Robert J. Golec, City Clerk


 Dave Woerpel, President
 Hammond Common Council

Time: 7:40 p.m.

mg/cb

Prepared by
Robert J. Golec
 Hammond City Clerk