

Strategic Plan for the Town of Howey-in-the-Hills

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Town of Howey-in-the Hills is to provide services to the residents in a competent, caring, and fiscally responsible manner.

CORE VALUES AND GOALS

The Mayor, Town Councilors and staff are dedicated to excellence in public service, to uphold the core value of Leadership, Integrity, Civility, Respect and Stewardship. Their goal is to protect and preserve through Teamwork, Creativity and Innovation, the small town rural charm that the citizens of Howey-in-the-Hills value and enjoy.

HISTORY

Howey-in-the-Hills was founded by William John Howey and incorporated as "Howey" on May 8, 1925. In 1927, the name was officially changed to Howey-in-the-Hills to reflect the beautiful rolling hills and sparkling lakes, which he dubbed "The Florida Alps." 2025 celebrates our 100th anniversary.

It is a small town in Central Florida and is strategically located just west of Orlando and north of Disney World. It is well known for its small-town charm with easy access to Clermont to the south and Tavares and Mt. Dora to north and east. Little Lake Harris waterfront, used daily for walking, fishing and boating, our parks and friendly library make it a prime destination for those looking to settle in Central Florida. It is home to around 2,000 residents who chose to move here to enjoy its small-town rural character and quality of life.

TOWN GOVERNMENT

The Town of Howey-in-the Hills is governed by five elected town Councilors, including the Mayor and a Town Manager in a Council-Manager form of government. All legislative, quasi-judicial, regulatory and propriety powers of the Town are vested in the town council except as otherwise provided by law or in the Charter. The mayor is appointed by a majority or in some cases a super-majority vote of the members of the council.

Other than the specific duties outlined in the Charter, the mayor has equal power with other members of the council. Town Councilors serve a four-year term and are elected 'at large' which means that they serve the whole of the town and not an individual district. The mayor is appointed from within the Council and serves a term of two years. There are no term limits. The Town Manager, who is appointed by the Council serves as the chief executive officer, managing day-to-day operations and overseeing all departments and employees. The Town Manager has the authority to conduct and is responsible to the town council for the town's executive, administrative, fiscal, regulatory and proprietary actions. Each department and office is administered by an executive officer which includes the Town Clerk, Public Works Director and the Chief of Police. Other senior positions include the Library Director, Utility Services Supervisor, Office Manager and Finance Supervisor.

OPERATIONS AND SERVICES

The Town provides a wide variety of services to its residents:

Principal Services:

- ☐ To provide high quality drinking water throughout the town. (An original goal of Mr. Howey)
- ☐ Wastewater (where provided) and its future expansion to replace septic systems.
- ☐ Solid Waste (Trash) and recycling collection.

Protection Services:

☐ Law Enforcement - to provide safety and security for residents of the town, including School Resource Officers for the three schools in the town.

☐ Building Services – Permitting and inspections for all construction and land development.

☐ Code Enforcement – to ensure that the town’s code of ordinances is followed.

Public Services:

☐ Public Works – Maintaining the assets of the town such as buildings, equipment and areas such as road repair, mowing, stormwater management and the cemetery. Public Works is also responsible for the operation of the water plant and wastewater connections and lift stations.

☐ Land Planning - Future development of the town and Growth Management.

Parks and Recreational Services

☐ Parks and Recreation – Provide recreation facilities such as parks, basketball courts, boat ramp and dock, and fishing piers.

☐ Library Services – Activities for children and adults, computer services, clubs, historical preservation and events.

☐ Special Events – Various events throughout the year such as Easter, Founders Day, Halloween and Christmas, for the whole town to participate in and enjoy.

All these services come with a cost, the largest being Personnel costs which include salaries and benefits to attract and retain the best staff. As a municipality, there are Federal, State and County mandates and procedures that have to be complied with. All of the departments shown above require trained and qualified people to manage and provide the services and keep the town in compliance with all Federal and State requirements. In addition to personnel costs, there are buildings, vehicles and equipment that must be purchased, maintained, updated and renewed.

Computer systems and software, security and communications, utilities for buildings and streetlights, safety equipment and training are all a part of the growing annual costs to operate our small town. Legal representation and outside professional services such as accounting, auditing, planning and engineering are expensive, but are a required cost of operating the town.

FINANCES

The revenues to pay for the operations and services shown above come from a variety of sources, some from Federal, State and County, and from the taxpayer. Every year a balanced budget must be presented by the Town Manager and be approved by the council. It must be properly advertised in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Florida Department of Revenue and include two public hearings. At the end of the year, the town is audited to ensure that the internal procedures have been adhered to and that the town has operated within the fiscal guidelines set forth by the Government Accounting Standards Board (GASB) including meeting the minimum required amount of reserves in the general fund. There are several different types of fund revenues, some with different levels of restrictions on what the money can be spent on including the General Fund; Transportation Fund; Infrastructure Fund; Building Services Fund; Enterprise Funds (Water and Wastewater) and Impact Fee Funds (Police, Parks and Recreation; Water and Wastewater).

General Fund:

This is the major source of revenue for the town. The revenues are unrestricted and can be spent on whatever services the council designate. The largest source of General Fund revenues come from Ad Valorem (Property) taxes, which makes up approximately fifty percent (50%) of the total General Fund budget. This is one of the few revenue items that the town administration has control over. Ad Valorem taxes are based on the taxable value of all Real Property within the

town limits. Each individual property value is calculated by the Lake County Property Appraiser and is multiplied by a millage rate which is voted on by the Town Council. The Process is called TRIM (Truth in Millage) and is administered through the Florida Department of Revenue. The calculated property taxes are then collected by the Lake County Tax Collector and paid to the town. The millage rate (1 mill) is based on 1,000th of the taxable value of each property. The current millage rate in the Town is 7.500 mills; the maximum is 10.000 mills. For a property that has a taxable value of \$200,000.00, the tax collected and paid to the town will be \$1,500.00 ($200,000.00 \div 1,000 \times 7.5$). The town can lower or raise the millage rate once a year as part of the budget approval. The Town cannot alter the calculated value of the property being taxed.

There are other General Fund revenues that come from the State, including Sales Taxes, Communication Tax, and State Revenue Sharing. Revenues also come from Lake County, and utility companies in the form of Gas Taxes, Citation Charges and Franchise Fees. The Municipality generates revenue through Permitting and Development fees, value added services such as copying, faxing and notary as well as interest earnings on money that is invested. Collectively this adds up to the total that the town can spend in any fiscal year (October to September) without bringing forward reserves from prior years. The revenue must cover the Principal; Protection; Public; Parks; Recreational and other services that the town provides as outlined on pages two and three. Any surplus is carried forward and added to reserves. Having reserves (savings) is important for fiscal security, particularly in the event of a property value decline such as was experienced following the 2008 crash. It also allows funds to accumulate for major future projects such as the Sarah Maude Park Boardwalk which has been completed. The town has been very successful in past years in obtaining Federal, State and

County grants which have been used for larger projects, to purchase vehicles and equipment and to complete water and wastewater upgrades.

Balancing the budget requires good judgement on the part of Town Manager to ensure that all obligations are funded without undue hardship being placed on the residents. A one mill reduction in the millage rate would save the average single-family home \$200.00 to \$400.00 per year depending on the taxable value, however the total reduction in revenue to the town would equate to \$235,000.00 in Fiscal Year 2024-2025. This shortfall could mean the reduction in staffing levels and/or a reduction in the services that the town provides. A reduction in the millage rate is looked at each year but any change has to be prudently considered. This is why some growth in the town is of benefit as it provides additional income which can be used for new projects and improvements, or to reduce the millage rate and lower property taxes for all homeowners and businesses.

Transportation Fund (restricted):

The revenues for this fund come from gas taxes from the State and County and a portion (18%) from State Revenue Sharing. The funds can only be spent on roads, which include repairs (the dreaded potholes), signage, striping, street lighting, road materials and supplies.

Infrastructure Fund (restricted):

Infrastructure revenues are derived from a single source, the one percent (1%) Surtax that is added to the sales tax. Funded by the State, the money can only be used for new infrastructure projects. It cannot be used for personnel costs or for repairs and maintenance. The surtax rate was renewed in 2018 for a further period of fifteen years.

There is a county oversight committee that meets twice a year to ensure that all municipalities are using this funding correctly. The town is currently using the revenues received to repave a

number of the town's worst roads along with other projects outlined in the Capital Improvement Plan.

Impact Fee Funds (restricted):

The town charges impact fees for Police, Parks and Recreation in the General Fund and a Water impact fee in the Enterprise fund. Impact fees are paid by anyone who is going to build in the town. This could be residents or more likely developers. Impact fees are paid when applying for the permit.

Impact fees are the most restricted funds and there are strict guidelines from the State, both as to the levels that can be charged, typically following an impact fee study, and what the money collected can be spent on. It can only be spent on projects created as a result of future growth or development such as new parks or vehicles and equipment as a result of expanding the police department or the water system.

Where possible, practicable and available, the town always seeks to use grant awarded funds first, followed by the most restricted (Impact Fee) revenue, and then Infrastructure and Transportation revenues to minimize the use of the General Fund. This gives the greatest opportunity to add to the reserves where necessary or to lower the millage rate if appropriate.

FUTURE PLANNING & GROWTH

Growth management is a set of techniques used by the town to ensure that as the population grows there are services available to meet their demands. Detailed future planning and growth management are guided by the town's Comprehensive Plan, which serves as a blueprint for development and ensures it aligns with community goals and state requirements, including land use, infrastructure, and environmental protection, to name a few topics. The Comprehensive Plan

is a long-range plan that outlines how a community envisions its future physical, economic, and social development. In Florida, our town is required by state law (Chapter 163, Florida Statutes) to adopt and maintain a Comprehensive Plan. It provides the framework for how we will regulate development and investments in infrastructure and services or structured growth. Structured management refers to strategies used by towns to guide the type, intensity, location, and timing of new development. It helps to ensure that development occurs in a way that is sustainable, environmentally responsible, and meets the needs of our town. This strategic plan is designed to focus future growth and development towards specific goals. It is intended to provide a quick and easy-to-understand document to guide town management decisions now and into the future.

“Safe streets, strong schools and stable finances, focus on those three things and your city’s going to be fine,” Rham Emanuel, former mayor of Chicago.

FUTURE PROJECTS AND GOALS

Town Administration: As the town grows, so will the need for more services that can be provided either through direct-hire employees or contractor provided personnel. Use of contractors, while initially more expensive, is easily scalable and has no residual costs such as retirement pension.

Law Enforcement: We need to remain focused on maintaining our police department to include increasing the size of the department as the town grows. Lake County Sheriff Office does not have the manpower to provide protection services to our town. Indeed, they rely on the Howey Police Department to provide law enforcement support for our section of the county.

Public Services: TBD

Parks and Recreation: Primary focus needs to be shifted to the development of the lake front property owned by the town. Lake front development by neighboring towns has been linked to their economic growth and sustainment.

Library: TBD

Special Events: Our town needs to closely coordinate celebrations with the Howey Mansion and Mission Resort +Club (formerly Mission Inn) to conduct a single community event, not hold competing events. The Events Committee needs to be revitalized shifting the burden of event planning from town staff to residents ensuring more inclusive events.

Roads and Transportation:

Water: Safe, potable water is the hall mark of our town. It is vital to ensure our health and well-being. It is also critical to provide fire protection capability, to keep insurance rates down. We should focus on ensuring drinking water can be provided to our Inter-Service Boundary Area (ISBA).

Wastewater: Increasing the use of sewer systems within the town and our ISBA will keep our environment cleaner, keeping us healthy while increasing town revenues. To this end, we must work closely with the Lake Central CDD to align our growth so that it permits the CDD to expand in a fiscally responsible manner.