



Planning & Zoning Board Meeting

June 26, 2025 at 6:00 PM
Howey-in the-Hills Town Hall
101 N. Palm Ave.,
Howey-in-the-Hills, FL 34737

MINUTES

Board Chair Tina St. Clair called the meeting to Order at 6:02 PM.
Board Chair Tina St. Clair led the attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag

ROLL CALL

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Board Member Joshua Husemann | Board Member Alan Hayes | Board Member Richard Mulvany | Vice Chair Frances Wagler | Board Member Erick Bright | Board Member Paul Johns | Chair Tina St. Clair

STAFF PRESENT:

April Fisher, Town Planner (via Zoom) | Sean O'Keefe, Town Manager | John Brock, Deputy Town Manager / Town Clerk

CONSENT AGENDA

Routine items are placed on the Consent Agenda to expedite the meeting. If a Planning & Zoning Board Member wishes to discuss any item, the procedure is as follows: (1) Pull the item(s) from the Consent Agenda; (2) Vote on the remaining item(s); and (3) Discuss each pulled item and vote.

1. Consideration and Approval of the May 29, 2025, Planning and Zoning Board Meeting minutes.

Motion made by Board Member Husemann to approve the Consent Agenda; seconded by Board Member Johns. Motion approved unanimously by voice vote.

Voting

Yea: Board Member Husemann, Board Member Hayes, Board Member Mulvany, Vice Chair Wagler, Board Member Bright, Board Member Johns

Nay: None

PUBLIC HEARING

2. Consideration and Recommendation: **Mission Rise Preliminary Subdivision Plan Submittal**

The Planning and Zoning Board considered the preliminary subdivision plan submittal for the Mission Rise development. Town Planner, April Fisher, presented the item, explaining that the proposed plan was consistent with the previously approved Planned Unit Development (PUD), including lot sizes,

phasing (three phases total), open space requirements, and buffer standards. The applicant addressed all concerns identified during staff review, and the amenity tracts were properly detailed in the submittal. While information on tree mitigation and preservation will be required at the final subdivision plan stage, the applicant indicated compliance with those requirements. Mrs. Fisher noted that the applicant had submitted the necessary school concurrency application and was actively working through that process.

Applicant representative Katlyn Crowell confirmed that the approved school concurrency documentation had been submitted to Town staff earlier that day. Staff acknowledged its inclusion in the official record. Staff recommended approval of the preliminary subdivision plan, and the Board prepared to make its recommendation accordingly.

Board Chair Tina St. Clair opened Public Comment for this item only.

Elizabeth Abney, 24545 Silverwood Ln., Howey-in-the-Hills (*unincorporated Lake County*) – County resident, Elizabeth Abney, expressed concerns regarding the presence of gopher tortoises on the Mission Rise property. Mrs. Abney explained that she and her husband have lived in the area for approximately 25 years and previously had cattle on the subject property with the landowner's permission. While she acknowledged that development was likely to proceed, she urged the Board to consider the impact on the local wildlife, particularly the gopher tortoises, which she noted are protected in Florida.

Mrs. Abney stated that she had recently walked the property and documented numerous gopher tortoise burrows, none of which appeared to be flagged or marked for relocation. She questioned the validity and duration of any previous gopher tortoise surveys, noting that if the last survey occurred several years ago, a new one should be conducted. She further questioned the timing and process for relocation and emphasized the importance of protecting the tortoises' habitat before site disturbance begins. Mrs. Abney expressed a broader concern about the pace of development in Howey-in-the-Hills, urging decision-makers to preserve the rural character and ecological integrity of the Town. She concluded by offering photographs of the burrows for the Board's review and thanked them for allowing her to voice her concerns.

Jeff Pharis, 10147 Revels Rd., Howey-in-the-Hills (*unincorporated Lake County*) – County resident, Jeff Pharis, spoke in opposition to the Mission Rise development, expressing concern over the impact on gopher tortoises and the Town's rural character. He described his lifelong connection to the area and recounted personal experiences with the tortoises, questioning the effectiveness of relocation efforts and warning that many would be harmed during excavation. Mr. Pharis also criticized the pace of development without corresponding road improvements, warning of future traffic congestion and loss of the small-town feel.

Joseph Stasa, 24827 Silverwood Ln., Howey-in-the-Hills (*unincorporated Lake County*) – County resident, Joseph Stasa, raised several questions regarding the Mission Rise development, specifically related to future access points, construction phasing, and the impact on Silverwood Lane. He noted that the site plans indicate a potential future connection to Silverwood Lane but lacked details about how and when that might occur. Mr. Stasa requested clarification from the developer on the overall construction timeline, including the order of phases, the anticipated duration of the project, and the planned routes for construction traffic. He also asked how Silverwood Lane would be maintained and managed if it were used for future access, particularly given that it currently serves as a right-of-way for several properties.

Applicant representative, Katlyn Crowell, provided clarification on the phasing and construction access for the Mission Rise development. She stated that construction plans for Phase 1 are currently underway and anticipated for submittal late next month. Construction access for Phase 1 will come from State Road 19 via Revels Road. Access for Phases 2 and 3 will progress internally, with Phase 2 accessed

through an extension of Revels Road and Phase 3 accessed from Phase 2. The final connection, as requested by the Town, will be to Number 2 Road during Phase 3.

In response to earlier concerns, it was clarified that Silverwood Lane is privately owned and not intended for construction access. Town staff and board members reviewed the site plan and confirmed that Silverwood Lane lies south of the development boundary and is buffered from the proposed construction area.

Stephen Kane, 24705 Silverwood Ln., Howey-in-the-Hills (unincorporated Lake County) – County resident, Stephen Kane, stated that, based on legal advice received when he purchased his property, he holds a recorded 20-foot easement that runs along the Silverwood Ln. boundary of the Mission Rise development, specifically below Phases 2 and 3. He emphasized that the easement is documented in Lake County records and questioned whether the developer acknowledges its existence.

Following an extensive presentation and public comment period, the Planning and Zoning Board discussed numerous concerns and details related to the Mission Rise Preliminary Subdivision Plan. These included the development's phasing, construction access points, infrastructure improvements, environmental protections, and interactions with adjacent properties.

Applicant representative, Katlyn Crowell, clarified that construction will begin with Phase 1, with access from State Road 19 via Revels Road. Phases 2 and 3 will use internal connections, with Phase 3 ultimately linking to Number 2 Road as requested by the Town. Concerns about a potential access point onto Silverwood Lane were addressed, with both the applicant and Town staff confirming that no direct connection is currently planned. Silverwood Lane is privately owned and buffered from the development.

County resident Stephen Kane asserted that a 20-foot easement along the development's boundary is deeded to his property. He requested formal acknowledgment of this easement. The applicant agreed to investigate the easement and work with Mr. Kane to resolve the matter. Mrs. Fisher recommended that the issue be clarified by the final subdivision stage.

Additional discussion addressed the status and regulation of gopher tortoise relocation, which the applicant confirmed would follow all required state permitting procedures once construction permits are issued. Concerns were also raised about future trail and road connectivity. The applicant stated that stub-out roads shown on plans are for possible future connections and will be dedicated to the Town once completed.

County residents requested that the stub-out road leading toward Silverwood Lane be reconsidered or removed to prevent misuse and protect private property. Town staff indicated that this stub may have been required in the original PUD approval but agreed it could be evaluated further.

Motion made by Board Member Husemann to recommend approval of the Mission Rise Preliminary Subdivision Plan with two conditions: (1) that the applicant speak with an abutting property owner, Mr. Stephen Kane, to determine if a 20-foot easement is recorded in his favor on the applicant's property and determine how that will be addressed, (2) determine whether the stub-out designed in the Mission Rise development that abuts Silverwood Lane can be closed so that the residents on Silverwood Lane do not have to be concerned about possible future traffic on their private road (The applicant is to provide a report to Town Council at their July 10, 2025 meeting as to their progress on these two conditions); seconded by Board Member Bright. Motion approved unanimously by roll call vote.

Voting

Yea: Board Member Husemann, Board Member Hayes, Board Member Mulvany, Vice Chair Wagler,

Board Member Bright, Board Member Johns, Chair St. Clair
Nay: None

Town Clerk, John Brock, stated to the public in attendance, that this item would have a final public hearing before the Town Council on Thursday, July 10, 2025, at 6:00 p.m.

OLD BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

None

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Any person wishing to address the Planning and Zoning Board and who is not on the agenda is asked to speak their name and address. Three (3) minutes is allocated per speaker. The general Public Question & Comment period will be limited to a maximum of thirty (30) minutes unless extended by the Presiding Officer.

Elizabeth Abney, 24545 Silverwood Ln., Howey-in-the-Hills (unincorporated Lake County) – County resident, Elizabeth Abney, had questions about future, potential development with the Town.

BOARD COMMENTS

Board Member Wagler suggested that a podium be provided for public speakers, allowing the applicant's representatives to remain seated with their materials during meetings. Mr. O'Keefe noted that public comment is not intended to be a Q&A session with the applicant. Mr. Brock added that implementing a podium setup would require additional sound equipment, as the current system is at capacity for microphones.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to discuss, a motion was made by Board Member Husemann to adjourn the meeting; Board Member Johns seconded the motion. Motion was approved unanimously by voice vote.

The Meeting adjourned at 6:59 p.m. | **Attendees: 18**

Tina St. Clair, Chairperson

ATTEST:

John Brock, Town Clerk