

TOWN OF HOWEY IN THE HILLS
PROJECT 2026-02: MUNICIPAL COMPLEX SITE SELECTION

June 12, 2025

1, Project 2026-02: During the approval of the Town's Five Year Capital Element of the Comprehensive Plan this past spring, the Town Council approved the consolidation of several repair and maintenance projects into a single project that would include building a new Municipal Complex including a new Town Hall, Police Station and potentially other municipal facilities, such as a new larger library, a small park facility, and asking the County to participate by adding their new fire station to the complex, in a campus like setting. The Capital Element provides for the design to begin FY 2027, with construction to begin in FY 2029 or 2030, approximately five years from now. It is not too early as we consider the FY 2026 budget to begin the planning for this project.

2. Discussion: The first item the Town Council needs to consider is the site where these facilities should be located. Also, the site must be large enough to contain all the appropriate functions that will last for a period of 20-25 years commensurate with the growth of the Town. The site for these facilities should be approximately 10-15 acres and located within or contiguous with the current Town Boundaries. The current Town Hall and Police Station site is too small for the these expanded uses, and it is suggested would be suitable for redevelopment into a beautiful Town Square devoted to park and recreational uses. The existing library building could be repurposed as a community center, much like the Town of Fruitland Park has done with their previous library. The two small houses could be razed and the entire block developed for parkland and recreational purposes. Alternatively, it has been suggested that one of the houses could be turned into a Town Museum to honor our passing the 100-year mark as a Town.

However, to begin this process we need to select a site for the new Municipal Complex. The town currently only owns two large parcels that are not being used. There is a nine (9) acre site across Central Avenue from existing industrial uses (Town Water Plant, Juice Factory, and CDD Wastewater Plant). This site may be more appropriately used for future expansion of Public Works facilities as the Town grows. The other site, the former Town Dump, is approximately five (5) acres in size.

The following factors need to be considered in the site selection as we plan for the growth of the Town of Howey In The Hills to a population of over 10,000 people by the year 2040, just 15 years from now.

- a. The site should be 10-15 acres to provide adequate space for the functions to be located in the municipal complex.
- b. The site must be within the Town Limits of Howey In The Hills or contiguous to allow for annexation.
- c. This proposal includes rededication of the existing site of the Town Hall and Police Station as a Town Square for park and recreational purposes.
- d. This proposal includes the reuse of the existing library building as a Community Center for the Town.
- e. The proposal may include the reuse of one of the existing houses on the Town Square as a Town Museum.
- f. The price of the land to be acquired must be reasonable and within the collective means of the Town and Lake County.
- g. Lake County and the Town would approve the site selected for location of the fire and police functions.
- h. The land would be at a central and prominent location within the Town.

3. Proposed Budget Action: To accomplish the site location the Town would need to engage a Professional Planning Firm to review the needs of the Town for the site and determine those sites appropriate for consideration for the Town, with the potential help of Lake County to acquire. An estimated budget of \$15,000-20,000 would be needed to complete the required study. The Town currently has a firm under contract for planning services, which could be used for this purpose. A small portion of the FY 2026 growth in the General Fund Revenue could be used to fund this study.

4. Recommendation: The Council budget an amount of \$20,000 in the General Fund in FY 2026 for the Municipal Complex site selection.