



Town Council Meeting
February 24, 2025 at 6:00 PM
Howey-in-the-Hills Town Hall
101 N. Palm Ave.,
Howey-in-the-Hills, FL 34737

MINUTES

Mayor Wells called the Town Council Meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.
Mayor Wells led the attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.
Councilor Reneé Lannamañ delivered an invocation.

ROLL CALL

Acknowledgement of Quorum Present and Proper Notice Given

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mayor Pro Tem Tim Everline | Councilor Jon Arnold | Councilor Reneé Lannamañ | Councilor David Miles | Mayor Graham Wells

STAFF PRESENT:

Sean O’Keefe, Town Manager | Heather Ramos, Town Attorney (via Zoom) | Morgan Cates, Public Services Director | Rick Thomas, Police Chief | John Brock, Deputy Town Manager / Town Clerk

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

None

AGENDA APPROVAL/REVIEW

Motion made by Councilor Arnold to approve the meeting’s agenda; seconded by Councilor Lannamañ. Motion approved unanimously by voice vote.

Voting

Yea: Mayor Pro Tem Everline, Councilor Arnold, Councilor Lannamañ, Councilor Miles, Mayor Wells

Nay: None

PUBLIC QUESTION & COMMENT

Any person wishing to address the Mayor and Town Council 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.

Andi Everline, 1012 N. Lakeshore Blvd. – Resident, Andi Everline, inquired about a possible change in the Town's policy regarding trash pickup. She noted that her neighbor, who has not lived in her home for eight months, received a code enforcement letter regarding her trash cans, despite having them for years. The letter

indicated that she would be charged an additional fee for having multiple cans, even though she is not currently utilizing the service.

Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, clarified that a recent audit conducted by Town Hall and Code Enforcement resulted in the issuance of the letter, but it was an error to categorize it as a code enforcement matter. He explained that residents are charged for the number of trash cans they possess, and those who request additional cans are required to pay for them accordingly. If the resident in question no longer requires the extra cans, she may request their collection to avoid unnecessary charges.

Mrs. Everline acknowledged the explanation and mentioned that the resident's family is in the process of preparing the home for sale, which may require continued use of the trash cans in the short term. Mr. O'Keefe advised that they could retain the cans as needed and later request a reduction to the base service level.

Additionally, Mrs. Everline brought up concerns regarding a previous discussion about the Troops of St. George, a Catholic organization, and its request for Town funding. She emphasized the importance of maintaining separation between church and state in municipal decisions.

Banks Helfrich, 9100 Sams Lake Rd., Clermont, FL – Mr. Helfrich spoke on the theme of kindness.

Marie Gallelli, 1104 N. Tangerine Ave. – Former Town Councilor, Marie Gallelli, asked about the status of the Town's firetruck, the old Howey Market, and the Asma parcel.

Tom Ballou, 1005 N. Tangerine Ave. – Mr. Ballou asked about the status of the old Howey Market.

Martha MacFarlane, 63 Camino Real – Former Mayor, Martha MacFarlane, addressed the Council regarding the Troops of St. George and their role in the community. She noted that past donations to scout troops were given in recognition of the services they provided to the Town, such as leading the Pledge of Allegiance, flag presentations, and proper disposal of retired flags. When Boy Scout Troop 254 was no longer active, the Troops of St. George stepped in to fill some of those gaps by supporting Town events, including Memorial Day and Veteran's Day observances and the Christmas festival. While she did not take a position on continued funding for the organization, she emphasized the importance of ensuring the Town remains inclusive. She cited historical examples of organizations that began with religious affiliations but evolved into broader community institutions, suggesting that perspectives on inclusion may change over time.

Mrs. MacFarlane also inquired about stakes placed around the area of SR 19 and the Town's cemetery, questioning whether they were related to new development or road work affecting water lines. Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, responded that they were markers for cable and water infrastructure. Town Clerk, John Brock, further clarified that the stakes were associated with the Hillside Groves development, which is preparing to move forward with infrastructure installation.

CONSENT AGENDA

Routine items are placed on the Consent Agenda to expedite the meeting. If Town Council/Staff wish 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. The approval of the minutes and ratification and confirmation of all Town Council actions at the February 10, 2025, Town Council Meeting.

Mayor Pro Tem Everline had a concern with the February 10, 2025, Town Council Meeting minutes. Mayor Pro Tem Everline pointed out that, during the discussion on "Town Donations", the Troops of St. George was mentioned. Mayor Pro Tem Everline stated that he had spoken on the importance of separation of state and religion and that it was not properly reflected in the minutes, and he would like a record of that.

Mayor Pro Tem Everline stated that he would like the following to be added in the minutes: “It concerned Mayor Pro Tem Everline that a donation was going to a religious exclusionary group. And he stated, we must as a local government, state government, and federal government, keep religion separate.”

Motion made by Councilor Lannamañ to approve the Consent Agenda while adding the Mayor Pro Tem Everline’s statement into the February 10, 2025, Town Council Meeting minutes; seconded by Councilor Arnold. Motion approved unanimously by voice vote.

Voting

Yea: Mayor Pro Tem Everline, Councilor Arnold, Councilor Lannamañ, Councilor Miles, Mayor Wells
Nay: None

PUBLIC HEARING

None

OLD BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

2. Discussion: **Procurement & Purchasing Policy**

Mayor Wells introduced the discussion on the Town’s procurement policy. Town Manager, Sean O’Keefe, provided an overview of its history, noting that major revisions were made in 2021 via ordinance, allowing future amendments by resolution. A minor update was made in 2023 to clarify cooperative purchasing (piggyback contracts) based on legal recommendations. There were no specific staff recommendations at this time, but Mr. O’Keefe suggested possible updates, including replacing references to the "Mayor" with "Town Manager" and adjusting approval thresholds to align with other municipalities.

Councilor David Miles, a former municipal purchasing director, outlined nine key areas for review, including:

- Replacing “Mayor” with “Town Manager” as the designated purchasing officer.
- Requiring Town Council approval for all competitively bid contracts.
- Raising small purchase approval thresholds from \$3,000 to \$5,000 for department directors.
- Adjusting competitive quote thresholds to \$5,001 - \$25,000, with the Town Manager approving purchases within that range.
- Ensuring competitive bids above \$25,000 are both bid and awarded by Town Council.
- The Purchasing Policy should explicitly state in section 4.052(J) that the Town Council should award all competitive bids and all Consultants’ Competitive Negation Act (CCNA) items.
- In section 4.06(B) should be changed to state “... sole source vendor for not more than one (1) year...”, rather than “less” as it states now.
- Section 4.08(D) needs a complete re-writing because it is not clear.
- Section 5.3 should be clarified as to who is the appropriate person to approve various purchases based on dollar thresholds or some other similar criteria.

Mayor Pro Tem Everline supported reducing the approval threshold to \$25,000, rather than the current \$50,000, to enhance transparency. He also inquired about the approval process for committee expenditures. Councilor Miles explained that, depending on the dollar amount, certain contracts might

require Council approval. The discussion highlighted inconsistencies in the current policy, leading to procedural confusion.

Councilor Lannamañ agreed with the proposed revisions and emphasized the importance of clarity and transparency. Mr. O’Keefe noted that any changes must be internally consistent and legally reviewed before adoption.

The Council reached a consensus to have staff draft revisions, conduct legal review, and present a redlined version at an upcoming meeting. Councilor Miles proposed a deadline for the first meeting in April, with potential earlier consideration in March.

Mayor Wells opened Public Comment for this item only.

Marie Gallelli, 1104 N. Tangerine Ave. – Resident Gallelli expressed concerns about past procurement decisions, including the purchase of the Town Christmas tree and expenses related to Peak Park. Mr. O’Keefe clarified that both expenditures were conducted in accordance with the current policy and budgeted funds.

Mayor Wells closed Public Comment for this item.

Further discussion among Council members revisited past procurement challenges, emphasizing the need for a clearer, more defined policy to prevent procedural ambiguities. Councilor Lannamañ reiterated that the discussion was not meant to critique past decisions but to ensure future transparency and accountability.

Mayor Wells concluded the discussion by confirming the next steps, aiming to finalize the revised procurement policy at the first meeting in April.

3. Consideration and Approval: **Talichet Lift Station**

Town Manager, Sean O’Keefe, outlined the options for bringing the lift station under Town management and upgrading it to municipal standards. The original plan involved a special assessment, which would have required a 16- to 24-month process through the County. Instead, a more cost-effective and expedient solution was proposed: the Town would finance the project, and the Talichet Homeowners Association (HOA) would repay the cost through quarterly reimbursements over a period not exceeding five years.

Councilor Miles supported the streamlined approach, noting that the special assessment process is typically used for large-scale projects involving hundreds or thousands of properties. However, he raised concerns about financing, as the Town’s current line of credit carries a 5.3% interest rate, which may be higher than necessary given declining market rates. Mayor Wells and Mr. O’Keefe suggested exploring alternative financing options, including using Town reserves or securing a separate loan.

Councilor Miles also questioned the necessity of a \$3,600 generator pigtail purchase when the proposed lift station upgrades would replace the entire control panel. Mr. O’Keefe confirmed that the pigtail would no longer be needed, as the upgrade project would include a proper generator hookup.

Councilor Lannamañ raised concerns about HOA stability and the risk of delinquent payments impacting the Town. She emphasized the need for a clear repayment agreement and safeguards in case of non-payment. Mayor Wells and other council members agreed that reducing the repayment period from five years to three years would minimize financial risk to the Town.

Resident Joshua Husemann, representing the Talichet HOA, confirmed that the HOA may have some reserve funds available and that a one-time special assessment would be the most cost-effective

solution. However, the HOA will need to secure approval from homeowners for the transfer of the lift station, requiring a two-thirds vote. The HOA planned to discuss the proposal at its March 5th meeting and then proceed with legal agreements.

Mayor Pro Tem Everline and Councilor Miles stressed the urgency of completing the project before the upcoming hurricane season to prevent overflows and potential environmental fines. Public Services Director, Morgan Cates, noted that, if the Town could use an existing utility contract, the work could be expedited and possibly completed by June.

The Council approved moving forward with a formal agreement between the Town and the Talichet HOA. The agreement will:

- Require the HOA to transfer ownership of the lift station to the Town.
- Establish a three-year repayment period with quarterly payments.
- Include all project costs, financing costs, and legal fees.
- Set an interest rate at 5% or the prevailing market rate at the time of financing.

The Council directed staff to have the agreement drafted by the HOA legal team, with the goal of finalizing it by the first meeting in April. Town Attorney, Heather Ramos, confirmed that the agreement review could be completed in a timely manner.

Mayor Wells opened Public Comment for this item only.

Michael Huculak (Talichet HOA President), 667 Avila PL – Mr. Huculak stated that the HOA was going to have a meeting on March 5th and he expected to have quorum at that meeting.

Tom Ballou, 1005 N. Tangerine Ave. – Resident Tom Ballou expressed urgency regarding the Talichet Lift Station upgrades, emphasizing the potential financial and environmental consequences if the project is not completed before hurricane season. He raised concerns about the possibility of an overflow during a storm, which could result in substantial fines from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Mr. Ballou urged the Council to act swiftly, suggesting that the Town should consider covering the cost of interim fixes—such as a \$1,900 or \$3,600 repair—since the lift station will ultimately be taken over by the Town. He cautioned against bureaucratic delays and emphasized the importance of setting a firm deadline to prevent unnecessary legal and administrative complications. His primary concern was ensuring the system is operational as soon as possible to avoid a costly environmental hazard.

Mayor Wells closed Public Comment for this item.

Motion made by Councilor Miles to approve the proposal as outlined above; seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Everline. Motion approved unanimously by roll call vote.

Voting

Yea: Mayor Pro Tem Everline, Councilor Arnold, Councilor Lannamañ, Councilor Miles, Mayor Wells

Nay: None

DEPARTMENT REPORTS

4. Town Manager

Town Manager, Sean O’Keefe, provided several updates. Regarding coyote management, he reported that a trapper had installed cameras on Town property and would soon set up snares. Private residents interested in additional measures should contact Public Services Director, Morgan Cates.

On the Central Lake Community Development District (CDD) agreement, Mr. O’Keefe noted that all necessary signatures had been obtained except for the Town Attorney’s, which he expected soon. He also announced the grand reopening of the Sarah Maude Mason Nature Preserve Boardwalk on Friday, March 7th at noon, where attendees will be provided with hot dogs, drinks, and chips. The Troops of St. George will assist with the event.

Regarding the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) resurfacing project, Mr. O’Keefe reminded the Council that FDOT requested feedback on the upcoming roadwork from Lakeview to SR 48. Councilor Miles suggested addressing incomplete sidewalks, installing a traffic signal at Central Avenue, and evaluating the potential to widen Palm Avenue to four lanes. Mayor Pro Tem Everline and Mayor Wells recommended a three-lane option to improve traffic flow while maintaining accessibility. Public Services Director, Morgan Cates, confirmed that sidewalk improvements are already included in the project and that FDOT has evaluated crosswalk enhancements. The Council agreed to draft a formal response letter to FDOT, to be signed by the Mayor or Town Manager, to ensure these concerns are documented.

Mr. O’Keefe also updated the Council on the Water Treatment Plant #3 and Infrastructure projects. The Town has secured \$4.25 million in funding for a new water treatment plant but requires an additional \$6 million to complete the project and install a 12-inch water main. A \$3 million request has been submitted to the state. The routing of the 12-inch pipe has been adjusted to N. Florida Avenue instead of N. Dixie Ave. to avoid recently paved areas. Additionally, upcoming road projects on Gardenia and Holly Streets will include lowering water mains to address elevation mismatches with SR 19, and the feasibility of extending pipe replacements in the area will be explored.

In preparation for the Sarah Maude Mason Nature Preserve Boardwalk grand reopening, Mr. O’Keefe reported that the boardwalk reconstruction was nearly complete, with final inspections expected soon. The Town has also installed a new fence and gate at the Preserve entrance on S. Lakeshore Drive.

COUNCIL MEMBER COMMENT

5. Mayor Pro Tem Everline

Mayor Pro Tem Everline noted that construction stakes and materials on SR 19 in front of the proposed Hillside Grove development indicate the beginning of utility and infrastructure work. Town Clerk, John Brock, confirmed that infrastructure work was beginning for that development with an entrance to the development adjacent to the Town’s cemetery.

Mayor Pro Tem Everline also asked about the status of the Lake Hills residential development project. Mr. Brock stated that the developer had submitted mass grading and primary boulevard plans (a portion of their final site plan) and the developer was looking to begin grading soon (possibly April or May).

6. Councilor Arnold

None

7. Councilor Miles

Councilor Miles requested updates on the six approved developments within the Town. Town Manager, Sean O’Keefe, and Town Clerk, John Brock, provided the following status updates:

- Hillside Groves – Currently undergoing elevation approvals for model homes.
- Watermark – Seeking to incorporate an additional 30-acre parcel into its Planned Unit Development (PUD) and will be going before the Planning & Zoning Board for rezoning.
- Mission Rise – Expected to propose changes to its Preliminary Subdivision Plan (PSP).

- Whispering Heights – No recent progress or updates.
- Publix Development – Moving forward with the final site plan and addressing outstanding contingencies.
- Lake Hills – No additional updates beyond previous discussions.

Additionally, Drake Point, a proposed development outside the Town, has approached Howey-in-the-Hills regarding a water and wastewater agreement, modeled after the Cedar Creek agreement. Mr. O’Keefe stated that a draft agreement, which included an annexation requirement, had been shared with the developer and was awaiting feedback. Councilor Miles emphasized the importance of ensuring that annexation was a condition of the agreement. Mayor Wells noted that, while the developer is willing to annex into the Town, the County may have jurisdiction over the process. Councilor Miles suggested that the development could be considered contiguous to the Town through state-owned lake property, which may support annexation under state law.

Council members also raised concerns about ensuring that developments annexed after County approval do not bypass the Town’s land development regulations. Mr. O’Keefe will obtain a copy of the County-approved plans for Drake Point for further review.

In terms of infrastructure planning, Councilor Miles inquired about the status of the Woodard & Curran wastewater study, which was needed to determine how to allocate the remaining \$3.2 million grant for septic tank replacements in older areas of Town. Mr. O’Keefe did not have an immediate update but committed to following up. Councilor Miles suggested inviting representatives from Woodard & Curran to a March meeting to provide an update on their findings.

Lastly, Mayor Wells pointed out the limited wastewater capacity available, with most of the 1,600 Equivalent Residential Units (ERUs) already potentially allocated to existing developments. He emphasized that if new applicants, such as Drake Point, secure service agreements first, they could take priority in the allocation process. Council members agreed that planning for additional wastewater capacity, whether through Groveland or other partnerships, must remain a priority.

8. Councilor Lannamañ

Councilor Lannamañ inquired about the recently installed sidewalk near Venezia, which had been closed. Town Manager, Sean O’Keefe, explained that the sidewalk remains closed because it still requires the installation of ADA-compliant rubber mats with raised bumps. These are part of the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) project and are expected to be installed by May.

Mayor Wells also raised concerns about pedestrian safety where the sidewalk ends near a school building, leaving a wide road crossing without proper markings. Public Services Director, Morgan Cates, confirmed that a crosswalk would be installed at that location. The Council emphasized the importance of ensuring safe pedestrian access.

Councilor Lannamañ also noted that GFL (the Town’s waste collection service) recently used a quieter black truck, potentially indicating the use of green energy vehicles. She suggested requesting more frequent use of these trucks in Venezia and throughout the Town.

Mayor Pro Tem Everline and several councilors discussed yard waste collection issues, noting that some residents' yard waste had not been picked up, leading them to store the waste on their property. Councilor Miles clarified that yard waste must be bagged and placed inside regular garbage bins to ensure collection. However, some residents reported that GFL had collected yard waste from the blue (recycling) bins, though this is not the official policy. The Council acknowledged the need for further clarification and consistency in yard waste collection procedures.

9. Mayor Wells

Mayor Wells provided an update on the strategic plan, stating that the initial framework had been completed, and the next phase would focus on defining future goals, projects, and development initiatives. A workshop would be scheduled, and Council members were encouraged to compile their thoughts and ideas in advance. The Town’s staff would continue refining its internal planning documents, which will be distributed to the Council before the workshop is scheduled.

Councilor Miles inquired about the status of the Capital Improvement Plan Element (CIP) following discussions from the January 28th meeting. Town Manager, Sean O’Keefe, confirmed that updates were in progress and would be reviewed by the Planning & Zoning Board in March, with final approval expected through ordinances during an April Town Council meeting. Town Clerk, John Brock, clarified that, while the CIP does not require submission to the state, it is an essential internal document that must be kept up-to-date for grant applications and funding considerations. The Council agreed that the updated CIP should be available for review during the strategic planning workshop to ensure alignment with future projects.

Mayor Pro Tem Everline requested an update on the Citrus Project. Mr. O’Keefe reported that agreements with three homeowners on Citrus Avenue are set to be executed this week. However, the replatting of parcels north of Camellia Avenue remains delayed due to ongoing legal review. Town Attorney, Heather Ramos, committed to expediting the process to ensure that the necessary approvals do not interfere with the Town’s paving contract.

Mayor Wells also informed the Council about an upcoming budget adjustment and amendment. He explained that several financial allocations within the Town’s accounts need to be corrected, including separating wastewater and trash collection revenues from the water fund to ensure compliance with the Uniform Accounting System. This restructuring will improve transparency and provide a clearer financial picture as the Town prepares for the upcoming budget discussions in May. The goal is to finalize these adjustments and bring them to the Council for approval by the first meeting in March.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to discuss, a motion was made by Councilor Miles to adjourn the meeting; Councilor Arnold seconded the motion. Motion was approved unanimously by voice vote.

The Meeting adjourned at 8:16 p.m. | **Attendees: 30**

Mayor Wells

ATTEST:

John Brock, Town Clerk