



## **Town Council Meeting**

**June 09, 2025 at 6:00 PM**

**Howey-in the-Hills Town Hall  
101 N. Palm Ave.,  
Howey-in-the-Hills, FL 34737**

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### **MINUTES**

Mayor Wells called the Town Council Special 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 | Tom Wilkes, Town Attorney (via Zoom) | Rick Thomas, Police Chief | Public Services Director, Morgan Cates | April Fisher, Town Planner | Oscar Ojeda, Finance Supervisor | John Brock, Deputy Town Manager / Town Clerk

### **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS**

None

### **AGENDA APPROVAL/REVIEW**

**Motion made by Councilor Miles to approve the agenda and pull agenda item #15 (Discussion: Road Infrastructure Funding Solutions) from the agenda with the intent to bring back at a later meeting; seconded by Councilor Lannamañ. Motion approved by voice vote.**

### **Voting**

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

**Nay:** Councilor Arnold

### **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.** - Town resident, Mrs. Andi Everline, addressed the Council to express her concern regarding public participation in meetings conducted online. She stated that, during a recent meeting,

she had attempted to raise her hand virtually (on Zoom) to speak about a candidate for the Library Board but was not acknowledged or called upon. Mrs. Everline shared her disappointment and emphasized that the opportunity to speak was important, particularly because she had intended to advocate for Gavin Scheel, a 19-year-old with a disability, whom she felt was unfairly overlooked for the board appointment. She underscored Gavin's intellectual capabilities and longstanding involvement with the library, urging the Council to be more attentive to online participants who may be trying to engage during meetings.

### **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.*

Mayor Pro Tem Everline requested to have Agenda Items #2, #3, and #7 pulled from the Consent Agenda and talked about separately. Councilor Miles requested to have Agenda Items #2 and #4 pulled from the Consent Agenda and talked about separately.

1. The approval of the minutes and ratification and confirmation of all Town Council actions at the May 27, 2025, Town Council Meeting.
5. Consideration and Approval: **Florida Commerce (CDBG-DR) Grant HI016 - Lift Station #1 Bypass Pump Project Grant**
6. Consideration and Approval: **Florida Commerce (CDBG-DR) Grant HI018 - Lift Station #2 Bypass Pump Project Grant**

**Motion made by Councilor Lannamañ to approve Consent Agenda Items #1 (Councilor Miles' edit of the minutes), #5, and #6; seconded by Councilor Miles. Motion approved unanimously by voice vote.**

### **Voting**

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

**Nay:** None

2. Consideration and Approval: **Lakeside Capture Phase 1 - Stormwater Project**

Mayor Pro Tem Everline initiated discussion on a pulled agenda item concerning a stormwater infrastructure project, inquiring about the prolonged delay in funding from Lake County. Public Services Director, Morgan Cates, explained that the project had initially been funded with a \$110,000 grant from the Lake County Water Authority, but when bids were solicited, all came in significantly over budget. As a result, the Town applied for and recently received additional grant funding and a six-month extension, bringing the total awarded grant amount to approximately \$140,975. However, due to inflation and time delays, the lowest bidder increased their price by roughly \$7,000, resulting in a new total project cost of \$195,414. The Town's required contribution, to be funded from the Stormwater Maintenance Fund, is \$54,440.

Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, clarified that the grant is a reimbursement-type agreement and that the Town has the funding in place to proceed. Councilor Miles expressed concern about the bidding timeline, recalling that the bids had been rejected over a year ago. Mr. Cates and other Councilors clarified that the bids had not been rejected but held over while additional funding was pursued. Councilor Lannamañ and Councilor Miles agreed that rebidding the project now might result in higher costs. The Council discussion concluded with consensus that the original vendor remains the most cost-effective option, even with the slight price increase.

**Motion made by Councilor Miles to approve agenda item #2; seconded by Councilor Lannamañ. Motion approved unanimously by roll call vote.**

**Voting**

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

**Nay:** None

3. Consideration and Approval: **E. Gardenia St. Road Reconstruction Project Proposal**

Mayor Pro Tem Everline expressed concern that the project had already been underway for over a week despite being listed on the agenda for Council consideration and approval. While he acknowledged the necessity of the project, he emphasized the importance of maintaining procedural integrity by securing formal approval before initiating work.

Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, responded by explaining that the vendor, Paquette, had been properly procured and the project was already included in the approved Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and budget. He noted that the project had been discussed numerous times as part of the Town's road reconstruction planning. The decision to proceed immediately was made in order to take advantage of the contractor's availability, but it was subsequently realized that the specific quote had not yet been formally presented for Council approval. Mr. O'Keefe characterized the item as a matter of housekeeping, reaffirming that Council had consistently expressed support for the project.

Councilor Arnold wryly summarized the situation as a case of "ready, fire, aim," to which Mr. O'Keefe agreed. No members of the public provided comment on the item.

**Motion made by Councilor Miles to approve agenda item #3; seconded by Councilor Lannamañ. Motion approved unanimously by roll call vote.**

**Voting**

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

**Nay:** None

4. Consideration and Approval: **Budget Transfer 119 - PD - Golf Cart Budget Approval**

Councilor Miles initiated discussion on the proposed purchase of two refurbished golf carts for the Police Department, raising concerns about both transparency and the age of the equipment. While acknowledging no objection to the intended use of the golf carts for events and medical response, he noted that, although the Town Manager had stated that three quotes were obtained, only one was presented for review. He also questioned the \$10,000 price tag for two 2010 model-year carts, suggesting that brand-new golf carts might be a better long-term investment.

Police Chief Thomas responded that fully equipped new carts typically start at \$15,000 each. He explained that the proposed carts had been thoroughly refurbished by a vendor in The Villages, with all major components replaced. Chief Thomas personally inspected the carts and was satisfied with their condition. He noted that the vendor had been holding the units for two months pending Council consideration and had offered to assist with any post-sale repairs. However, Chief Thomas acknowledged he would need to confirm the specific warranty terms.

Councilor Reneé Lannamañ asked about mileage and the feasibility of negotiating a reduced price, suggesting that the vendor be asked whether both carts could be acquired for \$8,000. She also requested a clear estimate of additional costs for medical equipment and mounting, which Chief Thomas estimated at approximately \$200 per cart. Council members expressed general agreement that more information was needed before proceeding.

Councilor Miles and Mayor Wells supported obtaining additional quotes for new, preferably American-made, golf carts, citing concerns over the reliability and long-term cost of older equipment. It was also

noted that the Police Department had sufficient funds in its impact fee account to support a higher-quality purchase without straining the budget.

Mayor Wells opened Public Comment for this item only.

**Clay Ormsbee, 301 N. Lakeshore Blvd.** – Resident Ormsbee sought clarification during public comment, and the Chief and Council clarified the intended next steps.

**Motion made by Councilor Miles to table this item to next meeting to give Police Chief Thomas time to research other options; 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

7. Consideration and Approval: **LEAD Municipal/County Cost Sharing Study**

Mayor Pro Tem Everline raised concerns about the Town's participation in the proposed County-wide cost-sharing study, questioning whether the \$3,000 contribution would yield valuable or actionable information, and suggesting the effort may be more symbolic than practical. Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, explained that the study originated from the private-sector group LEAD (Lake Economic Area Development) in partnership with County economic development officials. He emphasized that the study is intended to clarify the division of service responsibilities and funding between the County and municipalities, particularly in light of recurring disputes, such as police dispatch service billing and public claims that the County subsidizes municipal services. Mr. O'Keefe noted the goal of the study is to establish a fact-based framework to support future intergovernmental discussions, and that nearly all other Lake County municipalities are participating, with Leesburg offering to contribute a larger share to ensure the project moves forward.

Mayor Wells acknowledged skepticism about the potential outcomes but agreed the Town should be involved in order to have a voice in follow-up discussions. He noted that the \$3,000 share is relatively modest compared to the study's estimated \$70,000 total cost. Councilor Lannamañ expressed support for the study based on her own research, citing the potential value of the data in understanding the Town's role and positioning amidst county-wide development and legislative changes, including the impacts of "home rule" discussions and commercial growth indicators.

In response to Councilor Lannamañ's inquiry, Mr. O'Keefe stated that the study is expected to have a turnaround time of less than 90 days once funded. When asked how the unbudgeted \$3,000 would be covered, staff indicated the amount could be absorbed within the General Fund, specifically under finance and administrative contractual services, without significant fiscal impact.

Following discussion, the item was opened for public comment, but no members of the public addressed the Council.

**Motion made by Councilor Lannamañ to approve the LEAD Cost Sharing Study for \$3,000; seconded by Councilor Miles. Motion approved unanimously by roll call vote.**

**Voting**

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

**Nay:** None

**PUBLIC HEARING**

8. Consideration and Approval: **Esch Veterinary Office Preliminary Site Plan (PSP) Submittal**

Town Planner, April Fisher, presented a preliminary site plan application submitted by Dr. Esch for a veterinary clinic, which previously received a conditional use permit. Mrs. Fisher confirmed that all staff comments had been addressed and recommended approval of the site plan subject to six conditions. These included:

- 1) Allow a waiver from the 50% storefront window provision for the West and North elevations, as they do not function as primary or secondary façade entrances nor do they abut right-of-way, with the condition that the West and North elevations add the massing/articulation detail of awnings over the doors located on each of these elevations and incorporate the required second massing technique, such as building wall offsets on these two elevations.
- 2) Revise the dumpster enclosure height on Sheet A0-3 to show a 6-foot-high wall on the enclosure elevations. The landscaping details also need to be provided, compliant with LDC Sec. 7.04.03 (B) at Final Site Plan.
- 3) Provide a landscape, hardscape, and buffer Plan at Final Site Plan that complies with Chapter 7.
- 4) Provide a tree mitigation plan including the required replacement data, and tree protection detail at Final Site Plan that complies with LDC Chapter 7.
- 5) The accessible parking spaces are to be relocated directly adjacent to the building so that people who need to use these spaces do not have to cross a drive isle to get to the building.
- 6) A lighting/photometric plan will be provided at Final Site Plan.

Mrs. Fisher noted that the Planning and Zoning Board had unanimously recommended approval at their May 29 meeting.

Bob Ziegenfuss of Z Development Services, representing Dr. Esch, confirmed agreement with all six staff-recommended conditions and offered to answer Council questions. Dr. Esch clarified that the clinic will serve cats and dogs only. In response to a question from Councilor David Miles regarding utility connections, Mr. Ziegenfuss stated that the site will initially use well water and a septic system, with provisions to connect to public utilities once they are available. He noted that the team would research existing plans from nearby developments, such as Hillside Groves and Watermark, to evaluate the feasibility of early connection.

Town Clerk, John Brock, confirmed that the Town's prior zoning approvals included a requirement that the property connect to Town utilities once they are located within the statutory distance. Mr. Ziegenfuss expressed willingness to comply and noted the additional permitting work required with state agencies such as FDOT and the Water Management District. He estimated construction could begin after 6–7 months of permitting, with an opening targeted around late 2026, aligning with the expiration of Dr. Esch's current lease.

Mayor Wells opened Public Comment for this item only. Seeing no comments, Mayor Wells closed Public Comment.

**Motion made by Councilor Miles moved to approve the Esch Veterinary Office Preliminary Site Plan (PSP) Submittal with the six conditions as outlined by the Town Planner; seconded by Councilor Lannamañ. Motion approved unanimously by roll call vote.**

**Voting**

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

9. Consideration and Approval: (Transmittal Hearing) **Ordinance 2025-003 - EAR Comprehensive Plan Amendment**

Town Council considered Ordinance 2025-003, the transmittal of the Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR)-based amendments to the Town's Comprehensive Plan. Councilor Lannamañ initiated discussion by moving to table the item, citing insufficient time to thoroughly review the material. Councilor Miles seconded and proposed holding a workshop, recalling the previous year's intensive, multi-session review process. It was confirmed that the document must be adopted by August 28, 2025, necessitating immediate transmittal to the State to meet the 60-day review period.

Town Planner, April Fisher, clarified that the current EAR-based amendments do not propose substantive policy or land use changes but rather bring the plan into conformance with State requirements and update general information. Mrs. Fisher noted that although some population projections and subdivision names are outdated or inaccurate, altering them now could raise flags at the State level, as the prior planner had already submitted an outline of the expected updates. She advised against revising major data points at this stage but supported correcting scrivener's errors, typographical mistakes, and clearly inaccurate figures such as subdivision names and unit counts.

Mayor Wells and several Councilors expressed concerns about specific errors, such as incorrect population projections and mislabeled subdivisions. However, all agreed that more substantial changes could be deferred to a future update following adoption. Mrs. Fisher assured Council that a second hearing following State review would allow for additional edits and corrections.

Mayor Wells read Ordinance 2025-003 out loud by title only:

**AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF HOWEY-IN-THE-HILLS, FLORIDA, AMENDING THE TOWN'S COMPREHENSIVE PLAN, AS ADOPTED BY ORDINANCE NO. 2024-09, BASED ON THE EVALUATION AND APPRAISAL OF THE TOWN'S COMPREHENSIVE PLAN PURSUANT TO SECTION 163.3191, FLORIDA STATUTES; AMENDING AND UPDATING THE FUTURE LAND USE ELEMENT, TRANSPORTATION ELEMENT, HOUSING ELEMENT, PUBLIC FACILITIES ELEMENT, CONSERVATION ELEMENT, RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE ELEMENT, INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION ELEMENT, CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS ELEMENT, CONCURRENCY MANAGEMENT ELEMENT, PUBLIC SCHOOL ELEMENT, PROPERTY RIGHTS ELEMENT, AND DEFINITIONS; AUTHORIZING TRANSMITTAL TO THE FLORIDA COMMERCE DEPARTMENT; PROVIDING FOR CODIFICATION, SEVERABILITY, AND AN EFFECTIVE DATE.**

Mayor Wells opened Public Comment for this item only. Seeing no comments, Mayor Wells closed Public Comment.

After public comment was closed and additional discussion clarified the scope and timeline, Councilor Lannamañ amended her motion to approve the transmittal of Ordinance 2025-003 with the inclusion of scrivener's corrections and updates to inaccurate subdivision names and housing unit numbers. The motion was seconded and supported by consensus, with Council reaffirming the importance of revisiting more complex changes, such as population methodology, in future workshops.

**Motion made by Councilor Lannamañ to approve transmittal of the EAR Comprehensive Plan amendments to the State after staff fixes scrivener errors and misnamed subdivisions; seconded by Councilor Arnold. Motion approved unanimously by roll call vote.**

**Voting**

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

**OLD BUSINESS**

10. Consideration and Approval: **Resolution 2025-008 - Town's Electronic Sign Usage**

During the discussion on Resolution 2025-008, concerning the use of the Town's electronic sign, Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, explained that the proposed policy would formalize existing practices followed by staff since the sign's installation in April 2022. He clarified that the non-profit group, Friends of the Library, had contributed \$10,000 toward the total installation cost of \$36,392 of the sign. The resolution aimed to codify those operational practices and clarify administrative authority.

Mayor Pro Tem Everline proposed broadening the permitted uses of the sign to include not just official Town and library events, but also community events such as charity fundraisers, athletic achievements by local youth, and cultural happenings like the music series and Garden Club activities, even if held outside Town limits. He framed this broader use as civic engagement that strengthens community identity.

Councilor Miles expressed support for consistency and equity, suggesting that, if the sign policy is to be restrictive, it should be uniformly restrictive. He proposed that the Friends of the Library be reimbursed for their contribution and that all non-Town entities be excluded from use of the sign. Councilor Arnold recommended textual edits, including removing the phrase "and civic engagement" from the resolution's stated purpose and eliminating the clause that grants special access to the Friends of the Library.

Town Clerk, John Brock, raised concerns about message saturation, potential abuse by commercial interests, and the physical limitations of the sign, which can only cycle a limited number of slides.

Councilor Lannamañ cautioned against opening the Town to liability by allowing discretionary use of the sign, emphasizing that uneven enforcement or ambiguous standards could result in lawsuits. Town Attorney, Tom Wilkes, affirmed that the Town may set clear and legally enforceable parameters for sign usage and modify them over time as needed.

After discussion, a motion was made by Councilor Miles and seconded by Councilor Arnold to approve the resolution with two changes: (1) removing the phrase "and civic engagement" from the purpose statement, and (2) deleting the fifth sub-bullet under "Authorized Content" that granted Friends of the Library special access. Mayor Wells suggested that alternate communication methods, such as a newsletter inserted into utility bills, could address the community's broader informational needs. Councilor Lannamañ and others expressed continued concern about balancing community benefit with liability exposure.

Mayor Wells opened Public Comment for this item only.

**Gavin Scheel, 123 E Oak St.** – Resident Gavin Scheel commended the Council for their ideas and offered a constructive alternative. He suggested that, rather than expanding the use of the electronic sign for announcements such as student recognitions or community events, the Town consider implementing a monthly newsletter. Mr. Scheel proposed what Mayor Wells had just proposed: that the newsletter be distributed with water bills to ensure broad reach and noted that it could also be shared through social media channels to extend its visibility.

Councilors expressed support for the concept. Mayor Wells noted that a newsletter could be published in the water bill and also circulated through platforms such as Howey-in-the-Hills Unedited Facebook group, neighborhood social media groups in Talichet and Venezia, and personal sharing networks, as demonstrated by the Town's promotional efforts for Founders Day.

Mr. Scheel volunteered to draft the newsletter, highlighting his experience in preparing monthly newsletters for the library. Councilors responded appreciatively, with Councilor Lannamañ affirming the value of his initiative and Councilor Miles thanking him for stepping forward, noting it aligned with encouragement he had previously given Mr. Scheel to stay engaged.

**Diana Ballou, 1005 N. Tangerine Ave.** – Town Resident, Diana Ballou, addressed the Council, stating that she did not have a strong opinion on the matter being discussed. She stated that the Town could still be sued for written items or items communicated through social media (in addition to the communications on the Town’s electronic sign).

**Andi Everline, 1012 N. Lakeshore Blvd.** – Town resident, Andi Everline, commented that, when the Town Attorney was previously consulted, he did not appear to have concerns about the board being used for purposes beyond those currently specified. She noted that, since no immediate controversy or complaint is underway, there is not an active issue for the attorney to respond to. Councilor Lannamañ clarified that her concern lies not in current circumstances, but in potential future allegations of discrimination or unfair treatment if events are excluded from the electronic board. Mrs. Everline responded that she believes the attorney is capable of handling such matters, though Councilor Lannamañ cautioned that doing so would incur legal costs.

Mayor Pro Tem Everline interjected to express frustration, suggesting that the Town has a history of disregarding the legal advice it pays for. Councilor Lannamañ reaffirmed her position, emphasizing her ongoing concern about liability. Mrs. Everline concluded by stating her belief that the board’s use could be structured in a way that minimizes legal risk.

**Clay Ormsbee, 301 N. Lakeshore Blvd.** – Town resident, Clay Ormsbee, reflected on the Town’s previous use of a newsletter, stating that it had been highly successful during its run roughly 20 years ago, before being discontinued due to a budget crisis. He emphasized that many residents, including dozens he knows personally, are not active on social media, and that the mailed newsletter had been an effective communication tool for reaching the broader community. Mr. Ormsbee pointed out that, in all the years the newsletter was active, it never generated legal issues or lawsuits. He cautioned against allowing fear of potential litigation to hinder progress, suggesting that excessive caution could become a barrier to meaningful action. As an alternative to the contested signboard, he proposed selling it, estimating that the proceeds could fund a significant number of newsletter mailings. He described the current discussion over the sign’s content and usage as unproductive and urged the Council to consider the newsletter as a more efficient and less contentious communication tool. As a suggestion for the first newsletter, Mr. Ormsbee raised the issue of unsafe and possibly illegal golf cart use along Lakeshore Boulevard, especially by underage drivers and overloaded vehicles operating off designated paths. He recommended that the Town mail out a clear set of golf cart rules to all relevant residents, noting that confusion over proper use appears widespread. He concluded that a newsletter would be a practical vehicle for conveying such information and welcomed the option to receive it via email.

**Ann Griffin, 215 E Laurel Ave.** – Town resident, Ann Griffin, supported the idea of a newsletter to clarify Town rules. She noted that many long-time residents are unsure about current regulations, such as RV parking and vehicles on grass, and she often refers them to Town Hall due to the lack of clear information. Mrs. Griffin added that, when the Venezia neighborhood was developed, rules should have been provided to new homeowners, as relying on builders for accurate information has led to confusion and unintended violations.

**Joshua Husemann, 671 Avila Pl.** – Town resident, Joshua Husemann, expressed appreciation for Mayor Pro Tem Everline’s comments on community engagement but cautioned against broadening access to the Town sign. Drawing on his experience in the school system, he warned that loosening restrictions could lead to significant complications. Mr. Husemann supported limiting use of the sign to official Town entities, such as the Town itself and the library. He cautioned that allowing outside groups, including private companies or religious organizations, could lead to disputes over moral or religious disagreements, and raise concerns about the Town appearing to endorse particular beliefs or viewpoints.

**Tom Ballou, 1005 N Tangerine Ave.** – Town Resident, Tom Ballou, suggested just putting date, time, and temperature on the Town sign.



Town Attorney Tom Wilkes clarified that both the sign and a potential newsletter are instruments of the Town and do not constitute public forums, meaning the Town retains full editorial discretion over their content. He emphasized that the Town Council should base its decisions on what it believes is best for the community, rather than being overly concerned about liability. Mr. Wilkes explained that the Town is legally permitted to share announcements of general public interest, such as congratulatory messages or event notices, even if the Town is not directly sponsoring those events. However, he advised caution regarding religious content, which could raise more complex legal issues. He reassured the Council that if the chosen approach proves unmanageable, they can later revise or tighten their policy. Ultimately, he encouraged the Council to focus on the value and purpose of the sign for the community, asserting that legal concerns can be navigated appropriately.

**Motion made by Councilor Miles approve Resolution 2025-08 with two changes to Exhibit A (in the purpose paragraph, put a period after the word “business” in the third line and eliminate the last three words, and remove the fifth sub-bullet under Policy Guidelines #1 Authorized Content); seconded by Councilor Arnold. Motion approved by roll call vote.**

### **Voting**

**Yea:** Councilor Arnold, Councilor Lannamañ, Councilor Miles, Mayor Wells

**Nay:** Mayor Pro Tem Everline

Mayor Wells called for a recess at 8:08 p.m.

Mayor Wells reconvened the meeting at 8:16 p.m. All five Town Councilors were present at the time that Mayor Wells reconvened the Town Council Meeting.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **11. Presentation: Woodard and Curran**

Kevin Becotte of Woodard & Curran presented a preliminary wastewater facility plan for the Town of Howey-in-the-Hills, focusing on a proposed septic-to-sewer conversion in Old Howey. The plan includes approximately 56,800 feet of gravity sewer lines, 12,400 feet of force mains, and ten lift stations, serving 597 parcels at a projected cost of \$32.4 million.

Mr. Becotte outlined four treatment alternatives: (1) do nothing, which poses continued environmental risk to the lake; (2) connect to the existing Central Lake CDD wastewater facility using reserved capacity at an additional \$2.7 million in CIAC fees; (3) build a force main to Groveland, which has a higher estimated cost of \$43.7 million due to additional infrastructure and impact fees; and (4) acquire or partner with the Central Lake CDD plant, potentially investing \$39.8 million with an optional \$8.7 million to expand capacity for future growth and resale to developers.

Councilor Arnold asked whether the Central Lake CDD had been contacted, and Mr. Becotte confirmed that outreach had not yet been made but could be made with the Town's approval. Councilor Miles observed the plan closely resembled a 2023 presentation he and the Town Manager had developed, noting that costs had significantly increased. Councilor Miles raised concerns about affordability and suggested phasing the project into smaller, incremental sections to allow for gradual progress and grant eligibility.

Mayor Wells questioned the viability of Groveland as a partner, given reports of infrastructure issues, which Mr. Becotte acknowledged but confirmed Groveland is developing a new facility. Mayor Pro Tem Everline asked about newer, improved OnSyte septic systems as a potentially lower-cost alternative. Mr. Becotte responded that, while advanced systems exist, installation on private property presents logistical and legal challenges and would not significantly reduce per-property costs.

Councilor Miles also recalled a previous \$500,000–\$600,000 FDEP grant that was forfeited due to inaction by prior leadership. He urged that the current \$3.2 million grant be used strategically by connecting homes within 300 feet of existing sewer lines, covering both connection costs and septic abandonment, thus expanding the system in affordable, grant-funded stages. This approach, he argued, would allow the Town to demonstrate measurable progress and improve eligibility for future funding, using a leapfrog strategy to extend sewer service throughout the community.

**Mayor Wells made a motion to extend the Town Council meeting by an hour. This was done at 8:47 p.m. The motion was 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

Following the presentation by Kevin Becotte of Woodard & Curran, Council and staff engaged in an extended discussion covering legal, financial, logistical, and strategic concerns.

Councilors Miles and Lannamañ questioned whether the Town’s \$3.2 million SAHFI grant could be used to fund sewer lateral connections from the street to individual homes, as well as septic tank abandonment. Town Manager, Sean O’Keefe, noted that, even if permissible, the Town lacks additional wastewater capacity under the current agreement with the Central Lake CDD, as the 1,600 ERUs allocated have already been used. Mr. Becotte added that most grants only cover work on public property, not private connections, and offered to have Woodard & Curran’s funding team investigate further.

Mayor Wells and Councilor Miles discussed discrepancies in ERU calculations, particularly whether the capacity figure should be based on 250 gallons per day per unit, noting that the Central Lake CDD may have recalibrated its estimates downward. Mr. Becotte clarified that, while daily flow averages are typically lower, plant capacity must be sized for peak flow conditions. He also stated that the ERU expansion potential was based on the facility’s total permitted capacity of 870,000 gallons per day, with some already reserved by the CDD for its own use.

Mayor Wells opened Public Comment

**Ann Griffin, 215 E Laurel Ave.** – Town resident, Ann Griffin, asked why homes along Central Avenue, where sewer lines were previously installed, had not been connected.

Mr. O’Keefe explained that the decision was voluntary at the time, as the strong mayor system then in place combined project planning and execution, and the mayor and Town Council declined to mandate connections. The lack of reserved capacity further complicated future hookups.

Mayor Wells closed Public Comment.

Multiple councilors expressed frustration with the cost and scope of the \$185,000 study, calling it redundant and lacking in actionable planning detail. Councilor Arnold stressed the need for a comprehensive strategy addressing both wastewater and potable water infrastructure, noting that both are scarce resources in Florida. Mayor Pro Tem Everline voiced concern that the study failed to provide clear incremental cost strategies, while Mr. Arnold urged that the Town needed a phased plan, starting with treatment capacity expansion, before pursuing broader sewer installation.

Public Services Director, Morgan Cates, emphasized the importance of coordinating sewer installation with future road reconstruction plans, as most sewer lines are proposed to run down the center of roads. He confirmed the \$32.4 million estimate includes road work costs, though not the cost of acquiring or

expanding the treatment plant. Directional boring was discussed as a less invasive installation method, but Mr. Cates clarified that it is only viable in short segments due to the Town's long roadway stretches.

In conclusion, Council members called for further exploration of grant eligibility, treatment capacity expansion, phasing strategies, and a more detailed and comprehensive utility infrastructure plan to be discussed during upcoming budget meetings.

## 12. Consideration and Approval: **Talichet Lift Station Transfer**

The Town Council discussed and approved the conditional transfer of the Talichet lift station from the Talichet, Venezia-North HOA, to the Town, pending HOA membership approval. Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, explained that legal negotiations had resulted in an agreement capping the project cost at \$90,000, which includes the \$83,193.30 estimate plus limited legal fees. HOA representative, Mr. Joshua Husemann, provided a detailed update on community outreach efforts, noting extensive door-to-door engagement and widespread support, with at least 52 proxy votes already secured and additional votes expected at the HOA's formal vote scheduled for June 11. He reported that residents could either pay a one-time fee of approximately \$800 or opt into a \$68/month payment plan over a year.

Town staff recommended a three-part motion: (1) to add the Talichet lift station to the Town's assets, (2) to approve the work to be done by Town utility contractor Utility Repair Experts (URE) to bring the station up to Town standards, and (3) to amend the budget accordingly at a future meeting.

Mr. Husemann addressed anticipated delinquencies and explained that payments would be handled via a separate HOA account, monitored by the treasurer and management company. Delinquency rates were reported as low, with the HOA prepared to take standard enforcement actions if needed. The Town expects to front no more than \$15,000 due to most residents opting to pay in full at closing, and all funds are projected to be recouped within 12 months. The motion passed following clarification that the approval included the transfer agreement itself.

**Motion made by Councilor Miles to approve the Transfer Agreement with Talichet at Venezia North Homeowners' Association, Inc., bringing in the Talichet lift station into the Town's assets, approve the work to be done by Town utility contractor Utility Repair Experts (URE), and to direct staff to amend the Town's budget accordingly at a future meeting, contingent on the Talichet at Venezia North Homeowners' Association's approval; 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

## 13. Consideration and Approval: **Rescheduling the July 14, 2025, Town Council Meeting**

The Town Council considered rescheduling the July 14, 2025, regular Council meeting. After brief discussion, Councilors confirmed their availability for alternate dates. Councilor Arnold initially suggested vacating the meeting entirely, citing precedent from the holiday season; however, Councilor Lannamañ expressed concern about falling behind on Town business. Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, reminded the Council that two budget workshops would also need to be scheduled during that period, and that a regular meeting might be combined with a workshop if business was limited. Town Clerk, John Brock, recommended Thursday, July 10, as the rescheduled date to maintain proper spacing between meetings.

**Motion made by Mayor Pro Tem Everline to reschedule the July 14, 2025, Town Council Meeting to July 10, 2025; seconded by Councilor Lannamañ. Motion approved by voice vote.**

**Voting**

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

**Nay:** Councilor Arnold

14. Consideration and Approval: **Willdan Impact Fee Study Proposals**

The Town Council considered a proposal from Willdan Financial Services to conduct a comprehensive series of impact fee and fee-related studies, including updates to the Town's existing water, parks and recreation, and police impact fees, and evaluations for new potential fees for sewer (wastewater), transportation (mobility), stormwater, and administration.

Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, explained that only Willdan had responded to the Town's solicitation for proposals, and that the existing impact fees had not been updated in many years. He recommended revisiting these fees in light of upcoming capital needs, including a new police station, water system expansion, and potential sewer infrastructure. The proposed fees include:

- Five core studies (water, sewer, police, parks and rec, mobility): \$7,500 each
- Stormwater: \$10,000 for Phase 1 of a rate study
- Two new studies added during discussion: a building impact fee and an administrative processing fee, both capped at \$7,500 each

Councilor Miles emphasized that the proposed sewer impact fee must cover both collection and treatment infrastructure, not just the collection system as originally written. He also noted that the Town will need a reliable funding source for treatment capacity, regardless of whether it contracts with the Central Lake CDD or constructs its own facilities.

Mayor Wells proposed including a building impact fee and a separate administrative charge that would go to the general fund, revenue that could be used flexibly. He shared that, in past experience, such a fee could generate substantial unrestricted revenue, citing \$181 per residential unit as an example from another jurisdiction.

Mr. O'Keefe clarified that existing impact fee balances cannot be used to fund the studies themselves. The Town will need to amend the budget and allocate funds from the water and wastewater utility funds and the general fund. He confirmed that bundling the public hearings for multiple studies would save time and cost.

**Motion made by Councilor Miles to approve the Willdan Impact Fee Study Proposals, adding a building impact fee study and an administrative processing fee study (both studies cost to be capped a \$7,500 apiece), and that the sewer impact fee study should include treatment as well as collection in its study; 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

Mayor Wells notes that the meeting was running over the extend period of time.

**Motion by Councilor Arnold to 9:45 p.m. to extend the meeting by 30 minutes; 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

15. Discussion: **Road Infrastructure Funding Solutions**

Agenda Item was pulled during Agenda Approval

16. Discussion: **Oaks Grove Development/Annexation**

Town Manager, Sean O’Keefe, updated the Council on the June 4th Lake County Planning and Zoning Board meeting, where a proposed development adjacent to the Town’s borders was reviewed. Mayor Pro Tem Everline stated that the Town submitted a formal letter of opposition outlining planning and infrastructure concerns, but that the letter was sent late in the day before the meeting, which likely limited its impact. The Lake County Planning and Zoning Board nonetheless approved the proposal to proceed to the Board of County Commissioners (BCC). Mayor Pro Tem Everline and Councilor Miles, who both attended the meeting and spoke, noted that all public comments except those of the developer were in opposition.

Council members discussed the recurring issue of developers bypassing the Town’s stricter standards by seeking higher-density approvals directly from the County. Councilor Miles pointed out that this was the second instance where a development inside the Town’s Interlocal Service Boundary Agreement (ISBA) area pursued County approval for a density that would not be permitted under Town code, only to later seek access to Town water and sewer services. He emphasized the need for the Town to reconsider how it responds to these situations to avoid being saddled with incompatible development.

Mayor Pro Tem Everline voiced concern that the Town Manager had not spoken at the Lake County Planning and Zoning meeting to read the submitted letter into the record, which he felt would have added weight to the Town’s position. Mr. O’Keefe responded that, in previous County meetings, he had been told verbal comments were unnecessary when a letter was submitted, but he acknowledged the concern and indicated he had already received follow-up communication from a County Commissioner, suggesting greater openness to collaboration moving forward.

Councilor Lannamañ clarified that Mrs. Brock, one of the developers, resides at the subject property and had sent out a post-meeting invitation to Town officials for a meet-and-greet on June 21st. Mr. O’Keefe confirmed this and noted that Mrs. Brock also owns other parcels within Town limits.

Mayor Wells opened Public Comment for this item only.

**William Sullivan, 36336 SR 19, Howey-In-the-Hills (unincorporated Lake County)** - County resident, William Sullivan, addressed the Council, warning that the developer’s request was not for 49 units, but potentially up to 64 multi-family units allowed under the R-4 zoning designation. He accused the applicant of misrepresenting the project to the community and emphasized the significant impact this would have on the Town’s gateway. Mr. Sullivan called on the Town to consider legal preparations, such as funding a court reporter for the BCC meeting, in case an appeal becomes necessary. He also urged the Town to push back against the perception that it is seeking mass annexation, noting that the developer may be using that narrative to divide local sentiment.

Mr. Sullivan requested that the Town help pay for the court reporter that he intended to have at the Lake County Board of County Commissioners meeting. Councilor Miles stated to the Town Manager that he wanted the Town Manager to place Mr. Sullivan’s court reporting funding request on the agenda for the next Town Council meeting. Councilor Miles also asked Mr. Sullivan to present Mr. O’Keefe with cost for the request prior to the next Town Council meeting.

The discussion concluded with concerns about the density implications of the proposed development, the need for better coordination and earlier response from the Town, and the strategic importance of asserting control overgrowth at the Town’s borders.

## 17. Discussion: **Merging Infrastructure and Transportation Funds**

Council deliberated on the topic of potentially re-merging the Town's Transportation Fund and Infrastructure Fund. Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, introduced the topic, noting it originated from a request by Councilor Miles, who expressed strong concern that the previous splitting of the funds had inadvertently undermined funding for road projects, most notably, the planned reconstruction of Holly Street in the current fiscal year. Councilor Miles detailed his objections to the January/February restructuring, arguing that it reduced transparency and diverted resources from long-established capital priorities. He stated that day-to-day expenditures, such as pothole repair and street lighting, had been moved from the General Fund into the newly created Transportation Fund without a corresponding revenue transfer, effectively draining funds earmarked for capital roadwork. He further asserted that the fund split diluted the Council's ability to execute its multi-year road reconstruction plan and cited a Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) principle recommending a minimal number of funds. Miles proposed returning to a single, consolidated fund structure and also funding Holly Street's reconstruction as originally budgeted in FY25.

Mayor Wells and Mr. O'Keefe responded with clarifications. Mayor Wells stated the fund changes had been made transparently, with the goal of aligning expenditures with their appropriate revenue sources: infrastructure funds derived from the local option sales surtax, and transportation funds from gas taxes and state revenue sharing. He emphasized that the restructuring had been collaborative and not conducted solely by the Town Manager. Mr. O'Keefe acknowledged that some expenditures were shifted without a full offset in transportation revenue, resulting in a shortfall. He noted, however, that future fund transfers from the General Fund could still be considered by Council to cover project costs. He and Mayor Wells both rejected the characterization of the process as deceitful.

The exchange became heated, with Councilor Miles initially accusing the administration of underhanded conduct, later retracting that remark but reaffirming his opposition to the fund separation. The Mayor responded firmly, defending the process and warning that continued personal attacks might deter future participation from staff and volunteers, including the Finance Supervisor. Councilor Lannamañ spoke in favor of maintaining the current fund separation, citing increased transparency for the public and non-accountants. The discussion concluded without formal action, as the agenda item was for discussion only.

## **DEPARTMENT REPORTS**

### 18. Town Hall

This report was supplied in the meeting's packet.

### 19. Police Department

This report was supplied in the meeting's packet.

### 20. Code Enforcement

This report was supplied in the meeting's packet.

### 21. Lake County Fire Rescue

This report was supplied in the meeting's packet.

### 22. Public Services Department

This report was supplied in the meeting's packet.

23. Parks & Recreation

This report was supplied in the meeting's packet.

24. Library / Community Events

This report was supplied in the meeting's packet.

25. Town Attorney

None

26. Finance Supervisor

This report was supplied in the meeting's packet.

27. Town Manager

None

**COUNCIL MEMBER COMMENT**

28. Mayor Pro Tem Everline

None

29. Councilor Arnold

None

30. Councilor Miles

None

31. Councilor Lannamañ

None

32. Mayor Wells

None

## **ADJOURNMENT**

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

The Meeting adjourned at 10:31 p.m. | **Attendees: 48**

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Graham Wells, CMC, Mayor

ATTEST:

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John Brock, Town Clerk