



Town Hall Meeting
October 30, 2023 at 6:00 PM
Marianne Beck Memorial Library -
112 W. Central Ave.,
Howey-in-the-Hills, FL 34737

MINUTES

Call the Town Council Meeting to order
Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag
Invocation by Councilor Reneé Lannamañ

ROLL CALL

Acknowledgement of Quorum

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Councilor Reneé Lannamañ | Councilor David Miles | Councilor George Lehning | Mayor Pro Tem Marie V. Gallelli | Mayor Martha MacFarlane

STAFF PRESENT:

Sean O’Keefe, Town Manager | John Brock, Town Clerk

NEW BUSINESS

Any person wishing to address the Mayor and Town Council and who is not on the agenda is asked to fill out a Speaker Form and speak their name and address. Five (5) minutes is allocated per speaker at this meeting.

1. Topic: **What would you like to see accomplished or not done in fiscal year 2024-2025?**
2. Topic: **Development to a Town is key to its sustainability; what is your definition of “sustainability”?**
3. Topic: **Do you think the Town should move forward with building a wastewater plant to be maintained and operated by the Town of Howey-in-the-Hills?**
4. Topic: **Name concerns you have regarding sustainability for the Town of Howey-in-the-Hills.**
5. Topic: **Other concerns**

Mayor MacFarlane explained that Councilor Lannamañ had requested the Town Hall meeting to solicit input from the Town’s residents. Councilor Lannamañ discussed the scope of the meeting and the five issues that the Town Council wanted to hear the opinions of the Town’s residents on.

Eric Gunesch, 448 Avila Pl. – Mr. Gunesch stated that he wanted to see more improvement to the Town’s roads and sidewalks, before moving on to other miscellaneous things. Mr. Gunesch wanted to see more responsible uses of the Town’s resources.

Mr. Gunesch stated that that he would like to see the Town own and operate its own Wastewater plant.

Mr. Gunesch stated that he would like to see a Community Center built by the Town for the use of everyone.

Mr. Gunesch was also concerned about the Town getting “strong armed” by developers. He believes they are steering the Town away from its historical vision.

Mr. Gunesch wants the Town to abandon PUDs and the Village Mixed Use (VMU) designation in favor of straight zoning with a 50% or 60% open space requirement.

Peter Tuite, 300 E Croton Way – Mr. Tuite was concerned about the Town’s new Water Treatment Plant. Mr. Tuite did not want the Town to drill to the Lower Floridan Aquifer. Mr. Tuite thinks that these deep wells will do nothing for the Town. Mr. Tuite thinks that these new wells will do nothing for the Town’s current residents.

Mr. Tuite thinks that the Town is too small for its own Wastewater Treatment Plant. He believes that the Town should use Tavares’ treatment plant on the other side of the lake.

Mr. Tuite thinks that the Town should utilize the irrigation wells that are already existing on the Lake Hills and Simpson parcels for the Town’s irrigation needs.

Councilor Miles spoke about drilling to the Lower Floridan Aquifer and that this was a standard practice that was currently being required by the Water Management District of all municipalities in Florida.

Tim Everline, 1012 N Lakeshore Blvd. – Mr. Everline wants the Town’s piers to be repaired and better maintained. Mr. Everline would like the Town to do better job of trimming of weeds down at the shore of Little Like Harris.

Mr. Everline think that infrastructure is important and there should be a greater priority on maintaining the Town’s roads.

Mr. Everline thinks that the Town need more revenue, not more development.

Mr. Everline states that the Town needs to offer sewer to its residents and if the cost of buying/building a sewer treatment plant is close to expanding someone else’s plant, the Town should have its own.

Mr. Everline would like the Town to buy the Lake County School Board’s unused land in Howey-in-the-Hills, that is near the lake. Mr. Everline would like to see a Community Center built on this land with a Town owned marina / kayak launching facility built on the other side of Lakeshore Blvd.

Bud Beucher, Representing the Central Lake CDD – Mr. Beucher stated that the Central Lake CDD wants to assist the Town, but it needs an ironclad contract with rate increases built into it. Mr. Beucher states that the Town could own its own capacity in the Central Lake CDD Wastewater Treatment Plant, it would just need to buy it just like any developer would.

Mr. Beucher stated that he believed it would cost the Town at least \$20 million to build its own Wastewater Treatment Plant.

Councilor Miles asked Mr. Beucher if he would consider selling the Central Lake CDD’s Wastewater Treatment Plant to the Town. Mr. Beucher stated that he would not.

Matthew Pedlar, 414 Amola Way – Mr. Pedlar stated that he would like to see more parks in the Town and greater Commercial presence.

Mr. Pedlar was in favor of the Town controlling its own Water and Wastewater Plants.

Andi Everline, 1012 N. Lakeshore Blvd. – Mrs. Everline was concerned about Library activities and believed that they should occur later in the day, so that more public-school kids can participate. An example of this was the Chess Club, which currently meets at 2 p.m., only home-school kids can participate. Mrs. Everline also stated that the library should organize all their field trips for days that public-school kids have off.

Mrs. Everline would like to see pickleball courts built in the Town.

Ann Griffin, 215 E Laurel Ave. – Mrs. Griffin wants infrastructure to be a higher priority in the Town.

Mrs. Griffin was concerned that the money that had been budgeted for the canceled Oktoberfest, had been spent on a Christmas Tree and a stage; and that this money should have been used on roads.

Mrs. Griffin thinks that the Town should buy equipment to weed the foliage down at the lake shore rather than contract out for this service.

Mrs. Griffin thinks that Bud Beucher cares for the Town.

Sandi Russ, 6813 Lake View Dr., Yalaha Fl. – Mrs. Russ thinks that parking and growth opportunities in the Town are limited. She likes the idea that she heard about buying the Lake County School Board's land.

Mrs. Russ was concerned that about the high taxes in the Town and the amount of proposed development in the Town. Mrs. Russ also was concerned that some of the land that developers owned was not being taxed high enough.

Mrs. Russ thinks that the Town Council should be asking the developers what commercial growth they were targeting.

Mrs. Russ thinks that the Town should sponsor a farmers' market.

Mrs. Russ wants the Town to protect the rural area around Howey.

Mrs. Russ doesn't want development on the southside of the Town but wants a minimum of 1 acre lots there.

Bank Helfrich, 9100 Sams Lake Rd, Clermont Fl. – Mr. Helfrich spoke about sustainability and that he thought the Town of Howey-in-the-Hills was quaint. Mr. Helfrich recommended that that Town participate in the Strong Towns Initiative to improve sustainability.

Mayor MacFarlane read out loud an email that former Mayor Duane Gorgas had submitted to the Town. Former Mayor Gorgas email stated:

To the Council and Town Manager,

These are my comments regarding sustainability for Howey in the future as a resident since 1983. As a councilman for 11 yr. and Mayor for 7 yr., I was involved in the development and final approval of the original Comprehensive Plan. At that time, Howey was a small town of primarily single-family residences, very limited commercial development, and surrounding by miles of rural land consisting of orange groves. The Town's revenue base was ~75% funded by property tax revenue. The water system was old and needed massive improvement, there was no sanitary sewer system available, and there were virtually no development plan requests for land surrounding the Town limits. In the past 10 yr. there have been multiple new residential

developments built with many more currently in the planning stage, a limited sanitary sewer is now available, and the water system has improved significantly but is still in need of further improvement. There is still very little commercial development. The Town revenue continues to be funded primarily from property taxes. With the population increases the need for infrastructure is required. Vision for the future is now influenced more by the approval of new developments than what the current Town residents may or may not want.

When the first Comprehensive Plan was developed, the vision was a primarily single-family residential community with limited commercial development and a Town police force to maintain community safety. Citizen surveys conducted during that time period indicated the residents wanted a smaller family based residential community that was safe with limited commercial development. Is that the current citizen opinion now? That is what the sustainability meeting for citizen input should determine. Once those opinions are known, the Council's job will then be to implement those opinions into actionable plans for future development that meets the citizen's vision for Howey. The vision for the Town IS NOT YOUR personal opinion of what Howey needs but what the current citizens in Howey want. Please remember that each time you make decisions on approval of future developments and future infrastructure improvements.

The key areas that I believe need to be addressed are as follows:

1. Should Howey remain a primarily single-family residential community or should more multiple housing and smaller lot size single family residential units be built to allow more residents to live in Howey?
2. Will community safety in this age of rampant violence in communities of all sizes be maintained by continuing Howey's own police force or should safety be controlled by the Sheriff? What are the benefits of local police vs. county sheriff deputies? Is any financial savings in safety worth the loss of safety for the community?
3. Should Howey encourage increased commercial development that might negatively influence the single-family residential concept? Does Howey want to be another Clermont, Groveland, or Tavares?
4. How will the infrastructure services be improved to serve the new developments being considered for approval. Who will pay for the improvements the new developments or all current Town residents?
5. Traffic improvements will be dramatically affected by new development. Given the geography of the current transportation system in Howey, what will be needed to maintain easily accessible transportation routes in Howey to connect to other communities?

My opinion to each of these are as follows:

1. Howey should remain a primarily single-family residential community with very limited multiple housing development and no reduced lot size single family residential units. Downsizing lot requirements benefits only the developer and places increased demand on infrastructure for all citizens.
2. The Howey Police department should remain in place so the level of safety citizens have now is maintained. Asking the Sheriff to provide this protection will result in LESS safety for citizens because the response time will be longer. Saving money on services is not the way to keep citizens safe. How long is an acceptable response time when you are in danger or injured?
3. Commercial development should be minimal and placed only in areas that do not infringe upon the residential nature of the Town. Howey does not need to be another Clermont or Tavares.
4. Obviously, infrastructure must match the increased demand of new housing/commercial developments. The Town should manage its own sanitary sewer operation just like the Town managed water system. Without management control the Town is at the mercy of whoever owns the sewer system.

5. *Traffic improvements MUST include BY PASS construction. Failure to do so will “strangle” all the Town resident’s access to north/south routes. Geography prevents expansion of Palm Ave to accommodate future traffic increases due to future development. As a person who daily walks Palm Ave, I know that currently the traffic at certain times is so busy I can’t easily cross Palm Ave. What will it be like for anyone to turn onto Palm Ave in a vehicle when the traffic dramatically increases (especially for residents who live East of Palm Ave)? All future development approvals should have the transportation capacity in place PRIOR to the build out of any developments not CONCURRENT or AFTER! Failure to do so will make Howey a traffic nightmare especially for those who access Palm Ave from side streets or those who live on Palm Ave (like me).*

6. *Finally, ALL costs for infrastructure improvements should be funded 100% by new development. Current residents should not subsidize costs that benefit new developments. The current residents have been paying their “fair share” all along. Why should we be responsible for new development costs?*

I would ask the Council to carefully review my comments and keep them in mind when you are considering approval of any new development request.

Duane Gorgas

Mayor MacFarlane reminded those present that the Town Council would have workshop meeting at 6 p.m. on November 1, 2023, back in the library, and recommended that the public attend.

ADJOURNMENT

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

The Meeting adjourned at 7:06 p.m. | **Attendees: 36**

Mayor Martha MacFarlane

ATTEST:

John Brock, Town Clerk