



Town Council Special Meeting

April 01, 2025 at 1:00 PM

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

MINUTES

Mayor Wells called the Town Council Special Meeting to order at 1:02 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 | Library Director, Amanda Moldan | Finance Supervisor, Oscar Ojeda | Rick Thomas, Police Chief | Public Works Director, Morgan Cates | Police Lieutenant. Michael Giddens | Public Utilities Supervisor, James Southall (via Zoom) | John Brock, Deputy Town Manager / Town Clerk

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mayor Wells welcomed Town Staff and new hire (Executive Assistant to the Town Manager's Office) Victoria Roszkiewicz to the meeting.

AGENDA APPROVAL/REVIEW

**Motion made by Councilor Lannamañ to approve the meeting's agenda; 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 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.

None

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 March 24, 2025, Town Council Meeting.

Motion made by Councilor Lannamañ to approve the Consent Agenda; 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. Consideration and Approval: **Resolution 2025-006 - Safety Resolution**

The Town Council engaged in an extensive discussion about Resolution 2025-006, which involves the Town's safety resolution and prioritizing projects for submission to the Lake-Sumter Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, explained that the current document was created by consolidating feedback from various council members, particularly Councilor Arnold and Mayor Pro Tem Everline. The issue centered around deciding whether to include three projects or reduce the list to two in the submission to the MPO.

The Council debated the inclusion of the Central Lake Trail project versus prioritizing improvements to State Road 19, including intersections at County Road 48 and Revels Road. Councilor Arnold advocated for a streamlined list, focusing on the most critical needs due to the late submission. Councilor Arnold emphasized establishing a timeline for annual submissions to the MPO to ensure consistency in advocacy for projects.

Public Services Director, Morgan Cates, reported on ongoing discussions with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) and Lake County for funding improvements at the State Road 19 and County Road 48 intersection. Councilors debated whether to include this intersection project in the resolution. Councilor Miles argued for prioritizing the intersection improvements over the Central Lake Trail project, citing safety concerns and growing traffic issues.

Motion made by Councilor Miles to approve Resolution 2025-006, while striking item #3 from Section 1 and re-adding items #3 and #4 from the previous version of the proposed Resolution; seconded by Councilor Lannamañ. Motion withdrawn.

There was disagreement among the council members about the appropriate approach. Mayor Pro Tem Everline expressed frustration, feeling his input was being disregarded, and temporarily resigned his

position as the primary MPO representative. Ultimately, the council decided to approve Resolution 2025-006 with only two items: the State Road 19 and Central Avenue intersection improvement and the expanded State Road 19 traffic study. The Central Lake Trail project was removed, and no other items were added as replacements.

Motion made by Councilor Miles to approve Resolution 2025-006, while striking item #3 from Section 1; 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

At the request of the Mayor, Mayor Pro Tem Everline agreed to withdraw his resignation as the primary MPO representative, acknowledging the importance of continued advocacy for the Town's projects. The Council concluded by agreeing to expedite the approval process for Resolution 2025-006, ensuring copies would be sent to key MPO contacts promptly.

3. Discussion: **Strategic Planning**

During the strategic planning session, Mayor Wells and the Town Council members engaged in an extensive discussion covering various topics related to the Town's growth, infrastructure, legal representation, public safety, and community relations. Mayor Wells initiated the conversation by presenting two strategic plans—one authored by himself and another by Councilor Arnold. Mayor Wells requested the council members to review both documents and provide feedback. The discussion then branched into numerous pressing issues, including future projects, financial planning, and infrastructure improvements.

Councilor Miles offered a detailed list of 14 potential projects and goals aimed at enhancing the Town's infrastructure and quality of life. His suggestions included improving utilities, expanding water and wastewater services, annexing properties, and widening critical roadways such as State Road 19 and County Road 48. The discussion on infrastructure further highlighted the need to improve the Town's bridges and transportation routes to support future growth. Councilor Arnold underscored the importance of developing a cohesive strategy to guide the Town's progress, rather than continuing with piecemeal planning efforts. He emphasized that the Town's leadership should not only focus on immediate objectives but also provide a long-term roadmap for future councils and staff to follow.

The conversation about utilities and wastewater management was particularly extensive, with several council members advocating for the Town to pursue ownership of the local wastewater treatment facility. Councilor Miles argued that controlling wastewater services would offer the Town greater leverage in managing future growth and ensuring reliable services. Concerns were raised about the high cost of acquisition and the necessary expansions to accommodate increasing demand. While some members suggested pursuing a legal review to explore the feasibility of acquiring the plant through a gradual eminent domain process, others preferred to wait for the completion of a wastewater study expected in July before making definitive decisions.

In terms of Town planning and development, staff members expressed the need for a clear vision to guide future growth. The Council also discussed enhancing the downtown area to boost walkability and attract more commercial activity, which would, in turn, support the Town's economic growth.

Recreational amenities were another major topic, with members suggesting enhancements to existing parks, such as Griffin Park, and the addition of new amenities like pickleball courts. Public Services Director, Morgan Cates, indicated that the Town was actively seeking grants to support park improvements and infrastructure development. Some council members advocated for establishing a

dedicated Parks and Recreation Department within the next five years to better manage and expand the Town's recreational offerings.

Public safety and police staffing challenges were addressed, particularly the financial burden associated with providing School Resource Officers (SROs). Mayor Wells noted that the Town was effectively subsidizing the school board's responsibilities, and suggested reallocating resources to better compensate police officers and reduce turnover. Councilor Miles noted that, while maintaining the SRO program was costly, it bolstered the police department's overall capacity. The Council debated various strategies for retaining officers, including offering better benefits and revising the Town's retirement plan to provide a stronger incentive for officers to remain long-term.

Relations with the Howey Mansion proved to be a contentious issue, particularly regarding the organization of Founder's Day. Some council members felt that the Town should discontinue its Founder's Day event and allow the mansion to handle it exclusively, given its historical significance as the former home of William Howey. Others believed the Town should maintain control over its own celebration, suggesting alternative branding or scheduling options to reduce conflict. Mayor Pro Tem Everline suggested rebranding the event entirely and focusing on other unique aspects of the Town, such as its citrus heritage or lakeside amenities. However, some council members argued that abandoning the Founder's Day event would be a mistake, particularly as the Town approaches its centennial celebration.

Additionally, the Council noted ongoing tensions with the Howey Mansion's management, particularly regarding shared use of resources and conflicting event scheduling. Town Clerk, John Brock, recounted prior issues with the mansion's management, where collaboration efforts were complicated by unilateral decision-making from mansion staff. The council expressed concerns that these conflicts could undermine future collaborative efforts if not addressed.

The strategic planning session revealed a variety of priorities and concerns, including infrastructure expansion, parks and recreation improvements, public safety challenges, and ongoing issues with community relations. The council members agreed that developing a cohesive strategy was essential for guiding the Town's future growth. There was general consensus that the strategic plan should include concrete projects and goals to provide continuity and direction for future councils and staff members. Councilors Miles and Everline were asked to share their notes and proposals with the Town Clerk for further review and incorporation into the broader strategic plan.

DEPARTMENT REPORTS

4. Town Manager

None

COUNCIL MEMBER COMMENT

5. Mayor Pro Tem Everline

Mayor Pro Tem Everline explained that he had recently visited Sara Maude Mason's newly renovated Boardwalk. He was concerned about the signs that used to be posted along the boardwalk describing flora and fauna. Public Works Director, Morgan Cates, stated that the signs were being renovated and would be reposted along the boardwalk.

6. Councilor Arnold

Councilor Arnold concluded his remarks by referencing a quote from Rahm Emanuel, the former Mayor of Chicago, stating, "Safe streets, strong schools, and stable finances. If we focus on those things, the city's going to be fine." Councilor Arnold clarified that he was not necessarily a fan of Emanuel but

found the sentiment particularly relevant to the council's ongoing discussions about strategic planning and growth. Councilor Arnold highlighted how the simplicity of the quote encapsulated essential priorities that, if addressed properly, would ensure the Town's long-term success.

Councilor Arnold reflected on a recent Council meeting where the primary topic of concern had been the number of trash cans residents were allowed to have. Councilor Arnold pointed out that, if this relatively minor issue was the most pressing matter at the time, it could be a positive indicator that the Town's more significant challenges were under control. However, he also acknowledged that the minor issue could be a distraction from more pressing concerns, especially considering the broader discussions about infrastructure, utilities, and community growth. Ultimately, Councilor Arnold emphasized the need for the Council to remain focused on core priorities that would sustain the Town's prosperity and improve the quality of life for all residents.

7. Councilor Miles

Councilor Miles addressed several issues, beginning with noting that he had prepared a list of 14 points which he would finish typing and email to the Town Clerk for distribution. He then raised a concern about communication regarding a recent water pipe replacement on Mission Lane, which cost approximately \$27,000. Councilor Miles acknowledged that the work was necessary but expressed frustration that he, along with other council members, had not been informed of the project in advance. As a local resident who frequently walked by the area, he only became aware of the project by speaking with a backhoe operator on site. He emphasized that, for projects of significant scale, such as paving entire blocks or running lengthy water lines, the council should be notified in advance—preferably via a text or email. Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, responded that this issue would be addressed under the Town's procurement policy at an upcoming meeting, and that clarification would be provided about which projects require advance notice to the council.

Mayor Wells raised a question about whether the spending limit for requiring council approval had been reduced from \$50,000 to \$25,000. While the matter had been discussed previously, it was confirmed that no final decision had been made, but the issue would be revisited at the next meeting. Councilor Miles reiterated his point that, while minor tasks such as patching potholes did not require prior notification, larger projects should be communicated in advance to keep council members informed.

Councilor Arnold supported Councilor Miles's request for better communication, likening it to informing a superior of night operations to avoid unnecessary complaints. The discussion then turned to updates on work planned for North Citrus Avenue. Public Services Director, Morgan Cates, reported that contractors were ready to begin staking out the road realignment of Camilla and North Citrus, with tree removal scheduled to start the following week. This process was expected to take approximately a month before any actual road work would commence. Councilor Arnold suggested delaying significant work until after May 10th, but Mr. Cates indicated that such a delay could not be guaranteed.

Councilor Miles concluded his remarks by sharing a conservation-related concern. He reported that there were only three whooping cranes left in Florida, following the relocation of a crane from Osceola County to Louisiana where a larger flock resides. Efforts to establish a stable population in Florida had failed, while the Louisiana population thrived. He noted that, if the remaining cranes in Florida either died or were relocated to Louisiana, the species would likely be uprooted from the state.

8. Councilor Lannamañ

Councilor Lannamañ inquired about the Planning and Zoning (P&Z) openings mentioned on the Town's front marquee, seeking clarification about the number of positions available. Town Clerk, John Brock, explained that the matter would be addressed in the upcoming meeting's consent agenda. He noted that Board Chair, Tina St. Clair, was reapplying for her position, while Shawn Johnson, who held another seat, had decided not to reapply. Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, clarified that even when current

members reapply, the openings are posted publicly to ensure transparency and provide an opportunity for other interested parties to apply, preventing concerns about lack of accessibility. Mr. O’Keefe confirmed that there were two seats available—one from a renewal application and one fully vacant seat. Councilor Lannamañ acknowledged the clarification, thanking them for the explanation.

9. Mayor Wells

None

ADJOURNMENT

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

The Meeting adjourned at 4:25 p.m. | **Attendees: 14**

Graham Wells, CMC, Mayor

ATTEST:

John Brock, Town Clerk