



Town Council Workshop

April 03, 2025 at 4:30 PM

Howey-in the-Hills Town Hall

101 N. Palm Ave.,

Howey-in-the-Hills, FL 34737

MINUTES

Mayor Wells called the Town Council Workshop to order at 4:31 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 | Rick Thomas, Police Chief | Public Services Director, Morgan Cates | Finance
Supervisor, Oscar Ojeda | Police Lieutenant, Michael Giddens | John Brock, Deputy Town Manager / Town Clerk

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

NEW BUSINESS

1. Discussion: Town Manager Review

Mayor Graham Wells initiated the discussion about the Town Manager's review, noting that the assessment was based on a scoring method, which placed the Town Manager's performance between satisfactory and superior. The Mayor addressed misinformation circulating online, clarifying that the Town Manager's salary of \$118,000 is the lowest among Lake County's 13 Town and City Managers. Mayor Wells emphasized that the Town Manager is not responsible for making decisions on development but rather implements Council-approved plans. He also acknowledged the challenges of the position and highlighted the importance of experience.

Councilor Lannamañ shared her perspective, recognizing growth in the Town Manager's professional skills and expertise. While acknowledging areas for improvement, she emphasized the Town Manager's efforts to address Council requests and encouraged him to expand intergovernmental relations. Councilor Lannamañ noted that the Town's limited commercial tax base adds challenges to the role.

Mayor Pro Tem Everline appreciated the detailed evaluations from fellow Councilors and mentioned his observation that some tasks, such as the Citrus Road project, were not completed in a timely manner. Mayor Pro Tem Everline expressed concerns about communication issues and suggested improvements in providing the Council with relevant information from external meetings and conferences.

Councilor Arnold approached the evaluation with a structured Air Force mindset, focusing on whether the Town Manager meets standard expectations rather than assigning numeric scores. Councilor Arnold appreciated the Town Manager's availability and dedication but noted that the evaluation form could be more effective if it focused on meeting standards rather than numerical ratings.

Councilor Miles, one of the more experienced members in evaluating the Town Manager, praised improvements in staffing and fiscal management. Councilor Miles highlighted that the Town's staff is more professional compared to past years and credited the Town Manager for these improvements despite budgetary constraints. However, Councilor Miles expressed frustration with slow progress on certain projects, particularly the Citrus Road project, and called for better planning and organization.

Mayor Graham Wells noted that he had less history with the Town Manager than others but appreciated their collaborative efforts in addressing fiscal issues. Mayor Wells acknowledged the importance of understanding the Town's finances for future planning and praised the Town Manager's dedication and transparency. Mayor Wells concluded that the Town is fortunate to have a manager with the desire to improve continuously.

Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, responded by acknowledging the challenges of his position and expressing appreciation for the opportunity to serve. Mr. O'Keefe highlighted progress made over the years in staff development and project completion, crediting the staff for much of the success. Mr. O'Keefe concluded by thanking the Council and the Town's staff for their support.

Mayor Wells opened Public Comment for this item only.

Lynne Husemann, 671 Avila Pl. – Resident Lynne Husemann, speaking on behalf of herself and her husband, expressed appreciation for Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe's, leadership during the Town Council meeting. She noted that they have attended meetings for over four years, even prior to moving to the Town, and have found Mr. O'Keefe to be a humble leader with no personal agenda, dedicated to the betterment of the community. Mrs. Husemann highlighted Mr. O'Keefe's honesty, long working hours, professionalism, and his productive relationship with the Council. She also praised his availability and responsiveness to residents, his knowledge of policy execution and fiscal management, and his leadership in planning and organizational development. She concluded by thanking the Council for their constructive criticism and support of the Town Manager.

Andi Everline, 1012 N. Lakeshore Blvd. - Resident Andi Everline raised concerns about the Town's trash collection service, questioning whether the failure to pick up yard waste constitutes a breach of contract. She noted that some residents have resorted to placing yard waste in their regular trash due to inconsistent or missed pickups, which she highlighted as an environmental concern. Mrs. Everline also mentioned reports of rude interactions from Town office staff when residents called with complaints, suggesting a need for improved customer service.

Councilor Miles responded by explaining that the current seven-year contract with the trash company, established before Sean O'Keefe became Town Manager, lacks an "out clause" for termination of convenience. Councilor Miles confirmed that the only way to terminate the contract early would be to

prove non-performance, which is a complicated process. Councilor Miles expressed agreement with Mrs. Everline's concerns about the trash service but cautioned that pursuing legal action could be costly for the Town, which has previously faced expensive litigation issues.

Mr. O'Keefe recommended that residents report missed pickups promptly so the Town can contact the trucks and attempt to resolve the issue as quickly as possible.

Jim Steele, 1003 N. Temple Ave. - Resident Jim Steele expressed his appreciation for Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe's, accessibility and responsiveness, noting that Mr. O'Keefe is always willing to engage with residents, whether in person or by phone, regardless of the circumstances. Mr. Steele highlighted that Mr. O'Keefe's availability and dedication are valuable to the community and stated his concern that the Town Manager is underpaid compared to his peers. Mr. Steele echoed previous comments suggesting that, if Mr. O'Keefe were to leave, hiring a replacement would be significantly more costly. Mr. Steele also noted that the Town Clerk is similarly undercompensated considering the long hours worked. Mr. Steele encouraged the Town to recognize and reward the loyalty and dedication of its employees who have been working for below-average pay.

Ann Griffin, 215 E Laurel Ave. - Resident Ann Griffin raised concerns about the Town's spending practices, noting that many residents have expressed worries about the amount of money being spent without sufficient oversight. She questioned the limit on how much the Town Manager can spend without council or mayoral approval, suggesting that it should be set lower. Mrs. Griffin pointed to previous spending decisions, such as expenditures related to park improvements, which were not clearly explained and appeared excessive. She emphasized that residents are concerned about managing limited Town funds more effectively.

Mayor Wells acknowledged Mrs. Griffin's concerns, noting that the Town is currently reviewing its purchasing policy and procedures. Mayor Wells mentioned that there is already a recommendation to reduce the spending limit by half, which is under discussion. The Mayor assured Mrs. Griffin that financial oversight is a priority for him during his tenure, and that improvements in fiscal management are being actively pursued.

Joshua Husemann, 671 Avila Pl. - Resident Joshua Husemann commended Councilors Miles and Arnold for their detailed evaluation comments and encouraged the Council to adopt a more streamlined and constructive evaluation process. Mr. Husemann described the current evaluation format as overly complex and filled with unnecessary details, suggesting that it could be simplified for better clarity and efficiency. Mr. Husemann also emphasized the importance of requiring council members to provide comments, rather than just numerical ratings, to offer more context and clarity for the public.

Mr. Husemann expressed concern about misinformation circulating on local social media platforms and praised Mayor Wells for his efforts to calm tensions and provide accurate information during the meeting. Mr. Husemann urged the council to ensure that complete and accurate information is made publicly available, particularly if evaluations are posted online. Additionally, he recommended the use of a balanced feedback approach—providing positive comments alongside negative ones—to promote more effective and constructive evaluations.

Mayor Wells concluded the public comment portion of the meeting, thanking residents and council members for their participation and constructive feedback during the Town Manager's review. He acknowledged the positive and helpful nature of the discussion and noted that it provided a valuable opportunity for future progress. Mayor Wells then invited a motion to adjourn the meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

Before adjournment, Councilor Jon Arnold provided an update on the safety resolution discussed at the previous meeting. Councilor Arnold reported that the resolution had been forwarded to County Commissioner Sean Parks

and Mike Woods. Councilor Arnold noted that Commissioner Parks had expressed urgency in addressing the matter and intended to contact Mr. Woods immediately. Councilor Arnold expressed optimism that the inputs provided by Howey-in-the-Hills would be acted upon promptly, emphasizing the timeliness of their submission.

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

The Meeting adjourned at 5:34 p.m. | **Attendees: 31**

Graham Wells, CMC, Mayor

ATTEST:

John Brock, Town Clerk