



Town Manager Performance Evaluation

Town Manager's Name: Sean O'Keefe

Council Member Name: _____

Evaluation Period: April 1, 2025 to September 30, 2025

Evaluation Date: October 7, 2025

Evaluation Instructions:

This form shall be completed by each member of the Council to evaluate the Town Manager's performance in each of the areas noted below. Each member of the Board shall sign the end of the form and forward it to the Town Clerk. Performance levels can be based on the following scale:

- 5 – EXCELLENT:** The incumbent consistently demonstrates performance at a very high standard that significantly surpasses reasonable expectations.
- 4 – SUPERIOR:** The incumbent consistently demonstrates performance that generally exceeds reasonable expectations. The individual demonstrates no appreciable performance deficiencies.
- 3 – SATISFACTORY:** The incumbent consistently meets reasonable performance expectations. The individual demonstrates an acceptable degree of competence and performance.
- 2 – FAIR:** The incumbent achieves the minimum of performance expectations. The individual requires development in specific areas in order to meet reasonable expectations of performance.
- 1 – UNSATISFACTORY:** The incumbent frequently fails to meet minimum performance expectations.

Timeline: April 1, 2025 through September 30, 2025

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Performance Dimensions:

1. Professional Skills and Expertise		Rating:
a. Is knowledgeable of current developments affecting the management field and affecting local governments.		4
b. Regularly provides accurate, comprehensive reports concerning matters of importance to the organization.		3
c. Anticipates problems and develops effective approaches for solving them.		4
d. Offers workable alternatives when changes in the law render the administration of an ordinance or policy impractical.		4
e. Sets a professional example by handling the affairs of the organization in a fair and impartial manner.		5
Total Rating for this Performance Dimension:		20
Comment:	During this evaluation period, I have worked to ensure that the Council and community are informed and supported by accurate information, professional judgment, and practical alternatives. My efforts have centered on managing complex infrastructure and utility planning issues, including the Citrus Avenue right-of-way agreements, development utility agreements, and major revisions to the Capital Improvement Plan. Each of these required a clear understanding of technical, fiscal, and legal considerations, as well as an ability to translate those issues into actionable options for Council. I have also focused on enhancing policy clarity, including revisions to the purchasing policy, and providing context on long-term service delivery challenges such as wastewater capacity expansion. These efforts reflect both responsiveness to Council direction and a proactive approach to anticipating emerging needs. In doing so, I have worked to uphold the highest professional standards, presenting complex issues in a way that supports effective decision-making and public trust. While there will always be opportunities to further improve the accessibility of financial and technical information, I believe this period demonstrates continued progress in professional expertise, strategic foresight, and commitment to fairness. I remain dedicated to modeling the professionalism and impartiality expected of the Town Manager role while preparing the organization to meet the demands of future growth.	

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2. Council/Commission Relations		Rating:
a. Carries out directives of the Board as a whole rather than those of any one Boardmember.		5
b. In responding to requests for information, provides complete, accurate, and timely information equally to all Board members.		3
c. Assists the Board by resolving problems at the administrative level to avoid unnecessary Board action.		4
d. Assists the Board in establishing policy while acknowledging the ultimate authority of the Board.		5
e. Is willing to try new ideas proposed by Board members.		4
Total Rating for this Performance Dimension:		21
Comment:	Throughout this evaluation period, I have maintained a consistent focus on respecting the authority of the Council, making myself fully available for conversations and meetings to discuss topics, while ensuring its directives are carried out. In matters such as the Drake Point utility agreement and the Citrus Avenue right-of-way negotiations, I presented the facts, clarified legal and technical distinctions, and deferred to Council's collective decision-making, ensuring that staff actions reflected consensus rather than individual preferences. In support of Council's policymaking role, I worked to bring forward revisions to the purchasing policy and the Capital Improvement Plan, clarifying details at Council's request while recognizing that ultimate authority rests with the elected body. My approach has been to frame options and implications clearly so that Council can make informed choices. This approach was particularly evident during discussions of financial reporting practices, where I provided context and adjustments in line with Council feedback. I also sought to manage matters administratively whenever possible to reduce the need for escalated Council involvement. At the same time, I have sought Council's ideas and feedback, incorporating their recommendations into policy revisions and long-term planning. Even in cases where perspectives varied, I worked to foster respectful dialogue and to ensure that decisions were implemented without bias. Taken together, these efforts reflect my commitment to building a collaborative relationship with the Council. By focusing on accuracy and	

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	fairness, I believe I have done my part to strengthen the decision-making environment and have reinforced confidence in the Town's administrative leadership. Despite my efforts to maintain professional relations, Council as a body has tolerated, and at times encouraged, individual members interfering outside their Charter authority. Independent calls to the Town Attorney, undisclosed meetings with department directors, direct instructions to contractors, and public disparagement of the Town Manager have become normalized. These actions undermine collective governance, erode staff confidence, and damage the credibility of the organization.	
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3. Citizen and Public Relations		Rating:
a. Effectively conveys to the public that the organization delivers services in a cost-effective manner without sacrificing quality and customer focus.		3
b. Is willing to meet with members of the community and is responsive to their concerns.		4
c. Demonstrates a dedication to service to the community and its citizens.		5
d. Expresses information orally in a clear and concise manner when making public presentations.		4
e. Is skillful with the news media, proactively providing information that is important to the public.		3
Total Rating for this Performance Dimension:		19
Comment:	During this period, I worked to ensure that residents were informed, heard, and supported through transparent communication and accessibility. Whether addressing concerns about utility projects, explaining financial practices, or clarifying policy revisions, I have made it a priority to provide residents with clear and accurate information. This has been particularly important in infrastructure planning, where I sought to reassure residents that projects like road reconstructions and utility infrastructure projects were designed with safety, efficiency, and long-term community benefit in mind. Community events such as the Founders Day celebration also highlighted the need for responsiveness and inclusivity. While some residents expressed concerns about competing events, I worked to explain the Town's sponsorship and planning process and supported collaboration with other organizations. These interactions reinforced both the opportunities and the challenges in managing public expectations during a milestone year for the Town. I have also continued to be present and approachable in daily interactions with residents. This has included engaging in dialogue during Council meetings, participating in community activities, and addressing resident inquiries directly. These efforts reflect my ongoing commitment to service as more than administrative management, while building public trust and showing residents that their concerns matter. While there remains room to expand proactive communication strategies, especially with the news media and in digital outreach, I believe this	

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	evaluation period demonstrates steady progress in making government operations more transparent and accessible. During the recent budgeting season, Council members have actively spread inaccurate information to residents, such as misrepresenting staff raises, resulting in public hostility toward Town staff. This has created an atmosphere where residents question staff integrity, when, in fact, staff have operated transparently within budget and procurement rules. Staff time and energy are then diverted from service delivery to correcting misleading narratives, which undermines resident confidence.	
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4. Policy Execution		Rating:
a. Understands, supports, and enforces the organization's ordinances, policies, and procedures.		5
b. Clearly identifies and communicates expectations to the organization regarding the implementation of policies enacted by the Board.		4
c. Implements Board actions in accordance with the intent of the Board.		4
d. Supports the actions of the Board after a decision has been reached, both inside and outside the organization.		4
e. Helps internal and external stakeholders to achieve common objectives within the parameters of established Board policies.		4
Total Rating for this Performance Dimension:		21
Comment:	Over this period, I have worked to ensure that Council directives are carried out with accuracy, clarity, and consistency. One example is the revision of the purchasing policy, where I presented changes designed to improve transparency and efficiency while responding to Council's concerns about fiscal oversight. The process underscored the importance of aligning staff practices with Council expectations, and I believe the final outcome reflected both accountability and operational effectiveness. In managing the Capital Improvement Plan amendment, I provided Council with the necessary updates, options, and implications for sequencing projects and funding sources. These discussions required balancing ambitious infrastructure goals with fiscal realities, while also ensuring that the Town remained in compliance with statutory planning requirements. By presenting these issues in a clear and practical way, we have set ourselves up for future success.	

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	I also worked to faithfully execute Council’s policy direction in development and utility matters. Negotiations around the Citrus Avenue right-of-way and utility agreements required detailed coordination with property owners and developers, and my role was to ensure that agreements reflected the Council’s intent while protecting the Town’s long-term interests. More broadly, I have maintained a consistent commitment to supporting Council’s decisions once made, regardless of prior debate. By clearly communicating expectations to staff, guiding external stakeholders, and emphasizing the Council’s authority, I have helped translate policy into practice. This has strengthened organizational alignment and ensured that residents and partners see the Town follow through on its commitments. At times, council members have pressed staff to advance projects without legal authority or outside of procurement rules. I have resisted such pressure to protect the Town from costly exposure. When staff are criticized for following policy and procurement rules, it signals that compliance is not valued, which demoralizes employees who take pride in professional standards.	
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5. Intergovernmental Relations		Rating:
a. Promotes a positive working relationship with other governmental entities.		5
b. Engages with other local, regional, state, and federal agencies to accomplish local initiatives.		4
c. Positively and effectively represents the organization and its interests when working with other governmental agencies.		5
d. Maintains awareness of laws and other issues affecting other governmental agencies which may affect the organization.		4
e. Is willing to share resources or information with other governmental agencies as appropriate.		4
Total Rating for this Performance Dimension:		22
Comment:	During this evaluation period, I have continued to foster constructive relationships with other governmental entities to advance the Town's priorities. As one example, Lake County Fire Rescue's leadership now provides regular reporting and analysis to the Town, and their active involvement in Founders Day and emergency preparedness planning reflects the strong partnerships we have built and maintained. Intergovernmental engagement has also been critical in utility and infrastructure matters. The Town is strengthening its ability to provide utility services, and this requires coordination with Lake County in new ways. New requirements from St. Johns River Water Management District have brought us closer in cooperation with other municipalities to pursue shared alternate water source solutions. Likewise, planned growth has led to new challenges in traffic management and right-of-way issues, involving close cooperation with FDOT and Lake County. Overall, my efforts in this area have ensured that the Town is well represented in regional conversations and that its interests are protected when negotiating with larger entities. While there is always more work to do in pursuing shared service models and long-term funding partnerships, this period reflects steady progress in positioning Howey-in-the-Hills as a respected and engaged partner at the county and regional level. These partnerships have preserved the Town's credibility, ensuring that regional partners continue to view the Town as stable and reliable, even when internal dynamics present challenges.	

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6. Staffing and Management		Rating:
a. Recruits and retains competent personnel for Town positions.		5
b. Is aware of staff weaknesses and works to improve their performance.		4
c. Promotes training and development opportunities for employees at all levels of the organization.		4
d. Stays accurately informed and concerned about employee relations.		4
e. Is able to discern when it is necessary to assume charge of situations that would normally be handled by a subordinate and when it is necessary to only provide guidance and support.		4
Total Rating for this Performance Dimension:		21
Comment:	Over the course of this evaluation period, departmental roles have remained well staffed, and I have continued to prioritize employee development through opportunities for professional growth and cross-departmental collaboration. These investments not only improve service delivery but also foster a culture of accountability and teamwork across the organization. I have also focused on ensuring staff work is aligned with Council's expectations. In financial reporting, for example, I have worked with the Finance Supervisor to revise presentation formats so that departmental costs and revenues are easier for both Council and the public to understand. At the same time, I recognize that employee relations and communication can always be strengthened. I have worked to stay informed about staff concerns and to provide guidance where needed, stepping in directly when sensitive issues required my involvement but otherwise empowering department heads to manage their teams effectively, based on the principle of subsidiarity. There is a saying that "the highest reward for a person's toil is not what they get for it, but what they become by it." Ideally, Town service should foster pride and professional growth. Unfortunately, under the current conditions, what our staff are becoming is demoralized, due to the cumulative effects of interference and public criticism. Their achievements during this period must be recognized as hard-won successes in the face of adverse conditions.	

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7. Fiscal Management		Rating:
a. Prepares a balanced budget to provide services at a level directed by the Board.		5
b. Ensures that the budget meets the operational needs of the organization and makes the best possible use of available funds.		4
c. Prepares the budget in an intelligent but readable format.		5
d. Submits the proposed budget in a timely manner that allows for an appropriate review period.		4
e. Appropriately monitors and manages the fiscal activities of the organization throughout the fiscal year.		4
Total Rating for this Performance Dimension:		22
Comment:	During this evaluation period, I prepared and presented the FY26 budget, ensuring that it was balanced, fiscally responsible, and aligned with the policy direction established by Council. The process required reconciling ambitious infrastructure priorities with the Town's limited fiscal capacity, while also meeting ongoing operational needs. By presenting both immediate requirements and long-term considerations, I aimed to provide Council with the tools necessary to make informed budgetary decisions. In response to Council feedback, I also worked to refine financial reporting and presentation formats. Substantial adjustments were made to improve readability and to make departmental costs and revenues clearer to both Council and the public. While these refinements are ongoing, the goal has been to ensure that financial information is not only technically accurate but also accessible, thereby supporting transparency and accountability. Overall, I believe this period demonstrates continued progress in balancing stewardship of Town resources with responsiveness to Council's expectations. While further improvements in comparative reporting and public communication of fiscal data remain priorities, the Town is well positioned for both stability and growth through the sound financial practices developed during this period.	

8. Planning and Organizational Development	Rating:
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a. Works with the Board, community leaders, and other stakeholders to develop a clear vision, mission, values, and objectives for the organization.		4
b. Effectively prioritizes goals and objectives in order to ensure that the organization is doing "first things first" in support of its strategic plan.		4
c. Maintains a healthy and productive organizational culture focused on customer service and responsible stewardship of the organization's resources.		4
d. Has a capacity for and encourages innovation.		4
e. Reviews ordinances, policies, and procedures periodically to suggest improvements.		4
Total Rating for this Performance Dimension:		20
Comment:	This period has required balancing immediate operational demands with the Town's longer-term planning and development needs. Through updates to the Capital Improvement Plan, I provided Council with a framework to prioritize projects in alignment with strategic goals, available funding, and fiscal obligations. These discussions, particularly around wastewater capacity expansion, underscored the importance of forward-looking planning to ensure that the Town remains well-positioned to meet future growth demands. Organizationally, I have continued to focus on building a culture that values accountability, collaboration, and customer service. By empowering staff to take ownership of their roles while providing guidance and support, I have sought to maintain a productive environment that emphasizes efficiency while allowing space for creativity. I have also worked to identify opportunities for innovation and procedural improvements. Revisions to the purchasing policy and refinements to financial reporting are examples of how policy adjustments can strengthen organizational effectiveness while providing clearer accountability to Council and the public. These changes, while incremental, reflect an ongoing commitment to continuous improvement and responsible stewardship. Taken together, the planning and organizational development efforts during this period have reinforced the Town's long-term priorities while also strengthening internal practices. Continued attention to cross-functional communication and proactive planning will ensure that the organization remains aligned with Council's vision and responsive to community needs.	

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9. Leadership and Decision-Making		Rating:
a. Leads the organization by example in adhering to its established policies, rules, and procedures, and ensures that subordinates do the same.		4
b. Acknowledges the efforts of others and gives appropriate credit for their accomplishments.		4
c. Is effective at building consensus among stakeholders on new or unpopular policies or initiatives.		4
d. Makes logical decisions based on a thorough review of available information and soliciting input from appropriate sources.		4
e. Is able to effectively make decisions rapidly in situations where information is limited, and the outcome might be uncertain.		4
Total Rating for this Performance Dimension:		20
Comment:	This period has highlighted the importance of steady, principled leadership in managing the Town's priorities. I have led by example, ensuring that policies and procedures are consistently followed, and that staff and stakeholders can rely on an administration grounded in professionalism and fairness. Transparency in decision-making has been central, particularly in budget preparation and infrastructure planning. I have also worked to build consensus on matters that at times presented differing perspectives. Negotiations around utility expansion, for example, require balancing community impact with infrastructure needs, and my role is to provide options grounded in facts while respecting Council's authority to make the final determination. In these and other instances, I seek to provide logical recommendations without overstepping into policymaking. As always, my goal is to support stability, uphold accountability, and keep the organization moving forward in alignment with Council's vision. During this period, I addressed a significant policy interpretation issue regarding remote work. I discussed with councilors a transparent plan to work remotely for a period while maintaining availability and tracking time accurately. When legal guidance suggested that I must use leave to cover all my time despite actively performing my duties, I maintained a lawful, practical approach that upheld both performance expectations and employee rights. This situation demonstrated leadership under pressure and reinforced the need for governance practices and legal counsel that are both risk-aware and also grounded in practical, modern governance. At the end of this period, the retirement of the Police Chief required decisive leadership to ensure continuity and integrity in the department. Rather than defaulting to past Town practice of internal promotion with little to no	

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	advertisement, I implemented best practices: publicly posting the position state-wide and inviting a panel of local police chiefs to participate in interviews. This approach strengthened legitimacy and transparency compared to prior methods. As is typical in finding a new police chief, the process has not been without controversy, and strong views from former leadership and competing loyalties within the department have fueled misinformation and attempts to discredit the process. Despite this, I kept the focus on fairness, outside review, and organizational stability. While I anticipate some passionate discussion in securing Council confirmation of the new Chief, I remain confident the process was more rigorous and transparent than past practice, demonstrating leadership under pressure and commitment to the integrity of Town decision-making.	
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10. Individual Characteristics		Rating:
a. Consistently acts with professionalism and courtesy, including prompt attendance at meetings, returning phone calls/messages, and adhering to scheduled appointments.		3
b. Ensures that all business conducted by the organization is free of conflicts of interest or practices that might be construed as illegal, unethical, or unprofessional.		5
c. Is energetic, cooperative, and willing to spend whatever time is necessary to do a good job.		4
d. Has the capacity to listen to others and to recognize their interests.		4
e. Avoids political positions, partisanship, and unnecessary controversy.		4
Total Rating for this Performance Dimension:		20
Comment:	In my role as Town Manager, I have placed a consistent emphasis on professionalism, courtesy, and reliability. During this evaluation period, I ensured that Council meetings, budget presentations, and policy discussions were conducted in a manner that respected both the Council's authority and the public's trust. I have also taken deliberate steps to uphold the ethical standards of the organization. Decisions on purchasing policies, utility agreements, capital projects, and the budget in general were made transparently and within the framework of state law and the Town Charter. By consistently applying these standards, I have sought to protect the Town from even the appearance of impropriety and to reinforce confidence in the integrity of its administration.	

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	The work has required significant time and energy, particularly during budget preparation and in coordinating across departments for projects and events. I have committed the necessary effort to ensure that these tasks were completed with care, while also recognizing and respecting the perspectives of Council members, staff, and residents. My approach has been to listen carefully, respond thoughtfully, and balance differing interests to reach outcomes consistent with policy and community needs.
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	Finally, I have remained committed to avoiding partisanship and unnecessary controversy. Even in challenging discussions, I worked to keep deliberations focused on policy, facts, and the best interests of the Town. By doing so, I believe I have done my part to contribute to an environment that is stable, respectful, and capable of supporting the Council's vision for the community.
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Summary:

Performance Dimension:	Overall Rating:	
1. Professional Skills and Expertise		20
2. Council/Commission Relations		21
3. Citizen and Public Relations		19
4. Policy Execution		21
5. Intergovernmental Relations		22
6. Staffing and Management		21
7. Fiscal Management		22
8. Planning and Organizational Development		20
9. Leadership and Decision-Making		20
10. Individual Characteristics		20

Total Score: 206

Total Average Rating: 4.12

Date: 10/7/2025