



**Town Council Public
Hearing on Tentative
Budget and Proposed
Millage Rate**

**September 10, 2025 at 5:05 PM
Howey-in the-Hills Town Hall
101 N. Palm Ave.,
Howey-in-the-Hills, FL 34737**

MINUTES

Mayor Wells called the Town Council Public Hearing on Tentative Budget and Proposed Millage Rate to order at 5:05 p.m.

Mayor Wells led the attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.
Councilor 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 | Mayor Graham Wells

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Councilor David Miles

STAFF PRESENT:

Sean O’Keefe, Town Manager | Rick Thomas, Police Chief | Morgan Cates, Public Services Director | Oscar Ojeda, Finance Supervisor | John Brock, Deputy Town Manager / Town Clerk

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

None

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, 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.

Linda Ballou, 702 Santa Cruz Ln. – Town resident, Linda Ballou, raised concerns about the condition of the activity room carpet in the Town’s Library. She explained that, during her weekly yoga class, she encountered a strong odor from trash that had not been removed promptly, accompanied by flies, and that the carpet itself has been filthy for a long time. Despite repeated requests to the library staff over the past month, she has been told only that “we’re working on it,” with no progress. Ms. Ballou asked the Council to ensure the carpet is cleaned, questioning whether funds were allocated in the budget and suggesting that, if necessary, other means be sought.

Mayor Wells acknowledged the issue, clarifying that the activity room has carpet squares rather than traditional carpeting but agreed they are in poor condition. He noted that an outside cleaning firm provides janitorial services for both Town Hall Public Works and the Library, though they do not shampoo carpets, and affirmed that the matter would be addressed.

PUBLIC HEARING

1. Consideration and Approval: **Resolution 2025-014 - Tentative Millage Rate FY26**

Mayor Wells read Resolution 2025-014 out loud by title only and the following statements:

RESOLUTION NO. 2025-014, A RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN COUNCIL OF THE TOWN OF HOWEY-IN-THE-HILLS OF LAKE COUNTY, FLORIDA; ADOPTING A TENTATIVE MILLAGE RATE OF 6.99 FOR THE TOWN OF HOWEY-IN-THE-HILLS, LAKE COUNTY, FLORIDA FOR AD VALOREM TAXES FOR FISCAL YEAR 2026; PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

- The Taxing Authority is the Town of Howey-in-the-Hills of Lake County, Florida.
- The Rolled-Back Rate is 7.0227 mills.
- The percentage increase over the over the Rolled-Back Rate is -0.47%.
- The proposed Millage Rate to be levied is 6.99.

Mayor Wells opened Public Comment for this item only.

There were no public comments or questions.

Mayor Wells closed Public Comment for this item.

Mayor Wells opened Councilor Comment and Questions for this issue only.

Following a brief discussion regarding Councilor Miles’ absence from the meeting, Councilor Arnold moved to approve Resolution 2025-014.

Motion made by Councilor Arnold to approve Resolution 2025-014 (A RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN COUNCIL OF THE TOWN OF HOWEY-IN-THE-HILLS OF LAKE COUNTY, FLORIDA; ADOPTING A TENTATIVE MILLAGE RATE OF 6.99 FOR THE TOWN OF HOWEY-IN-THE-HILLS, LAKE COUNTY, FLORIDA FOR AD VALOREM TAXES FOR FISCAL YEAR 2026; PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE DATE); seconded by Councilor Lannamañ. Motion approved 4 to 0 by a roll call vote.

Voting

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

Nay: None

2. Consideration and Approval: **Resolution 2025-015 - Tentative Budget FY26**

Mayor Wells read Resolution 2025-015 out loud by title only and the following statements:

RESOLUTION NO. 2025-015, A RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN COUNCIL OF THE TOWN OF HOWEY-IN-THE-HILLS OF LAKE COUNTY, FLORIDA; ADOPTING A TENTATIVE BUDGET FOR THE TOWN OF HOWEY-IN-THE-HILLS, LAKE COUNTY, FLORIDA FOR FISCAL YEAR 2026 AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

- The Tentative Budget for the Town of Howey-in-the-Hills for Fiscal Year 2026 to be adopted by Fund Department is as follows:
 - General Fund in the amount of \$3,897,390.
 - Infrastructure fund in the amount of \$259,200.
 - Enterprise fund in the amount of \$6,806,197.
 - Police Pension Fund in the amount of \$165,515.
 - Police Advanced Training Fund in the amount of \$1,500.
 - Water Impact Fee Fund in the amount of \$1.
 - Parks & Rec Impact Fee Fund in the amount of \$1.
 - Police Impact Fee Fund in the amount of \$4,368.
 - Building Services in the amount of \$156,013.
 - Tree Fund in the amount of \$1,000.
 - Transportation Fund in the amount of \$76,465.
 - Wastewater Fund in the amount of \$574,124.
 - Total all Funds \$11,941,774.

Mayor Wells opened Public Comment for this item only.

There were no public comments or questions.

Mayor Wells closed Public Comment for this item.

Mayor Wells opened Councilor Comment and Questions for this issue only.

Mayor Pro Tem Everline raised questions about legal fees and Parks and Recreation allocations. He noted that \$100,000 was budgeted for legal services, reflecting reduced usage, but asked if an additional \$20,000 should be included in case the Town selects a firm offering a flat fee structure. Mayor Wells responded that such an adjustment could be handled later through a budget amendment if necessary.

Mayor Pro Tem Everline also inquired about the \$20,000 budgeted in Parks and Recreation for tree removal, noting it had not been highlighted in prior years. Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, and Public Services Director, Morgan Cates, explained that, while funds for tree removal have traditionally been included under different accounts, this year's increase reflects the need to protect and repair the new boardwalk if damaged by falling trees. Insurance may cover boardwalk damage, but tree removal costs would still fall to the Town. Mayor Pro Tem Everline suggested reviewing the Town's policy to see if coverage could be expanded to include removal.

Mr. O'Keefe then reviewed changes made since prior workshops, including salary adjustments of 3% for general employees, and 10% for police officers (excluding the Chief), removal of the building permitting clerk position, addition of a lease vehicle for public utilities, and funding for waterfront

cleanup. The current unallocated balances stand at \$44,138 in the General Fund and \$125,177 in the Water Fund.

Mayor Wells commended staff, particularly Finance Supervisor, Oscar Ojeda, for restructuring departmental coding and accounts, noting that over 240 line items were corrected to provide clarity and transparency. Councilors praised the improvements, emphasizing that the new format was easier to understand and track.

Mayor Wells also flagged \$55,000 budgeted for replacement of Police Department servers, stating that, while the item was included, Council should review lease versus purchase options before approving expenditure, given the cost.

Council members expressed satisfaction with the budget overall, describing it as the most accurate and transparent in recent memory.

Motion made by Councilor Lannamañ to approve Resolution 2025-015 (A RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN COUNCIL OF THE TOWN OF HOWEY-IN-THE-HILLS OF LAKE COUNTY, FLORIDA; ADOPTING A TENTATIVE BUDGET FOR THE TOWN OF HOWEY-IN-THE-HILLS, LAKE COUNTY, FLORIDA FOR FISCAL YEAR 2026 AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE); seconded by Councilor Arnold. Motion approved 4 to 0 by a roll call vote.

Voting

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

Nay: None

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Wells asked if there were any other Councilor comments.

Mayor Pro Tem Everline expressed concerns regarding development impacts, particularly the proposed 700+ home subdivision and its reliance on a two-lane spine road for access and lack of an additional entrance/exit at the rear of its townhome component. He warned of potential evacuation and safety issues during emergencies and emphasized the Town's need to push back more firmly against developers, citing past successes when Council resisted concessions. He also cautioned that Publix may return with a design inconsistent with the developer's agreement and urged Council to hold firm on architectural standards.

Mayor Wells acknowledged the safety issues both within the subdivision and on Number Two Road, which will also carry traffic from other developments. He stressed that decisions ultimately rest with Lake County, since Number Two Road is a county road, and expressed support for Councilor Miles' efforts to advocate with county commissioners. Mayor Wells noted, however, that the developer's agreement already left the matter to county approval, and warned that advocacy must be carefully presented to avoid alienating decision-makers.

Mayor Pro Tem Everline reiterated the scale of traffic concerns compared to smaller subdivisions like Venezia and Talichet, and both he and Mayor Wells noted that additional nearby projects, such as Watermark, will further impact the area. Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, confirmed that all parties, the Town, County, and developers, had agreed in principle to dedicate land and fund improvements to widen Number Two Road, with the County expected to finalize the arrangement. Once completed, the road would become the Town's responsibility to maintain.

Mayor Pro Tem Everline and Mr. O'Keefe also discussed the possibility of requiring safety improvements such as traffic signals or shifting subdivision access points to mitigate risks associated with curves and intersections. Council members agreed that safety considerations should remain a priority as development proceeds.

Mayor Wells announced that the Final Public Hearing on Budget and Proposed Millage Rate would be held on Wednesday, September 24 at 5:05 p.m. in Town Hall.

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 5:43 p.m. | **Attendees: 18**

Graham Wells, CMC, Mayor

ATTEST:

John Brock, Town Clerk