



Town Council Meeting
January 13, 2025 at 6:00 PM
Howey-in-the-Hills Town Hall
101 N. Palm Ave.,
Howey-in-the-Hills, FL 34737

MINUTES

Mayor Wells called the Town Council Meeting to order at 6:03 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

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 | Tom Wilkes, Town Attorney | Sean Parks, Town Planner | Morgan Cates, Public Services Director | Amanda Moldan, Library Director | John Brock, Deputy Town Manager / Town Clerk

AGENDA APPROVAL/REVIEW

Motion made by Councilor Arnold to approve the meeting’s agenda; seconded by Councilor Lannamañ. Motion approved unanimously by voice vote.

Voting

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

Nay: None

Mayor Wells introduced the Town’s new Library Director, Amanda Moldan, to the Town Council.

Councilor Lannamañ welcomed Library Director Moldan to the Town.

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.

Councilor Miles requested to pull Agenda Item #1 and Agenda Item #5 from the meeting’s Consent Agenda.

1. The approval of the minutes and ratification and confirmation of all Town Council actions at the November 25, 2024, Town Council Meeting. *(This item was pulled for discussion by Councilor Miles.)*

Councilor Miles stated that the Town Council had just been sent these minutes for review the morning of the meeting and that he had barely had time to read them.

Motion made by Councilor Miles to table this item to the next meeting; seconded by Councilor Lannamañ. Motion approved unanimously by voice vote.

Voting

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

Nay: None

2. The approval of the minutes and ratification and confirmation of all Town Council actions at the December 10, 2024 Town Council New Councilor Orientation Workshop.
3. The approval of the minutes and ratification and confirmation of all Town Council actions at the December 17, 2024 Town Council Wastewater Workshop.
4. Consideration and Approval: **FDEM/FEMA Mitigation Grant Funding Contract**
5. Consideration and Approval: **Milestone Audit Assistance Contract Approval** (*This item was pulled for discussion by Councilor Miles.*)

Councilor Miles stated that he would have a problem with approving this item in future years because he believes that the Finance Supervisor should be able to do this without the assistance of Milestone.

Mayor Wells opened Public Comment for this item only.

Martha MacFarlane, 63 Camino Real – Former Mayor, Mrs. MacFarlane, endorsed this vendor, stating that they had a strong skillset.

Mayor Wells closed Public Comment for this item.

Motion made by Councilor Miles to approve the Milestone Audit Assistance Contract; 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

6. Consideration and Approval: **Binney Accounting & Assurance Services - Auditing Agreement**

Motion made by Councilor Miles to approve the Consent Agenda (which consisted of Agenda Items #2, #3, #4, and #6); 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

PUBLIC HEARING

None

OLD BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

7. Consideration and Approval: Central Lake CDD Amended and Restated Wastewater Agreement

Town Manager, Sean O’Keefe, introduced this agenda item. This agreement provides wastewater capacity for 1,600 equivalent residential units (ERUs) to serve approved developments within the Town. Mr. O’Keefe noted that, while the agreement was in its near-final form, minor corrections were needed, including updating four references from 60 days to 90 days regarding acquisition decision timelines. The Town Attorney, Tom Wilkes, emphasized the agreement’s significance, noting that it incorporates extensive feedback from the Council and reflects the outcomes of thorough negotiations. Mr. Wilkes confirmed that the agreement does not grant long-term exclusivity beyond the 1,600 ERUs, which addressed concerns raised by Councilor Lannamañ.

The Council discussed the allocation of ERUs among various developments, including Thompson Grove and planned commercial projects, and clarified the Town’s role in administering reservation and maintenance fees (RAM fees) without assuming financial liability. Questions were raised about the adequacy of capacity for future development and the potential impact of upcoming wastewater studies. Mr. Wilkes assured the Council that the agreement allows flexibility for future decisions based on the findings of these studies.

Amendments to the agreement were also proposed during the meeting. These included updating outdated maps and legal references, filling in undefined unit numbers in Exhibit E, and correcting typographical inconsistencies for clarity and accuracy. Councilor Lannamañ made the motion to approve the agreement with the proposed amendments, which was seconded by Councilor Miles.

Mayor Wells opened Public Comment for this item only.

Eric Gunesch, 448 Avila Pl. – Mr. Gunesch had questions about the Right of First Refusal agreement and the Town’s ISBA area.

Martha MacFarlane, 63 Camino Real – Mrs. MacFarlane had questions related to the three annual raises in rates the Central Lake CDD was approved to make.

Mayor Wells closed Public Comment for this item.

Mayor Wells asked Mr. O’Keefe to restate all the contingencies or changes that the Council had discussed that would need to happen before approval of the agreement.

Mr. O’Keefe stated that there were five changes that needed to be made (the first four to the Central Lake CDD Amended and Restated Wholesale Wastewater Treatment Agreement and the final change to the Right of First Refusal Agreement). Mr. O’Keefe stated that the first change was that there were four references to 60 days, primarily in section 13.2 of the Central Lake CDD agreement, that should have been 90 days. Mr. O’Keefe stated that the second change would need to be in (page 10) section 3.4, (c), (i), in which uppercase letters A, B, and C were used when they should have been lowercase letters. Mr. O’Keefe stated that the third change to the agreement would be that Exhibit B (Map of Howey 180 Utility Service Area) would need to be update to a newer map. Mr. O’Keefe stated that the fourth item that would need to be changed was that approved development numbers would need to be added into Exhibit E. Mr. O’Keefe stated that the fifth and final change was that the map in Exhibit A of the Right of First Refusal Agreement, needed to be added (as it was missing).

Motion made by Councilor Lannamañ to approve the Central Lake CDD Amended and Restated Wholesale Wastewater Treatment Agreement and the Right of First Refusal Agreement (with Sewer & Water Plant Investment, LLC) with the five changes that Mr. O’Keefe had just restated; seconded by Councilor Miles. Motion approved by roll call vote.

Voting

Yea: Councilor Arnold, Councilor Lannamañ, Councilor Miles, Mayor Wells

Nay: Mayor Pro Tem Everline

Mayor Pro Tem Everline stated that he voted no because he would have preferred to have waited for the completion of the Clean Water Study that Woodard and Curran was doing for the Town.

8. Consideration and Approval: **Resolution 2025-001 - Rules of Order**

The Town Council discussed Resolution 2025-001, proposing new Rules of Order for conducting Council meetings. Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, outlined the legal framework for adopting these rules, referencing the Town Charter and Code, which allow the Council to determine its own procedures. The draft document was reviewed by the Town Manager, Town Clerk, Town Attorney, and the Mayor to tailor it to Howey-in-the-Hills' specific needs.

Council members debated various provisions, including a guideline for completing meetings within two and a half hours. Some members expressed concerns about mandating this timeframe and suggested using the term "endeavor" to allow flexibility. Discussions also addressed quorum protocols, rules for public comment placement, and the use of electronic media for council member participation, emphasizing fairness and practicality.

The timeline for agenda and packet preparation was reviewed, with agreement that the agenda and packet should be published by Thursday, with no changes to the agenda allowed after Friday at 5 p.m., except by supermajority vote. This provision aims to ensure transparency while allowing for urgent, last-minute items to be added.

Audio recordings of meetings were another key topic. While state law recommends retaining recordings for two years, some council members suggested extending this to five or even ten years for historical and legal purposes. The Town Attorney supported this idea, highlighting the potential value of recordings as part of the Town's history.

The Council also discussed clarifying the process for placing items on the agenda. It was agreed that, while the Town Manager has initial discretion, Council members can appeal decisions to the full Council for final determination. Additionally, a provision for waiving rules by a supermajority was proposed to address urgent or unforeseen circumstances.

After deliberation, the Council agreed to table the resolution to incorporate suggested revisions. The updated document will be presented at the next Council meeting for approval.

Mayor Wells opened Public Comment for this item only.

Eric Gunesch, 448 Avila Pl. – Mr. Gunesch was in favor of the proposed rules.

Tom Ballou, 1005 N. Tangerine Ave. – Mr. Ballou stated that he wanted to make sure the remote Town Councilors attending future meetings electronically would be allowed to vote.

Motion made by Mayor Pro Tem Everline to table this item to the next Town Council meeting, directing the Town Staff to make the various changes that were discussed; 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

9. Discussion: **Library Director and the Charter**

The Town Council discussed the classification and hiring process for the Library Director in light of the Town Charter. This item was introduced by Mayor Pro Tem Everline, who raised concerns about whether the Library Director qualifies as a "Town officer" under the charter. He noted that the charter states each department and office must be administered by an executive officer, and since the library is defined as a department, he questioned why the Library Director is excluded from this designation and from requiring council confirmation.

Mayor Wells and Town Manager, Sean O’Keefe, explained the charter’s intent, clarifying that only specific positions—such as the Town Clerk, Police Chief, and Public Services Director—are defined as executive officers. They also addressed that the term "director" is a standard title within the library profession but does not confer executive officer status. Councilor Miles suggested that the Town Council have input on hiring department heads reporting directly to the Town Manager, but staff noted potential complications, including delays in the hiring process and candidate privacy concerns.

After extensive discussion, the Council acknowledged the need for procedural clarity and agreed to consider amendments to the charter or ordinances if necessary. The discussion concluded without any formal action.

Mayor Wells opened Public Comment for this item only.

Lynne Husemann, 671 Avila Pl. – Mrs. Husemann was upset that the Town Council was attacking the staff again and not trusting the staff. Mrs. Husemann was opposed to the micromanagement of administrative decision. Mrs. Husemann stated that the attack on the Town Manager’s family was disgusting.

DEPARTMENT REPORTS

10. Town Hall

This report was included in the meeting's packet.

11. Police Department

This report was included in the meeting's packet.

12. Code Enforcement

None

13. Public Works

This report was included in the meeting's packet.

14. Library

This report was included in the meeting's packet.

15. Parks & Recreation Advisory Board / Special Events

None

16. Town Attorney

None

17. Finance Supervisor

This report was included in the meeting's packet.

18. Town Manager

Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, stated that there would be a public hearing to allow for public participation in the grant process for a CDBG-DR grant that the Town was submitting.

Mr. O'Keefe reminded the Council of the federal holiday on January 20th and that Town Hall and the Library would close for the holiday.

A date and time was selected for a Town Council Workshop on the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). The Workshop would be on Tuesday, January 28, 2025, from 2pm to 5pm. Councilor Miles stated that he wanted Public Services Director, Morgan Cates, to submit a revised 5-year road improvement plan at the CIP workshop for the Town Council to review.

COUNCIL MEMBER REPORTS

19. Mayor Pro Tem Everline

Mayor Pro Tem Everline provided an update from the Lake-Sumter Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) meeting, sharing key transportation projects and their potential impact on Howey-in-the-Hills. He noted that in 2026, SR-19 resurfacing is scheduled from Lakeview Drive through the Town, making the only planned improvement for the area within the next 20 years. He also discussed the MPO's long-range transportation plan, which spans 25 years, and the List of Priority Projects for the next five years. These plans allow for adjustments to address urgent needs.

During the MPO meeting, discussions also focused on traffic safety, including a statewide "Zero Fatalities" initiative aimed at reducing highway fatalities. Everline highlighted concerns raised by Groveland officials about traffic hazards near the Amazon and Kroger distribution centers. A "Groveland-Howey Developmental Survey" will study traffic from Route 50 in Groveland to 561, stopping at 455, due to Howey-in-the-Hills' policy against four-lane roads through the Town. Mayor Pro Tem Everline reported that state representatives expressed interest in a three-lane option to mitigate traffic congestion.

Mayor Pro Tem Everline also shared updates on Turnpike construction, with completion dates for segments near Howey projected between 2026 and 2028. Additionally, discussions with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) included the potential for a pedestrian crossing signal at Central Avenue to coincide with the 2026 resurfacing project.

The conversation shifted to fire station planning. Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, recounted Lake County's analysis of potential fire station locations, noting that the current site on Number Two Road is no longer considered viable by the County. The County's preference is for a site near the Mission Inn entrance, which would optimize emergency response times, but lacks available land. Mayor Pro Tem Everline mentioned conflicting reports about the County's reasoning for withdrawing from the Number Two Road site and suggested further discussions to clarify the matter. Mr. O'Keefe agreed to follow up with County officials for more information.

20. Councilor Arnold

Councilor Arnold expanded on the Lake-Sumter Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) update, emphasizing the importance of proactively advocating for projects to secure prioritization. While the

MPO operates with long-term planning in mind, Councilor Arnold highlighted that projects can move up the priority list with strategic efforts, including Council action and effective advocacy.

Councilor Arnold shared insights from a discussion with T.J. Fish, City of Groveland's Director of Transportation and Public Works, who suggested that the Town could advance a pedestrian crossing project by reframing it as a safety issue rather than a traffic or infrastructure issue. Passing a Council resolution to designate the crossing as a safety improvement could expedite its placement on the MPO's priority list, as safety projects receive heightened attention through state programs. Councilor Arnold committed to gathering specific resolution requirements from Mr. Fish and proposed that the council take steps to draft and approve the resolution at a future meeting. Councilor Arnold underscored the potential benefits for residents who rely on safe pedestrian crossings.

21. Councilor Miles

Councilor Miles asked about the status of the possible transfer of the Talichet Lift Station to Town property. Mr. O'Keefe asked resident Joshua Husemann to speak about the Talichet Lift Station situation.

Resident Joshua Husemann addressed the Town Council regarding a proposed solution to bring the HOA-managed lift station up to Town standards and potentially transfer ownership to the Town. Mr. Husemann emphasized the challenges faced by the HOA in funding the required upgrades, which include compliance with current codes, integration with the SCADA system, and the addition of a diesel backup pump to prevent overflow incidents. He noted that the HOA cannot apply for federal grants, a capability the Town could leverage if it assumes ownership.

Mr. Husemann proposed spreading the costs over a five-year special assessment facilitated by the Town, which would ease the financial burden on residents. He highlighted that the HOA's direct funding approach would require an immediate payment of \$2,000–\$3,000 per household, a significant hardship for many. The five-year assessment would provide a more manageable annual payment.

Mr. Husemann also stressed the urgency of addressing the lift station's vulnerabilities, citing a near-overflow incident that could have resulted in environmental damage and federal involvement. Mr. Husemann reiterated the HOA's willingness to cooperate with the Town, including securing the necessary 76 homeowner votes for approval, provided the financial impact is mitigated through the proposed assessment plan.

22. Councilor Lannamañ

Councilor Lannamañ raised significant concerns about the Town's waste management service provider, GFL, citing numerous issues, including damage to roads in the Venezia neighborhood, diesel spills, delayed or skipped pickups, and broken-down trucks left on-site for extended periods. She also criticized the additional \$20 charge for bulk item pickups despite an overall increase in service fees. Councilor Miles suggested documenting these issues thoroughly to ensure accountability and to address potential disputes about responsibility for damages.

The Council discussed the possibility of revisiting the waste management contract when it is due for renewal. Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, confirmed he would review the contract terms to determine if service failures could constitute cause for renegotiation or termination. Council members also recommended specifying smaller truck sizes in future contracts to minimize road damage. Concerns were echoed about GFL's performance in other areas of the Town, including trash spills and delayed service.

Additionally, Councilor Lannamañ highlighted visibility issues with the street sign at the intersection of Venezia Boulevard and State Road 19, labeling it a hazard. Public Services is already investigating solutions to address this problem.

23. Mayor Wells

Mayor Wells asked the Town Councilors to look in their email account and review an email that the Town Clerk had forwarded the Council about the Lake County League of Cities Strategic Plan.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

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.

Eric Gunesch, 448 Avila Pl. – Mr. Gunesch urged the Town Council to review the GFL contract and thanked the Town Council for their hard work.

Andi Everline, 1012 N. Lakeshore Blvd. – Mrs. Everline stated that she did not believe that the playground equipment in Griffin Park was safe. Mrs. Everline stated that she did not think the playground equipment was ADA compliant and that the swings were slanting. Mrs. Everline also stated that there was no playground equipment at Griffin Park for young children. Mrs. Everline also stated that the renovated pier on Lakeshore was not ADA compliant and needed to have a ramp to be compliant.

Banks Helfrich, 9100 Sams Lake Rd, Clermont FL – Mr. Helfrich spoke about the theme of “We the People”.

ADJOURNMENT

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 8:41 p.m. | **Attendees: 35**

Mayor Wells

ATTEST:

John Brock, Town Clerk