Town Council Meeting

October 12, 2026 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 6:00 p.m.
Councilor Reneé Lannamañ delivered an invocation.
Mayor Wells led the attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

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 | Heather Ramos, Town Attorney | John Batchelor, Interim Police Chief | Morgan Cates, Public Services Director | John Brock, Town Clerk / Deputy Town Manager

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

None

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

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.

Frances Wagler, 409 W. Central Ave. – Town resident, Frances Wagler, congratulated the Council on completing the previous meeting before 8:00 p.m. and thanked Council members for being prepared. She then discussed a Code Enforcement notice she received regarding political signs that had been removed from her property. Ms. Wagler questioned the location and measurement of the Town's right-of-way in front of her

residence, noting the presence of a sidewalk and hedge, and requested clarification regarding where political signs may lawfully be placed. She also requested that the removed signs be returned to her.

Tina St. Clair, 143 E. Central Ave. – Town resident, Tina St. Clair, expressed concerns regarding the October 2nd sewer connection notification letter, questioning the increase in the stated cost from $5,250 to $5,463, the addition of 5.3% interest beginning in November 2026, and a $6 monthly Reservation and Maintenance (RAM) fee. She questioned why these costs had not been clearly communicated during previous public meetings. Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, explained that the original $5,250 represented the base cost at the time sewer service became available and that the Central Lake CDD had subsequently added interest and RAM fees for reserved wastewater capacity. Mrs. St. Clair also requested a detailed accounting of grants pursued by the Town to assist affected property owners, including grant names, application dates, approval or denial status, and pending decisions. She emphasized the financial burden and stress the mandatory sewer connections were placing on residents. Mayor Wells stated that the Town would make every effort to provide the requested grant information.

Mitzi Maxwell, 803 Camino Real Blvd. – Town resident, Mitzi Maxwell, expressed concerns regarding transparency, public participation, and the Town's development review process, citing the attendance of approximately 65 residents at the recent Development Review Committee (DRC) meeting concerning Thompson Grove. She criticized the limited time available to review meeting materials and the lack of publicly available minutes or recordings following the meeting. Ms. Maxwell also questioned discussions regarding the Town potentially acquiring the Howey Mansion, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive analysis of long-term maintenance, insurance, preservation, operational costs, and potential financial obligations. She requested that the Town publish a summary of the DRC meeting, including outstanding issues and next steps; clarify whether negotiations with the Thompson Grove developer were underway and who authorized them; and provide a public analysis of costs, benefits, risks, and alternatives before considering any development agreement involving the mansion, impact fee waivers or credits, or significant taxpayer obligations. She emphasized the importance of meaningful public involvement and access to information before development-related decisions are made.

Tom Ballou, 1005 N. Tangerine Ave. – Town resident, Tom Ballou, expressed concerns regarding inconsistencies in the Town's Code Enforcement case reports, noting that some August violations remained open while the September report showed nearly all violations closed, with one case disappearing from the report without a documented resolution. He stated that these discrepancies could create the appearance of favoritism in code enforcement practices. Mr. Ballou also acknowledged improvements in the condition of several properties and thanked Code Enforcement Officer, Jacob Salas, for his efforts.

Marie Gallelli, 1104 N. Tangerine Ave. – Town resident, Marie Gallelli, expressed concerns regarding the lack of follow-up on a promised copy of the response to FDOT's second Request for Additional Information (RAI) related to the proposed 7-Eleven development, noting that she had requested the document following the September 14th Town Council meeting but had not received it. She also requested that Council members refrain from using cell phones or laptops for matters unrelated to the agenda during meetings to ensure their full attention and demonstrate respect for public participation. Additionally, Ms. Gallelli questioned why the Town Planner had suggested allowing through streets from the proposed Thompson Grove development onto Mission Lane and Tangerine Avenue during a recent Development Review Committee meeting, stating that such connections would conflict with provisions of the Town's Land Development Code and Comprehensive Plan. Mayor Wells clarified that his brief cell phone use during the meeting involved a personal matter, and Ms. Gallelli emphasized that her request was directed toward all Council members rather than any individual.

Andi Everline, 1012 N. Lakeshore Blvd. – Town resident, Andi Everline, commented on the recent candidate meet-and-greet event held at the library, expressing disappointment that candidate Leslie Manning's absence was not acknowledged despite her reportedly requesting that an explanation be provided. Mrs. Everline also relayed concerns from a neighbor whose trash can was damaged during a GFL collection. She stated that the neighbor had difficulty reaching the appropriate GFL representative and was reluctant to contact Town Hall due to perceived difficulties reaching staff and concerns about the courtesy of interactions. Mrs. Everline indicated that she had assisted the neighbor but was uncertain whether the issue had been resolved.

Morgan Tice, 204 W. Holly St. – Town resident, Morgan Tice, requested an update regarding the Town's compliance with Section 381.00655, Florida Statutes, specifically concerning the statutory requirement to provide one year's advance notice of anticipated sewer availability.

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 September 28, 2026, Town Council Meeting.

2. The approval of the minutes and ratification and confirmation of all Town Council actions at the September 23, 2026, Town Council Public Hearing.

Motion made by Councilor Miles to approve the Consent 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

PUBLIC HEARING

3. Consideration and Approval: (second reading) **Ordinance 2026-008 - Impact Fees**

   Mayor Wells read Ordinance 2026-008 out loud by title only:

   AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF HOWEY-IN-THE-HILLS, FLORIDA, RELATING TO IMPACT FEES; PROVIDING FINDINGS; AMENDING CHAPTER 110 OF THE CODE OF ORDINANCES OF THE TOWN ENTITLED "IMPACT FEES," TO: (1) REVISE THE METHODOLOGY AND INCREASE THE POLICE PROTECTION AND PARKS AND RECREATION IMPACT FEES; (2) ESTABLISH IMPACT FEES FOR MUNICIPAL FACILITIES AND MOBILITY FACILITIES; AND (3) INCLUDE WASTEWATER FACILITIES WITHIN THE WATER IMPACT FEES AND RENAME THE WATER AND WASTEWATER IMPACT FEES AS "UTILITY IMPACT FEES"; ADOPTING THE WILLDAN FINANCIAL SERVICES IMPACT FEE STUDY DATED SEPTEMBER 2026; ADOPTING THE IMPACT FEE SCHEDULE SET FORTH IN THE STUDY; PROVIDING FOR CODIFICATION, SEVERABILITY, AND AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

   Town Attorney Heather Ramos stated that the proposed impact fee ordinance had been revised to incorporate the changes requested by the Council during its previous review. Mayor Pro Tem Everline questioned how the new impact fees would apply to the Lake Hills and Regency developments, which had previously paid water impact fees in advance. Discussion clarified that the previously paid water impact fees would remain unchanged, but the developments would be subject to newly established impact fees, including wastewater, municipal facilities, and mobility fees, as applicable following the ordinance's effective date. Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, noted a minor clarification made since the first reading, specifying that the $1.88 per gallon per day wastewater impact fee calculation applies to non-residential development. Mayor Wells subsequently opened the floor for public comment on the ordinance.

   Mayor Wells opened Public Comment for this item only.

   Tracy Fulton, 10535 Lake Crescent Hills Ct., Clermont FL – Tracy Fulton, representing the Lake Sumter Home Builders Association (HBA), expressed concerns regarding the proposed impact fee

increases, particularly their impact on housing affordability and developments already underway. She questioned the rapid implementation of the new fees without a phased approach, requested further review of compliance with Florida's impact fee statutes, and raised concerns regarding the absence of provisions allowing developers to receive credits for infrastructure improvements they construct. Ms. Fulton requested that the Council table the ordinance to allow additional research and consultation with builders and residents. Councilor Miles questioned the accuracy of her comparison of existing and proposed fees, and Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, clarified that current impact fees for a typical smaller home total approximately $5,500, compared to approximately $13,500 under the proposed structure. Ms. Fulton maintained that the increase would impose significant costs on new homebuyers and questioned whether Willdan's involvement in both the impact fee study and building department services presented a potential conflict. Mayor Wells defended the independent study and its compliance with statutory requirements. Councilor Miles discussed historical impact fee costs, regional comparisons, and the Town's recent development activity, expressing his view that the proposed fees were reasonable. Ms. Fulton reiterated her request for a phased implementation to reduce financial impacts on developments already in progress.

William Dorman, 537 Sunnyside Drive, Leesburg, FL - County resident, William Dorman, expressed concerns regarding the implementation of the proposed impact fee increases and emphasized the importance of complying with Florida's statutory requirements for phasing in fee increases, including those justified by extraordinary circumstances. He acknowledged the need for additional impact fees but cautioned that substantial increases without a phased implementation could create unexpected financial burdens for new homeowners. Councilor Miles explained that the Town's existing police and parks and recreation impact fee increases would be phased in over four years, consistent with state law, while the water impact fee would remain unchanged. He further clarified that the newly established municipal facilities and mobility impact fees would be implemented at the rates supported by the Town's impact fee study. Councilor Miles emphasized that the fees were intended to ensure new development pays its proportionate share of infrastructure costs rather than shifting those expenses to existing residents. Mr. Dorman reiterated his concerns about affordability and encouraged the Council to carefully consider the financial impacts and ensure compliance with state law.

Town Attorney, Heather Ramos, clarified that the proposed impact fee ordinance includes a phased implementation schedule for the years 2027 through 2030, as outlined in the fee tables attached to the ordinance. She explained that the Town was not utilizing the extraordinary circumstances exception and that the ordinance had been developed in accordance with the requirements of Senate Bill 180, enacted in 2025. Town Attorney Ramos stated that she had worked with the Town's consultant to ensure compliance with the applicable statutory phase-in limitations, procedural requirements, and substantive standards. She affirmed her opinion that the proposed ordinance complied with Florida law.

Marie Gallelli, 1104 N. Tangerine Ave. – Town resident, Marie Gallelli, requested clarification regarding the effective date of the proposed impact fee increases and whether pending or active building permit applications would be subject to the new rates. It was clarified that the new fees would take effect on January 11, 2027, approximately 90 days after the meeting. Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, confirmed that permit applications submitted prior to the effective date would be assessed impact fees at the currently applicable rates rather than the proposed increased rates.

Mayor Wells closed Public Comment.

Motion made by Councilor Miles to approved Ordinance 2026-008; 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

4. Consideration and Approval: (second reading) **Ordinance 2026-009 - Natural Gas**

Mayor Wells read Ordinance 2026-009 out loud by title only:

AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF HOWEY-IN-THE-HILLS, FLORIDA, AMENDING THE CODE OF ORDINANCES OF THE TOWN OF HOWEY-IN-THE-HILLS, FLORIDA, BY AMENDING THE TOWN OF HOWEY-IN-THE-HILLS LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE, BY AMENDING CHAPTER 8, "DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS", BY AMENDING SECTION 8.06.00 "OTHER UTILITIES", BY ADDING NEW SECTION 8.06.03 "NATURAL GAS INSTALLATION"; PROVIDING FOR INSTALLATION OF NATURAL GAS LINES WITHIN SUBDIVISIONS OR RE-SUBDIVIDED AREAS; PROVIDING FOR DEVELOPER PAYMENT OF COSTS OF INSTALLATION AND MATERIALS; PROVIDING FOR COST SHARING FOR GAS MAIN EXTENSIONS UNDER CERTAIN CONDITIONS; PROVIDING FOR CONSTRUCTION OF INSTALLATION AND MAIN EXTENSION; PROVIDING FOR EASEMENTS AND PERMITS; PROVIDING FOR OWNERSHIP AND MAINTENANCE; PROVIDING FOR CONFLICTS, SEVERABILITY AND AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

Town Attorney, Heather Ramos, presented the proposed natural gas infrastructure ordinance, which would require developers of newly approved developments to install natural gas infrastructure concurrently with other utilities, with developers responsible for installation costs within the development and up to 100 feet beyond its boundaries. She addressed objections raised in correspondence concerning Senate Bill 180 and Florida's energy choice protections, explaining that the ordinance was intended as a utility infrastructure policy rather than a land development regulation and would not restrict homeowners' energy choices. Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, requested clarification regarding its applicability to existing developments, and Town Attorney Ramos confirmed that previously approved developments, including Hillside Groves and Mission Rise, would not be subject to the requirement, although developers could voluntarily participate.

Brent Haywood, CEO and General Manager of the Lake Apopka Natural Gas District, explained that the ordinance would require natural gas infrastructure in newly approved developments but would not require homeowners to use natural gas or install gas appliances. He discussed potential construction costs, homeowner savings, property values, and incentives available to builders, emphasizing that the ordinance would expand energy choices. Councilor Miles expressed support for expanding natural gas availability and described his difficulties obtaining service from TECO for his residence. Mr. Haywood explained the service arrangements between TECO/Peoples Gas and Lake Apopka Natural Gas District, including opportunities for the District to serve properties when the existing provider declines service. Mayor Pro Tem Everline also commented on the costs associated with extending natural gas service. Attorney Ramos noted that the proposed ordinance was based on a template developed by the District's attorney, and Mr. Haywood stated that the Town's proposed requirements were less burdensome to developers than similar ordinances adopted by some neighboring municipalities.

Motion made by Councilor Lannamañ to approved Ordinance 2026-009; seconded by Councilor Miles. Motion approved unanimously by roll call vote.

Voting
Yea: Mayor Pro Tem Everline, Councilor Arnold, Councilor Lannamañ, Councilor Miles, Mayor Wells
Nay: None

5. Consideration and Approval: (second reading) **Ordinance 2026-010 - Synthetic Turf**

Mayor Wells read Ordinance 2026-010 out loud by title only:

AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN COUNCIL OF THE TOWN OF HOWEY-IN-THE-HILLS, FLORIDA, RELATING TO THE REGULATION OF SYNTHETIC TURF; PROVIDING FINDINGS; AMENDING SECTION 7.04.01 OF THE LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE; PROVIDING MINIMAL STANDARDS FOR THE INSTALLATION OF SYNTHETIC TURF ON

SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES OF ONE ACRE OR LESS; PROVIDING FOR CODIFICATION, SEVERABILITY, AND AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

Town Attorney, Heather Ramos, presented Ordinance 2026-010, explaining that it would bring the Town's synthetic turf regulations into compliance with Section 125.572, Florida Statutes, which limits local government restrictions on synthetic turf installation on single-family residential properties of one acre or less when applicable Florida Department of Environmental Protection standards are met. Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, identified a minor scrivener's error in Section 9 concerning the required 25-foot setback from natural "or" man-made water bodies, which would be corrected in the final ordinance. During discussion, Councilor Reneé Lannamañ requested clarification regarding the ordinance's applicability to homeowners associations (HOAs). Councilor Arnold explained that the state law regulates local governments and does not supersede private HOA covenants or architectural restrictions. He further noted that incorporating the state requirements into the Town Code would provide residents with a convenient reference for synthetic turf regulations.

Motion made by Councilor Miles to approve Ordinance 2026-010; seconded by Councilor Arnold. Motion approved unanimously by roll call vote.

Voting
Yea: Mayor Pro Tem Everline, Councilor Arnold, Councilor Lannamañ, Councilor Miles, Mayor Wells
Nay: None

OLD BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

None

DEPARTMENT REPORTS

6. Town Hall

   This report was included with the meeting's packet.

7. Police Department

   This report was included with the meeting's packet.

8. Code Enforcement

   This report was included with the meeting's packet.

9. Lake County Fire Rescue

   This report was included with the meeting's packet.

10. Public Services Department

    This report was included with the meeting's packet.

11. Parks & Recreation

    None

12. Library / Community Events

    This report was included with the meeting's packet.

13. Town Attorney

    None

14. Finance Supervisor

    During review of the departmental financial reports, Mayor Wells expressed concerns regarding expenditures exceeding budgeted amounts, particularly engineering expenses, which were approximately 67% ($63,000) over budget, and legal expenses. He requested that staff verify whether any engineering expenses should have been charged to developers as pass-through costs and suggested including explanatory memoranda with future financial reports to clarify significant budget variances. Council members and the Town Manager discussed how planning and engineering expenses were categorized and separately identified within the financial reports. Councilor Miles also questioned the status of anticipated state funding for upgrades to two lift stations in the Venetia area, noting that expenditures appeared to exceed the budget while corresponding revenues had not yet been recorded. Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, agreed to investigate the funding status. Additionally, Councilor Miles questioned whether one of the financial reports had been incorrectly labeled as July rather than August, and clarification was requested to verify the reporting period.

15. Town Manager

    Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, announced several upcoming events, including the Town Manager's annual evaluation workshop scheduled for the following day at 1:00 p.m. at Town Hall and a Meet the Candidates event scheduled for Wednesday, October 14, at 7:00 p.m. at Howey Community Church, ahead of early voting beginning October 19.

    Public Services Director, Morgan Cates, provided clarification regarding the placement of political signs and other temporary signage within public rights-of-way. He explained that most Town streets have a 60-foot right-of-way, generally measured 30 feet from the roadway centerline, and that signs are prohibited within these areas. He outlined the Town's practice of contacting property owners or candidates before removing improperly placed signs and emphasized that collected signs are retained for retrieval rather than discarded. Mr. Cates clarified that West Central Avenue is maintained and regulated by Lake County rather than the Town and stated that he would coordinate with Code Enforcement Officer, Jacob Salas, to return signs removed from that location. He also explained that the Town assists with sign enforcement along State Road 19, where signs must be placed outside the public right-of-way, generally behind the sidewalk on private property.

COUNCIL MEMBER COMMENT

16. Mayor Pro Tem Everline

    Mayor Pro Tem Everline discussed several matters, beginning with concerns regarding the Town's planning approach to the State Road 19 corridor between the bridge and County Road 48 (Thompson Grove). He encouraged the Town's planning staff to take a more proactive approach by developing potential land use and design concepts to enhance this important gateway into the community rather than responding solely to developer proposals.

    Mayor Pro Tem Everline then shared information obtained at the Florida League of Cities Annual Conference. He discussed potential changes to federal grant termination authority that could affect funding for ongoing projects and encouraged the Town to monitor future developments. He also reported on an experimental septic tank treatment being evaluated with the Florida Department of

Environmental Protection that reportedly could reduce nitrogen discharge by approximately 60%, potentially providing an alternative to septic-to-sewer conversions if approved. Additionally, he discussed a larvicide treatment for controlling blind mosquitoes and encouraged staff to explore its feasibility with Lake County. Public Services Director, Morgan Cates, confirmed that he had been discussing mosquito control options with the Town's shoreline maintenance contractor and had requested pricing for treatments in affected areas.

Mayor Pro Tem Everline also shared information regarding cybersecurity services offered, potential assistance from the Florida Urban Forestry Council in reviewing the Town's approved tree species, and a residential water service line protection program offered by HomeServe. He suggested that some of these resources could benefit the Town and its residents. Mayor Wells concluded by commenting on the value of attending the conference, noting that he had participated primarily in educational workshops while Mayor Pro Tem Everline had focused on vendor presentations and available services.

17. Councilor Arnold

None

18. Councilor Miles

Councilor Miles requested an update on the status of a state grant totaling approximately $3.1 million, noting that only about $100,000 had been expended and approximately $3 million remained available. He expressed concern about the lack of progress following the division of the grant into two components approximately six months earlier and emphasized the importance of utilizing the funds rather than risking their return to the State. Councilor Miles requested that a project update be presented at the remaining October Town Council meeting, which would be his final meeting as a Council member. Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, agreed to coordinate a presentation. Councilor Miles also inquired about the availability of the agenda for the following day's Town Manager annual evaluation workshop and was informed that it had been published.

19. Councilor Lannamañ

Councilor Lannamañ thanked the Friends of the Library and those involved in organizing the recent Meet the Candidates event. She then requested that the Council discuss contingency planning for the potential passage of Amendment 3 in the November 3 election, expressing concerns about its possible effects on the Town's ad valorem tax revenues, municipal services, utility rates, and long-term financial stability. She emphasized the importance of involving the current Council, including Councilor Miles, in preliminary discussions before the election.

Mayor Wells suggested that a comprehensive review would be better suited for a workshop but acknowledged that a brief discussion could be included on the next Council agenda. He discussed the Town's financial reserves, potential revenue losses estimated at approximately $520,000 to $550,000, and anticipated revenues from future development, expressing confidence in the Town's ability to manage the initial financial impacts if the amendment passed. Councilor Miles emphasized the importance of separately identifying capital projects in financial reports to improve expenditure tracking.

Mayor Wells and Councilor Arnold also raised concerns regarding language in the proposed amendment referencing property valuation at "just value" and its potential implications for existing Save Our Homes assessment protections. Mayor Wells indicated that he had requested clarification from a state legislator, while Councilor Arnold reported seeking guidance from the Florida League of Cities and the Lake County Property Appraiser's Office. Mayor Pro Tem Everline shared polling information discussed at the League of Cities conference. Following the discussion, Mayor Wells agreed to include Amendment 3 contingency planning as a discussion item on the next Town Council agenda, as requested by Councilor Lannamañ.

20. Mayor Wells

Mayor Wells reminded Council members that lunch would be provided prior to the following day's Town Manager evaluation workshop. Mayor Pro Tem Everline then expressed concerns regarding a recent meeting between Town staff and an FDOT engineer, which had been referenced during the Development Review Committee meeting. He requested that the Town's Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) representative be included in future meetings between the Town and FDOT to ensure elected representation and coordination on transportation-related matters. He emphasized the importance of the MPO representative working collaboratively with the Town Manager, Public Services Director, and Town Engineer.

ADJOURNMENT

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

The Meeting adjourned at 7:43 p.m. | **Attendees: 45**

Graham Wells, CMC, Mayor

ATTEST:

John Brock, Town Clerk