

Town Council Meeting

August 25, 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 6:05 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 | Tom Wilkes, Town Attorney | Rick Thomas, Police Chief | Morgan Cates, Public Services Director | Sean Parks, Town Planner | John Brock, Deputy Town Manager / Town Clerk

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

It was noted at the beginning of the meeting that Town Hall was having difficulties with its internet service and the Zoom meeting, for those seeking to participate remotely, was dropping in and out.

AGENDA APPROVAL/REVIEW

Motion made by Councilor Arnold to approve the meeting's agenda; seconded by Councilor Miles. 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.

Tom Ballou, 1005 N. Tangerine Ave. – Town resident, Mr. Tom Ballou, addressed the Council to emphasize his appreciation for Town staff during the budget process. He stated that, although discussions have sometimes been heated, it should not be perceived that citizens do not value Town employees. On the contrary, he praised staff for

their professionalism, kindness, and dedication. Mr. Ballou specifically commended Mr. John Brock, Mr. Morgan Cates, Chief Rick Thomas, Ms. Kim Bohrer, and Mr. Ron Kimmel from Public Works, as well as all the Public Services team, noting their consistent helpfulness and positive service to residents. He concluded by affirming that staff are appreciated by the community.

Banks Helfrich, 9100 Sams Lake Rd., Clermont – County resident, Banks Helfrich, addressed the Council, beginning with a “Farm Tip of the Day” about peanut harvesting in Florida. He then emphasized honesty, integrity, and character as essential qualities for elected representation, highlighting the need for truthfulness, consistency between words and actions, and strong personal conviction. He concluded by stressing the importance of these values during municipal elections and offered a blessing to those present.

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.

Motion made by Councilor Arnold, Seconded by Councilor Lannamañ.

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

1. The approval of the minutes and ratification and confirmation of all Town Council actions at the July 22, 2025, Town Council Budget Workshop.
2. The approval of the minutes and ratification and confirmation of all Town Council actions at the July 28, 2025, Town Council Meeting.
3. The approval of the minutes and ratification and confirmation of all Town Council actions at the August 7, 2025, Town Council Budget Workshop.
4. The approval of the minutes and ratification and confirmation of all Town Council actions at the August 11, 2025, Town Council Meeting.

Councilor Miles stated that he would like the minutes for the August 11, 2025, Town Council meeting to be amended on page 9, to reflect that, in the paragraph that he begins discussing Ordinance 2025-004, that the words “closing the” be added before “barn doors”.

Motion made by Councilor Arnold to approve the Consent Agenda with Councilor Miles’ amendment to the August 11, 2025, Town Council Meeting minutes; 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

5. Consideration and Approval: (Second Reading) **Ordinance 2025-005 - Platting Process Changes**

Mayor Wells read Ordinance 2025-005 out loud by title only.

AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF HOWEY-IN-THE-HILLS, FLORIDA, PERTAINING TO DEVELOPMENT; PROVIDING FINDINGS; AMENDING SECTION 4.09.00 OF THE HOWEY-IN-THE-HILLS LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE; DELETING OBSOLETE AND INCORRECT LANGUAGE REQUIRING VACATION OF PRIOR PLATS BEFORE REPLATTING; CLARIFYING AND REVISING PROCEDURES AND REQUIREMENTS FOR REVIEW AND

APPROVAL OF PROPOSED PLATS OF LAND TO CONFORM TO 2025 AMENDMENTS TO PART I OF CHAPTER 177 OF THE FLORIDA STATUTES; REQUIRING TOWN COUNCIL APPROVAL AS A CONDITION TO APPROVAL OF PLATS FOR PRIVATE, GATED SUBDIVISIONS; PROVIDING FOR CODIFICATION, SEVERABILITY, AND AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

Town Planner, Sean Parks, explained that the recent state legislation (SB 784) mandates administrative review of plats and assured Council that the process would involve multiple staff members to provide checks and balances. The Town Attorney, Tom Wilkes, then identified several drafting errors in the ordinance, including incorrect references to the Development Review Committee (DRC) and to the “Town Manager’s office” instead of the Town Manager. He recommended revisions to remove references to the DRC, clarify that the Town Manager is the approving authority, and allow the Town Manager to seek input from other staff or consultants as needed.

Council expressed frustration that these issues were not identified prior to the second reading, with the Mayor emphasizing that such changes should be resolved before reaching this stage. The Town Attorney acknowledged the oversight and apologized. After discussion, Council determined that the errors were not substantive but still required correction. Mr. Wilkes stated that there would be no requirement to re-advertisement the final hearing. It was noted that the Town is already operating under a temporary resolution, so no projects would be delayed.

Motion made by Councilor Miles to continue this item to the Sept. 10, 2025, Town Council Meeting; 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

6. Consideration and Approval: Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) Restriping of Palm Ave. to Remove On-Street Parking

The Town Planner, Sean Parks, introduced the transportation improvement discussion, noting that staff had been working with the Lake-Sumter Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) to explore ways to improve safety and traffic flow along Palm Avenue (State Road 19). The proposal focused on removing underutilized on-street parking in the downtown core to allow re-striping and the creation of a dedicated turn lane at Central Avenue, where large trucks frequently turn. He clarified that no additional right-of-way would be needed.

Council raised questions about whether the parking removal would apply to the entire corridor or just near the intersection. The Mayor and Mayor Pro Tem emphasized that FDOT had not formally proposed the project but suggested it as a possible option. They also noted FDOT’s design standards on lane width and the need to account for minimum requirements if on-street parking were eliminated.

The Town Engineer, Don Griffey, explained that FDOT does not consider the striped area along Palm Avenue to be designated parking, but rather an edge stripe, and that the existing 18-foot pavement width could allow either a *de facto* turn lane or formal striping adjustments. He noted that removing the edge stripe could speed up traffic but also allow vehicles to maneuver around turning cars. He also confirmed FDOT was willing to consider design exceptions and that resurfacing work on SR 19 was scheduled for the following year. He outlined that parking impacts near the intersection of Palm Ave. and Central Ave. could be partially offset by using Town-owned land for additional parking, and that pedestrian safety standards would require prohibiting parking near crosswalks.

Council inquired about the possibility of a traffic light at the Central Avenue intersection. Mr. Griffey reported that FDOT was actively evaluating the location and reviewing signal timing at nearby intersections. He credited police traffic studies with influencing FDOT's decision to reassess the need for a full signal.

Council members generally supported pursuing a traffic signal and agreed that parking needs and pedestrian safety should be carefully considered.

Mayor Wells opened Public Comment for this item only.

Anderson Raber, 206 S. Palm Ave. – Town resident, Anderson Raber, spoke in opposition to the proposal, noting that the on-street parking in the affected area is heavily used by nearby businesses, including the local hairdresser, and will be needed for the soon-to-open Virginia's Pancake House. He expressed concern about the loss of parking for visitors to his home, stating that without on-street spaces, guests would resort to parking in his yard, potentially creating code enforcement issues.

Sara Raber, 206 S. Palm Ave. – Town resident, Sara Raber, was not in favor of any changes to SR. 19, as she stated that they would lose all of their parking.

Michael St. Clair, 201 E Croton Way – Town resident, Michael St. Clair, noted that he is not directly affected; he shared that his friends and sister live on Palm Avenue and rely on the limited parking available. He explained that many homes along the corridor have narrow, steep, single-lane driveways that cannot accommodate multiple vehicles, making on-street parking essential. Although he acknowledged the traffic challenges and the need for improved turning movements for large trucks, he opposed the complete elimination of parking along Palm Avenue, emphasizing that such a measure would create significant hardship for residents.

Mayor Wells closed Public Comment for this item.

Mayor Wells noted that a large tree currently blocks the view of the flashing pedestrian light, creating a serious hazard, and suggested its removal as part of the safety effort. Councilor Lannamañ expressed concern about preserving parking along Palm Avenue, asking if modifications could be limited to just the intersection area. Mayor Wells and Councilor Miles both emphasized the need for a turning lane, even though it would eliminate some on-street parking.

Mr. Griffey explained that the Town already owns property behind the Howey Market that could provide approximately ten angled parking spaces to offset the loss. Councilors discussed adding no-parking signs near the intersection to remove ambiguity and increase safety.

Councilor Lannamañ raised concerns about pedestrian risks from vehicles turning without a signal, while Councilor Arnold highlighted recent dangerous incidents at the crosswalk as evidence of the urgent need for improvements. Discussion also touched on future traffic growth from nearby developments, with members noting that the improvements should complement future FDOT consideration of a traffic light.

Motion made by Councilor Lannamañ recommend restriping part of SR 19, limiting changes to one block on either side of Central Avenue, preserving the rest of Palm Avenue parking while creating turn lanes and re-striping as shown in Town Engineer Griffey's plan; 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

NEW BUSINESS

7. Consideration and Approval: Lake Hills Commercial S.R. 19 Access Design

Town Engineer, Don Griffey, presented FDOT's review of the proposed Lake Hills Commercial entrance on State Road 19. FDOT required a signal warrant analysis and Intersection Control Evaluation, both of which determined that full turn lanes and a traffic signal were necessary to maintain acceptable levels of service. FDOT advised that a roundabout would only be permitted if designed as a two-lane roundabout tied to a four-lane cross-section of SR-19 across the project frontage, which would require significant additional right-of-way and cost. Mr. Griffey noted this would make a roundabout impractical at this stage and suggested a signal could serve as an interim solution.

Councilor Miles opposed the proposal, stating that, on April 22, 2024, the Town required a roundabout as a condition of development approval. He cited safety concerns and congestion, arguing that additional residential units and the shopping center would overburden SR-19. He urged coordination with state legislators for funding and right-of-way acquisition to support widening and a roundabout. Mayor Pro Tem Everline questioned whether a needs assessment had ever been submitted to FDOT, noting that the long-range transportation plan contained no projects for Howey-in-the-Hills.

Town Attorney, Tom Wilkes, advised that the roundabout condition of approval applied to both residential and commercial components and remained enforceable. However, he explained that developers were caught between Town requirements and FDOT's refusal to permit a roundabout without four-laning. He emphasized that the responsibility to resolve this conflict lay with the developers, not the Town Council.

Mr. Craig Buchanan, Windcrest Development Group representative for Publix, stated that Publix did not have funding to widen SR-19 and would table the project without approval of a signal. He explained that FDOT had concluded a signal was the only acceptable solution under current conditions.

Discussion followed regarding ownership of connecting roads, long-range four-laning plans for SR-19, and the Town's financial obligations for ongoing traffic signal maintenance and electricity. Several Councilors expressed concern over long-term safety and aesthetics, while others stressed the importance of moving the project forward to secure new tax revenue.

Motion made by Councilor Arnold to approve the Lake Hills SR 19 Access design as presented by Town Engineer, Don Griffey; seconded by Councilor Lannamañ. Motion approved by roll call vote.

Voting

Yea: Councilor Arnold, Councilor Lannamañ, Mayor Wells

Nay: Mayor Pro Tem Everline, Councilor Miles

8. Consideration and Approval: Water Treatment Plant #3 Construction Bid (RFB 2025-007)

Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, explained that the bid under consideration was limited to the construction of Water Treatment Plant No. 3. He clarified that related projects, including installation of a 12-inch water main and retrofitting of Water Plant No. 1, would be bid separately. Six bids were received, with RCM Utilities, LLC submitting the lowest bid at \$8,864,055. A minor discrepancy of \$1,000 between written and numerical amounts on the bid was confirmed by the contractor as a clerical error, with the correct total being \$8,864,055.

Troy Mitchell of Halff Associates, project engineer, confirmed that the scope of work covered only the new plant and explained that the 12-inch line had been identified after the master plan due to system balancing and fire protection needs. He also clarified questions regarding the chlorination method,

noting that the new plant will use the same gaseous chlorination system currently in use, making operation and maintenance consistent for staff. Mr. Mitchell further explained that a septic system was included for the plant facility due to the absence of nearby sanitary sewer, with the option to connect to future sewer infrastructure when available.

Councilor Miles raised concerns regarding chlorination methods and septic use but accepted the technical explanations provided. He also sought confirmation from the bidder on the corrected contract amount, which was affirmed by the representative of RCM Utilities.

Motion made by Councilor Miles to award the contract for Water Treatment Plant No. 3 to RCM Utilities, LLC in the amount of \$8,864,055, as recommended by Halff Associates; 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

Mayor Wells asked for a motion for a five-minute recess.

Motion made by Councilor Lannamañ for a five-minute recess to the meeting; 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

Mayor Wells placed the meeting in recess at 7:59 p.m.

Mayor Wells reconvened the meeting at 8:05 p.m.

9. Discussion: **Woodard & Curran Presentation**

Council received an informational briefing from Woodard & Curran regarding the Town's Septic-to-Sewer project and wastewater facility plan. Woodard & Curran representative, Peter Hardy, explained that approximately 600 parcels in Old Howey are affected, requiring four lift stations, new gravity lines, force mains, and manholes. He presented three alternatives: (1) do nothing, (2) pump wastewater to Groveland's Sunshine Plant at an estimated cost of \$28.3 million plus connection fees, or (3) acquire and expand the Central Lake CDD wastewater plant at an estimated \$20.4 million, depending on valuation. Councilors discussed technical issues such as force main capacity, manhole placement, and plant expansion needs, as well as concerns about the true value of the plant and the negotiation process with the private owners.

Funding opportunities were a central focus, including the Town's existing \$3.185 million grant, of which \$185,000 has been spent on the Clean Water study (that was being present at this time) and \$3 million remains. Woodard & Curran advised that the grant could likely cover the septic-to-sewer design phase, but further clarification is needed on whether funds could be applied toward a plant purchase. They also noted that significant state and federal grant opportunities exist, with potential for a high percentage of project costs to be covered, though final amounts remain uncertain until November.

Town Attorney, Tom Wilkes, explained that financing could be structured through bonds or SRF loans, with repayment tied to utility revenues rather than property taxes. Council emphasized the need for detailed financial analysis and clarity on when the Town would be committed beyond preliminary approval. Woodard & Curran stressed that accepting the Preliminary Engineering Report (PER) does not commit the Town to any single option but is required to remain eligible for additional state funding.

Following discussion, Council agreed that acceptance of the PER should be brought forward to meet state deadlines for funding consideration.

Motion made by Councilor Miles to convert Agenda Item #9 from a Discussion to Consideration and Approval; seconded by Councilor Arnold. Motion approved by voice vote.

Voting

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

Nay: Mayor Wells

Mayor Pro Tem Everline and Mayor Wells questioned acting the same evening, noting the item had been noticed as a discussion and that state deadlines were unclear. Woodard & Curran stated the original SRF submittal date was July 15, 2025, that an extension had been granted without a firm new deadline, and that Town approval of the PER is needed to retain access to remaining SAHFI funds. Councilor Miles and Councilor Lannamañ supported moving forward to keep funding eligibility and obtain definitive cost and financing information, emphasizing that approval of the PER does not commit the Town to a specific alternative or vendor.

Mayor Wells opened Public Comment for this item only. Hearing no comments, Mayor Wells closed Public Comment for this item.

Motion made by Councilor Miles to approve the Preliminary Engineering Report prepared by Woodard & Curran dated July 2025 for submission to the State of Florida; seconded by Councilor Lannamañ. Motion approved by roll call vote.

Voting

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

Nay: Mayor Wells

10. Discussion: **Public Services 20-Year Road Plan**

Mayor Wells identified that the meeting had run past 9:00 p.m. and asked for a motion to extend the meeting by 30 minutes.

Motion made by Councilor Miles to extend the meeting to 9:30 p.m.; seconded by Councilor Arnold. Motion approved by roll call vote.

Voting

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

Nay: None

Public Services Director, Morgan Cates, presented a 20-year Road Improvement Plan and a supporting road inventory, the Town's first comprehensive plan in 25 years, assigning 1–5 condition scores and noting a clerical omission (Island Drive previously reconstructed after a hurricane washout). He reported Gardenia is essentially complete and that work on North Citrus will begin the following week, with resident notices already issued. Mr. Cates recommended moving East Holly Street out a few years and substituting Valencia for FY 2026 based on field conditions, emphasizing current reconstructions are being built with proper base so future maintenance can be handled by milling and resurfacing at far lower cost.

Councilor Miles concurred on prioritizing Valencia and suggested adding one short connector, West Pine or West Palmetto, in FY 2026 to "catch up," citing that \$225,000 is programmed for next year while Valencia's cost is expected to be below the prior \$159,000 East Holly estimate; the Town

Manager cautioned that West Pine (\$370,000) and West Palmetto (\$347,000) also require lowering water mains at SR 19.

Mr. Cates and Town Planner, Sean Parks, advised county road revenue distributions are likely to decline, reinforcing the need to scale project lengths to match funding. The Town Manager recognized the Public Services team for completing more roadway work in the last three years than in the preceding 25.

DEPARTMENT REPORTS

11. Town Manager

Town Manager, Sean O’Keefe, announced Town Labor Day closures (Monday, September 1), and confirmed the FY 2026 budget public hearings for Wednesday, September 10 and Wednesday, September 24 at 5:05 p.m.

Mayor Wells requested adding Police Department server replacement to the September 8th Town Council agenda (approximately \$55,000; three quotes received; a lease option to review), with the Mayor’s preference to consider Infrastructure Fund use instead of the General Fund.

Council clarified the September calendar (Council meeting on Monday, September 8; first budget hearing September 10); Councilor Miles noted he will be out of Town on September 8.

COUNCIL MEMBER COMMENT

12. Mayor Pro Tem Everline

Mayor Pro Tem Everline shared updates from a recent municipal conference, noting it was the best-attended to date, with many mayors and city managers present, and suggested that both the Mayor and Town Manager attend future sessions given the valuable information and contacts. He also referenced a state agency presentation on property taxes, from which he has ordered follow-up materials for Council review and potential resident outreach.

Mayor Pro Tem Everline then expressed concern about not being informed of a recent Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) meeting involving Town staff and consultants. He stressed the importance of timely communication so that Council leadership can coordinate effectively and present a unified front to FDOT and the MPO. Town Manager, Sean O’Keefe, clarified that the meeting was intended as a staff-level discussion with FDOT, though Councilor Arnold learned of it separately and attended. Mayor Wells acknowledged the point and agreed better coordination and communication are needed going forward.

13. Councilor Arnold

Councilor Arnold directed the Town Manager to deliver, by the next Town Council meeting, rigorous, empirical market compensation data to substantiate the working assessment that the Library Assistant employee is underpaid. He emphasized that the analysis must go beyond anecdotal comparisons (e.g., isolated offers from nearby cities) and provide structured benchmarks and comparables sufficient to support a potential pay adjustment that could be incorporated before the Town’s budget is approved.

14. Councilor Miles

None

15. Councilor Lannamañ

Councilor Lannamañ requested that the Town formally ask FDOT to install mast-arm traffic signals, rather than traditional pole-and-wire assemblies, at both State Road 19 intersections (Central Avenue and CR 48). She noted mast arms provide a cleaner appearance and greater durability in storms and hurricanes. Other members acknowledged and agreed with her point.

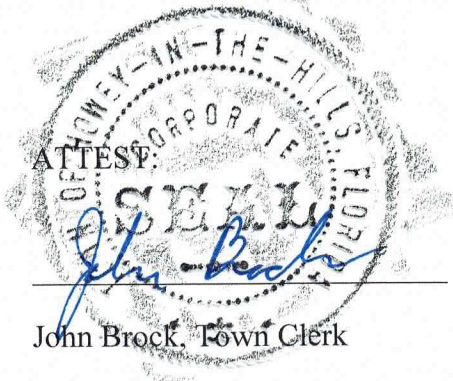
16. Mayor Wells

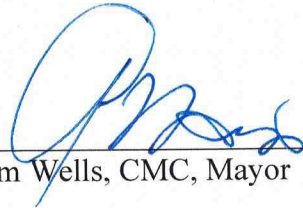
Mayor Wells thanked the public, Town Planner, Public Services Director, and Police Lieutenant for attending the evening's meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

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 9:31 p.m. | **Attendees: 50**





Graham Wells, CMC, Mayor