



Planning & Zoning Board Meeting

**April 24, 2025 at 6:00 PM
Howey-in the-Hills Town Hall
101 N. Palm Ave.,
Howey-in-the-Hills, FL 34737**

MINUTES

**Board Chair Tina St. Clair called the meeting to Order at 6:02 PM.
Board Chair Tina St. Clair led the attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag**

ROLL CALL

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Board Member Joshua Husemann | Board Member Richard Mulvany | Vice Chair Frances Wagler | Board Member Paul Johns | Chair Tina St. Clair

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Board Member Alan Hayes

STAFF PRESENT:

Lisa Busto, Town Planner | Sean O'Keefe, Town Manager | John Brock, Deputy Town Manager / Town Clerk

CONSENT AGENDA

Routine items are placed on the Consent Agenda to expedite the meeting. If a Planning & Zoning Board Member wishes 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. Consideration and Approval of the March 27, 2025, Planning and Zoning Board Meeting minutes.

Motion made by Board Member Husemann to approve the Consent Agenda; seconded by Board Member Mulvany. Motion approved unanimously by voice vote.

Voting

Yea: Board Member Husemann, Board Member Mulvany, Vice Chair Wagler, Board Member Johns, Chair St. Clair

Nay: None

Motion made by Board Member Husemann to add an Agenda Item, "Discussion: Variances"; seconded by Board Member John. Motion approved unanimously by voice vote.

Voting

Yea: Board Member Husemann, Board Member Mulvany, Vice Chair Wagler, Board Member Johns, Chair St.

Clair
Nay: None

This new Agenda Item will appear between Agenda Items #3 and Public Comments.

PUBLIC HEARING

None

OLD BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

2. Consideration and Recommendation: Erick Bright Planning and Zoning Board Application

Board Applicant, Erick Bright, appeared before the Planning and Zoning Board to express his interest in serving as a board member. He introduced himself as a lifelong Florida resident, having lived in the Orlando area since 1980. He shared his firsthand perspective on the region's growth, particularly in the east Orlando and Kissimmee areas, where he has long-standing family ties. Now residing in Talichet, Mr. Bright described Howey-in-the-Hills as "Heaven on Earth" and expressed a strong desire to contribute to the community's ongoing development and quality of life. He emphasized his local family connections in Yalaha and Leesburg and his commitment to being an engaged resident. During the discussion, Board Member Wagler asked whether there is a residency duration requirement for board service, which led to a brief clarification that such a requirement applies to Town Council positions but not to Planning and Zoning Board appointments. Following this, Chair Tina St. Clair opened the floor for community comment, but none were received.

Motion made by Board Member Husemann to recommend Erick Bright to the Town Council as a Board Member to the Planning and Zoning Board; seconded by Board Member Mulvany. Motion approved unanimously by voice vote.

Voting

Yea: Board Member Husemann, Board Member Mulvany, Vice Chair Wagler, Board Member Johns, Chair St. Clair

Nay: None

3. Information Item: Comprehensive Plan - Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR) Amendments

Town Planner, Lisa Busto, speaking on behalf of April Fisher, provided an overview of the ongoing Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR) amendments to the Town's Comprehensive Plan. She explained that Florida law requires local governments to periodically review their comprehensive plans to ensure alignment with state and regional planning goals. The Town notified the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity in August of its intent to amend the comprehensive plan based on the EAR, and the department confirmed receipt and advised that the process be completed by August 28, 2025. The amendments address 12 elements of the plan and were presented in a strikethrough and underline format to highlight revisions. A summary table for each element was also prepared to aid review.

The purpose of presenting the amendments at this meeting was informational, allowing board members time to review the extensive documentation. A formal ordinance will be prepared by the Town Attorney, and the amendments will return as a public hearing item for action and recommendation to the Town Council at the May 2025 Planning and Zoning Board meeting. Board Member Johns noted that

the process dates back as far as February of the previous year. No questions were raised by board members, and there were no comments from the public during the open comment period.

4. Discussion: **Variances** (*This Agenda Item was added to the meeting's agenda during the Consent Agenda portion of the meeting.*)

The Planning and Zoning Board held an extensive discussion regarding rear setback requirements for swimming pools, prompted by a recent trend of variance requests, particularly from residents in the Talichet and Venezia developments. Board Member Husemann presented a detailed analysis showing that nine out of the 16 variances granted in the past nine years were for pools, most of which involved newer homes on smaller lots. Board Member Husemann argued that a five-foot rear setback, consistent with Lake County and neighboring jurisdictions, would have negated the need for nearly all of those variances. Board Member Husemann advocated for adopting a size-based approach, wherein lots under a certain square footage (such as 9,600 square feet) would qualify for reduced setbacks, aligning local code with regional norms and preserving homeowner flexibility.

The conversation included concerns about lot sizes in upcoming developments, where smaller parcels are increasingly common. Board Member Husemann emphasized that larger homes on smaller lots are becoming standard and that the Town's current 10-foot setback requirement effectively prevents many homeowners from installing pools. Other board members raised contrasting views, noting the importance of preserving spacing between properties and pointing out that buyers should do their due diligence. Board Member Mulvany and Board Member Wagler emphasized the importance of the Land Development Code (LDC) as a guiding vision and expressed concerns about erosion of standards. Board Member Johns added that inconsistent variance decisions risk undermining fairness and consistency.

Board Chair St. Clair opened Public Comment for this item only.

Michael Ann Hussan, 8601 E. Dewey Robbins Rd., Howey-in-the-Hills (unincorporated Lake County) – County Resident Michael Ann Hussan, who lives on East Dewey Robbins Road, shared heartfelt concerns about the direction of development in Howey-in-the-Hills. She explained that she and her husband moved to the area two years ago to enjoy its rural character and currently live on 17 acres where they raise miniature cows. As a veteran and someone who spent part of her childhood in Florida, she emphasized how much she values the peaceful, open environment of the Town. Mrs. Hussan urged the board not to allow Howey to become overdeveloped like The Villages or Leesburg, cautioning that unchecked growth would erode the qualities that make the area so appealing. She stressed the importance of preserving space and tranquility for residents who intentionally chose a country lifestyle.

Board Chair St. Clair closed Public Comment.

After further deliberation, the board voted to refer the issue to the town planner to research and potentially draft an amendment for further discussion. The motion was made by Richard Mulvany and seconded by Tina St. Clair, with the expectation that the matter will return to the board in a formalized format at the next meeting. The goal is to determine whether to recommend an amendment to the Town Council that would revise pool setback requirements based on lot size, balancing homeowner desires with the Town's vision for growth and livability.

Motion made by Board Member Mulvany to table this item to the May Planning and Zoning Board meeting; seconded by Vice Chair Wagler. Motion denied by roll call vote.

Voting

Yea: Board Member Mulvany, Vice Chair Wagler

Nay: Board Member Husemann, Board Member Johns, Chair St. Clair

Motion made by Board Member Johns to direct the Town Planner to propose an amendment to the Town's Land Development Code that is alignment with the Board discussion on variances and have the proposed amendment come up for future discussion and recommendation by the Board; seconded by Board Member Husemann. Motion approved unanimously by roll call vote.

Voting

Yea: Board Member Husemann, Board Member Mulvany, Vice Chair Wagler, Board Member Johns, Chair St. Clair

Nay: None

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Any person wishing to address the Planning and Zoning Board 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.

None

BOARD COMMENTS

Board Member Wagler raised a concern regarding the Town's previous statements about land dedication along Citrus Avenue during a previous meeting's variance discussion. She recalled that the board had been informed the land in question would be "dedicated" by property owners, implying it would be gifted to the Town. However, it later emerged at the Town Council level that the land was actually being purchased, not dedicated. Mrs. Wagler expressed frustration that this critical distinction had not been clearly communicated to the board at the time of their variance discussions.

Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, and several board members clarified that the variance approvals were a separate matter from the land acquisition. The variances pertained to two parcels, primarily concerning setbacks and lot size compliance, and did not involve any exchange of property. The purchases, which included three parcels at the intersection in question, were a separate council action. Mr. O'Keefe explained that, while one property owner originally offered to dedicate the land, the situation changed when another insisted on payment. To ensure fairness, the Town ultimately paid all three property owners. Mr. O'Keefe concluded that the Town had acted equitably once payment became necessary.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to discuss, a motion was made by Board Member Husemann to adjourn the meeting; Board Member Mulvany seconded the motion. Motion was approved unanimously by voice vote.

The Meeting adjourned at 6:59 p.m. | **Attendees: 16**


Tina St. Clair, Chairperson


John Brock, Town Clerk