

Town Council Meeting

May 12, 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 Special Meeting to order at 6:02 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 (via Zoom) | Mayor Graham Wells

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Councilor David Miles

STAFF PRESENT:

Sean O'Keefe, Town Manager | Tom Wilkes, Town Attorney (via Zoom) | Rick Thomas, Police Chief | Michael Giddens, Police Department Lieutenant | Public Works Director, Morgan Cates | Oscar Ojeda, Finance Supervisor | John Brock, Deputy Town Manager / Town Clerk

Motion made by Mayor Pro Tem Everline to allow Councilor Lannamañ to participate and vote remotely via Zoom; seconded by Councilor Arnold. Motion approved unanimously by voice vote.

Voting

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

Nay: None

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

None

AGENDA APPROVAL/REVIEW

Motion made by Mayor Pro Tem Everline to table agenda item #6 (Consideration and Approval: SRO Agreement FY 25-26) to the first Town Council meeting in June (to allow Councilor Miles to participate in this matter); seconded by Councilor Arnold. Motion approved by voice vote.

Voting

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

Nay: Mayor Wells

After this vote was taken, it was discovered that Councilor Miles would be at the second Town Council meeting in May.

Due to issues with the Town Hall's internet connection, Councilor Lannamañ was briefly unable to hear the Town Council meeting and did not vote on the next motion, however her connection was restored shortly after the vote.

Motion made by Mayor Pro Tem Everline to revise the previous motion and table agenda item #6 (Consideration and Approval: SRO Agreement FY 25-26) to the May 27, 2025, Town Council Meeting; seconded by Councilor Arnold. Motion approved by voice vote.

Voting

Yea: Mayor Pro Tem Everline, Councilor Arnold, 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.

Carol Roque, 505 Mission Ln. – Resident Carol Roque expressed her gratitude on behalf of the Howey Garden and Civic Club for being allowed to promote the Howey Mansion's May 3rd Founder's Day event using the Town's sign. She extended thanks to the Town Council, the Town of Howey-in-the-Hills, and the Friends of the Library, noting the event's tremendous success. Roque also spoke positively about the May 10th cotillion ball, describing it as a memorable evening and thanking Jon and Mary Arnold for attending. Councilor Jon Arnold acknowledged the appreciation and noted that the mansion also announced the Town's May 10th event at the conclusion of the May 3rd festivities.

Marie Gallelli, 1104 N. Tangerine Ave. – Resident Marie Gallelli raised concerns about rumors of a 400-home development on the Thompson property. Town staff clarified that no approvals have been granted, and any development would require rezoning and face infrastructure limitations. She also asked about Centennial event finances, and the Town Manager noted that sponsorship funds exceeded expenses, with about \$15,000 to be carried over for Christmas events. Gallelli questioned public access to staff meetings, which the Town Manager explained depends on the meeting type. Finally, she shared feedback that the Centennial celebration was too child-focused and suggested more adult-oriented activities for future events.

Andi Everline, 1012 N. Lakeshore Blvd. – Resident Andi Everline shared that she attended both the mansion and Town events and suggested they be held on the same day in the future. She felt this would allow the community to enjoy both experiences, with the Town event offering more kid-friendly activities and the mansion event providing opportunities like early holiday shopping.

Banks Helfrich, 9100 Sams Lake Rd., Clermont FL. – County resident Banks Helfrich offered a brief agricultural tip about loquats, then delivered remarks emphasizing public service and accountability in government.

Lynne Husemann, 671 Avila Pl. - Resident Lynne Husemann thanked the Town and everyone involved in organizing the Centennial event, especially those who worked to secure vendors and sponsors. She shared her experience handing out cotton candy and noted that both children and adults enjoyed it, expressing appreciation for the Town's efforts.

Gavin Scheel, 123 E. Oak St. – Resident Gavin Scheel raised concerns about one of the fishing piers on Lakeshore Blvd., noting it is not wheelchair accessible and questioning the purpose of constructing a new dock without ADA compliance. Public Services Director, Morgan Cates, responded that the Town intends to make all piers ADA accessible but is currently working through permitting challenges with the Department of Environmental Protection due to nearby wetlands. Mr. Scheel also asked if his band could perform at a future Town event. Mayor Wells expressed interest and suggested the idea of concerts in the park as a possible future opportunity.

Andi Everline, 1012 N. Lakeshore Blvd. - Resident Andi Everline followed up on a previous concern about the playground's lack of wheelchair accessibility, noting that the mulch has settled so low it poses a safety hazard. Public Services Director, Morgan Cates, responded that he contacted the playground mulch vendor after her last comment and is working to get the issue resolved.

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 April 28, 2025, Town Council Meeting.
2. The approval of the minutes and ratification and confirmation of all Town Council actions at the May 1, 2025, Town Council Special Meeting.
3. Consideration and Approval: **Lake County School Board Utility Easement Agreement**
4. Consideration and Approval: **Storm Debris Removal Agreement Option Selection**

Mayor Pro Tem Everline asked about the Town's satisfaction with the County's storm debris removal. Public Services Director, Morgan Cates, said that, while there were delays due to contractor availability, he was ultimately satisfied with the service, especially since it reduced the Town's administrative burden with FEMA. Mr. Cates also confirmed that the Public Works Department conducts an initial debris push and that backup contractors are improving capacity. Mayor Pro Tem Everline also inquired about the utility easement agreement with the school board, which Cates confirmed was overdue and necessary for infrastructure access. Mayor Wells clarified that the Town was proceeding with Option B for storm debris removal, where the Town pays 25% and the County covers the rest.

Motion made by Councilor Arnold to approve the Consent Agenda; seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Everline. Motion approved unanimously by voice vote.

Voting

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

Nay: None

PUBLIC HEARING

None

OLD BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

5. Presentation: **Stormwater Management Program Implementation Overview**

Public Services Director, Morgan Cates, presented an overview of the Town's stormwater management program in preparation for hurricane season. Mr. Cates emphasized that the Town actively maintains its stormwater infrastructure and is working to secure grants for new treatment structures along Lakeshore Blvd. to protect Little Lake Harris. The stormwater master plan outlines strategies for flood control, pollution prevention, and regulatory compliance, including public education and collaboration with HOAs. Mr. Cates explained that, while the Town is responsible for infrastructure within the rights-of-way, HOAs manage stormwater systems within their subdivisions under permits transferred from developers. He detailed the Town's response procedures for illicit discharges and stressed the importance of public reporting.

Councilor Arnold asked about regional drainage concerns and detection of improper dumping. Mr. Cates confirmed that the Town operates independently of surrounding systems and enforces stormwater violations through code compliance when necessary.

6. Consideration and Approval: **SRO Agreement FY 25-26**

This agenda item was tabled during the Agenda Approval portion of the meeting. This item will come back up before the Town Council during the 5/27/2025 Town Council Meeting.

DEPARTMENT REPORTS

7. Town Hall

This report was included in the meeting's packet.

8. Police Department

This report was included in the meeting's packet.

9. Code Enforcement

This report was included in the meeting's packet.

10. Lake County Fire Rescue

None

11. Public Services Department

This report was included in the meeting's packet.

12. Parks & Recreation

This report was included in the meeting's packet.

13. Library / Community Events

Mayor Pro Tem Everline raised questions, including the absence of recent library reports, which the Town Manager attributed to the director being occupied with events.

14. Town Attorney

None

15. Finance Supervisor

Mayor Wells highlighted the financial update through March, including pie charts showing revenue and expenditure breakdowns. Mayor Wells noted that, while ad valorem taxes form the largest revenue source, more than half comes from other streams. The Police Department accounts for 35% of expenditures.

Mayor Pro Tem Everline also inquired about the tree fund balance, which was confirmed as unchanged at \$1,815, and questioned a \$2,500 overage in the library executive salary, which resulted from a vacation payout to the retired Library Director, Tara Hall. He also sought clarification on over-budget items in the capital outlay, including water equipment and police vehicle costs. The Town Manager explained that some were due to timing—equipment ordered in one fiscal year but paid for in the next—and noted that police vehicle costs were largely offset by grant reimbursements.

Councilor Arnold raised a question about why Town residents pay for both the Lake County Sheriff's Office and the Town's Police Department. Mayor Wells and Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, explained that ad valorem taxes fund county services, including the sheriff, regardless of municipal departments. Councilor Arnold and Mayor Pro Tem Everline questioned why the Town provides police services to nearby developments like Cypress Point and Bishops Gate without reimbursement. Mr. O'Keefe discussed potential options such as Municipal Service Benefit Units (MSBUs), where developments could enter agreements to fund supplemental services.

Police Lieutenant, Mike Giddens, explained that mutual aid statutes require response to emergencies outside Town limits but not routine calls, and noted that Howey officers often assist nearby areas due to limited county coverage. Councilor Arnold emphasized the need to explore ways to increase funding for the Police Department, given the broader area it often serves. Lt. Giddens added that social media often misattributes incidents outside of Howey-in-the-Hills to the Town due to postal address confusion, contributing to public misunderstanding.

16. Town Manager

Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, extended his appreciation to all who contributed to the success of the Town's Centennial Founder's Day celebrations, including staff, volunteers, vendors, sponsors, entertainers, and the descendants of William J. Howey. He emphasized the planning and cooperation required for such events and noted the strong turnout and favorable weather. He also announced that the Town's Memorial Day ceremony will take place on Monday, May 26 at 10 a.m. at Taylor Memorial Cemetery, with a reminder that the regular Town Council meeting had been rescheduled to Tuesday, May 27 due to the holiday. Councilor Arnold added a brief clarification distinguishing Memorial Day as a time to honor those who have fallen, as opposed to Veterans Day.

COUNCIL MEMBER COMMENT

17. Mayor Pro Tem Everline

Mayor Pro Tem Everline shared a concern raised by Bud Buecher, who was upset about an eminent domain discussion at a recent Town Council meeting. Mr. Buecher believed the discussion targeted the Central Lake CDD property, which Mayor Pro Tem Everline clarified was not the case. Mayor Pro Tem Everline suggested that such topics be handled with greater discretion to avoid misunderstandings that could hinder potential negotiations.

Mayor Pro Tem Everline also relayed a complaint from residents of the Venezia Townhomes about problematic parking that affects visibility and emergency access. Residents claimed they received little help when contacting the police, as there was confusion over whether it was a Town or HOA issue. Town staff clarified that, while the development has a property management group and should have an

HOA in place, communication with residents may be lacking. Parking enforcement is complicated by recent state legislation that limits HOA authority over public roadways. However, if vehicles are blocking access or posing safety issues, residents can contact the police for assistance.

Mayor Pro Tem Everline also noted that the library was closed on the Saturday of the Founder's Day Event and asked about public notice. Staff confirmed that notice was sent via email to library cardholders and posted on social media. Mayor Pro Tem Everline suggested improving event outreach, such as including flyers with water bills. Mayor Wells supported the idea, noting that printing and mailing costs are relatively low and could be budgeted if staff are available to create the materials.

18. Councilor Arnold

None

19. Councilor Miles

None

20. Councilor Lannamañ

Councilor Lannamañ expressed her appreciation to Town staff for their efforts in organizing the May 10th Centennial Founder's Day event, calling it family-friendly and well-executed. While acknowledging previous feedback that it may have been too focused on children, she emphasized the importance of offering plenty of activities for families, noting that areas like Talichet and Venezia have many young children. She also thanked the event sponsors for their investment in the community and confirmed that the Venezia Townhomes have a responsive property management company capable of addressing resident concerns. She concluded by praising staff for their dedication and hard work in making the celebration a success.

21. Mayor Wells

Mayor Wells acknowledged the controversy surrounding the eminent domain discussion at a prior Town Council meeting, agreeing with Mayor Pro Tem Everline that it may have caused unnecessary tension, especially with the Central Lake CDD stakeholders like Bud Buecher. He emphasized that the Town lacks the leverage to pursue such measures effectively and that more tactful communication would be more productive. Regarding the Town's Centennial Founder's Day event, Mayor Wells addressed a critical email suggesting the Town should be "ashamed" of the event, which he strongly refuted. He highlighted the extensive planning by staff, the wide range of family activities, and the positive public feedback. He also noted the generous sponsorships, donations to the Friends of the Library, and the significant community turnout, calling the event a source of pride for the Town.

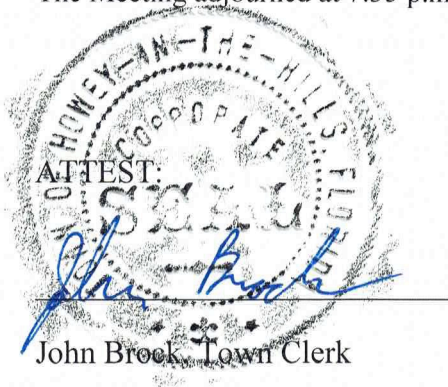
Councilor Lannamañ echoed support for the event and reinforced the importance of avoiding public discussions of complex issues like eminent domain. She explained that such matters are typically handled behind the scenes until properly developed. She stressed the importance of diplomacy in dealings with stakeholders like the Central Lake CDD, especially given the Town's current infrastructure challenges.

Police Lieutenant, Mike Giddens, and Public Services Director, Morgan Cates, also praised the Founder's Day celebration, commending the strong turnout, smooth coordination, and the dedication of staff who worked long hours to make the event a success. All agreed that the event reflected well on the Town and its commitment to community spirit.

ADJOURNMENT

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

The Meeting adjourned at 7:35 p.m. | Attendees: 29




Graham Wells, CMC, Mayor