

Town Council Meeting

July 28, 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 Present and Proper Notice Given

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mayor Pro Tem Tim Everline (via Zoom) | Councilor Jon Arnold | Councilor Reneé Lannamañ | Councilor David Miles | Mayor Graham Wells

STAFF PRESENT:

Sean O'Keefe, Town Manager (via Zoom) | Tom Wilkes, Town Attorney | Rick Thomas, Police Chief | Morgan Cates, Public Services Director | John Brock, Deputy Town Manager / Town Clerk

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

Voting

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

Nay: None

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

None

AGENDA APPROVAL/REVIEW

Motion made by Councilor Lannamañ to approve the meeting's agenda, but to remove agenda item #3 from the agenda; seconded by Councilor Arnold. Motion approved by voice vote.

Voting

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

Nay: Councilor Miles

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.

Marie Gallelli, 1104 N Tangerine Ave. – Town resident, Marie Gallelli, inquired about the status of the new proposed business taking over the old Howey Market location, if Citrus Avenue's reconstruction would incorporate features to minimize future sewer installation costs, and if any new grants had been secured.

Mrs. Gallelli raised concerns about missed garbage pickups. Mrs. Gallelli concluded by encouraging residents to attend the upcoming budget meeting on August 7th at 1:00 p.m., noting she would be present and urging others to review and question the budget.

Diana Ballou, 1005 N. Tangerine Ave. – Town resident, Diana Ballou, urged the Council to reconsider proposed salary increases, noting that tough economic times make such decisions burdensome for residents. She emphasized that Council members are elected to serve all citizens.

Banks Helfrich, 9100 Sams Lake Rd., Clermont, FL – County resident, Banks Helfrich, delivered a patriotic message in honor of America's 249th birthday, highlighting the nation's unique identity as a diverse and inclusive melting pot. He emphasized that all Americans, regardless of origin, share a common immigrant heritage and urged compassion toward newcomers. He also praised a recent beautification project near Town Hall, completed through a partnership between Morgan Cates, Keep Lake Beautiful, and the Town of Howey.

Andi Everline, 1012 N. Lakeshore Blvd. - Town resident, Andi Everline, questioned delays on the Gardenia Street project. Public Services Director, Morgan Cates, explained that recent rain and utility conflicts, specifically a fiber optic line needing relocation by Lumen Communications, have caused setbacks. Mr. Cates stated that work should resume soon to avoid repaving the intersection twice. The delay has lasted several weeks.

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 July 10, 2028, Town Council Meeting.

**Motion made by Councilor Lannamañ to approve the Consent Agenda; 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

PUBLIC HEARING

None

OLD BUSINESS

2. The approval of the minutes and ratification and confirmation of all Town Council actions at the June 23, 2025, Town Council Meeting.

Motion made by Councilor Miles to approve version 5 of the June 23, 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

3. Consideration of Approval: **E Holly St. Budgeting**

THIS ITEM WAS REMOVED FROM THE AGENDA DURING THE AGENDA APPROVAL SECTION OF THE MEETING

NEW BUSINESS

4. Consideration and Approval: **Resolution 2025-009 - Proposed Maximum Millage Rate**

Mayor Wells read Resolution 2025-009 out loud by title only.

A RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN COUNCIL OF THE TOWN OF HOWEY-IN-THE-HILLS, FLORIDA; SETTING THE PROPOSED MAXIMUM MILLAGE RATE OF AD VALOREM TAXATION AND SETTING THE DATE, TIME, AND PLACE OF THE FIRST PUBLIC HEARING ON THE BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2025-2026; PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

Town Manager, Sean O’Keefe, clarified that this is a not-to-exceed rate required for the TRIM notice and that the Town may still reduce the rate during budget workshops. Mayor Wells emphasized this is a routine annual action mandated by state law. The first public budget hearing was scheduled for September 10, 2025, at 5:05 p.m.

Motion made by Councilor Lannamañ to approve Resolution 2025-009; 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

5. Consideration and Approval: **Water Rate Increase**

The Council discussed a proposed 1.77% water rate increase, raising the base rate from \$34.02 to \$34.62 and generating about \$16,000 annually. Town Manager, Sean O’Keefe, explained that the increase follows the Municipal Cost Index and is allowed by Town Code.

Councilor Miles supported the increase, citing operational deficits in the Water Fund and praised improved budget transparency. Mayor Wells opposed it, favoring no rate hikes this year and suggesting the shortfall could be absorbed elsewhere.

Mayor Pro Tem Everline raised concerns about prior accounting practices and construction fees, while Councilor Lannamañ noted the increase would impact both potable and irrigation meters, potentially raising some bills to \$200 monthly. Staff confirmed the increase applies across all rate tiers.

Mayor Wells opened Public Comment for this item only.

Marie Gallelli, 1104 N. Tangerine Ave. – Town resident, Marie Gallelli, spoke against the proposed water rate increase, suggesting the \$16,000 in projected revenue was not worth the administrative effort or added cost to residents. She recommended leaving rates unchanged this year and revisiting the issue next year based on economic conditions.

Mayor Wells closed public comment for this item.

Motion made by Councilor Lannamañ to not increase water rates and leave them as they are; seconded by Mayor Wells.

Voting

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

Nay: Councilor Arnold, Councilor Miles

6. Consideration and Approval: (First Reading) **Ordinance 2025-006 - Compensation for Mayor and Town Council Members**

Mayor Wells read Ordinance 2025-006 out loud by title only.

AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF HOWEY-IN-THE-HILLS, FLORIDA, PERTAINING TO THE COMPENSATION OF THE MAYOR, MAYOR PRO TEMPORE AND TOWN COUNCIL MEMBERS; REVISING THE COMPENSATION TO BE PAID TO THE MAYOR, MAYOR PRO TEMPORE AND COUNCILORS IN SECTION 42-10 OF THE TOWN'S CODE OF ORDINANCES; PROVIDING FOR SEVERABILITY, CODIFICATION AND AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, explained that current council pay was halved several years ago and remains among the lowest in Lake County. The proposed increase would raise pay by 50%, though Councilor Miles suggested a more modest \$100 monthly increase for all five members, citing the shift to a council-manager government and fairness in workload.

Mayor Pro Tem Everline opposed any increase, expressing concern about optics and fairness, particularly given that volunteer board members receive no compensation. Other Council members acknowledged the significant time commitment and behind-the-scenes work involved in serving, noting the value of offering a modest incentive to future candidates.

Mayor Wells emphasized the increase was already factored into the draft budget.

Mayor Wells opened Public Comment for this item only.

Carol Roque, 505 Mission Ln. – Town resident, Carol Roque, acknowledged the Council deserves more pay but said the timing feels inappropriate given recent proposed staff raises and economic uncertainty. She noted some residents feel the Town is overspending.

Tom Ballou, 1005 N. Tangerine Ave. – Town resident Tom Ballou echoed concerns about the timing of the proposed Council pay raise, noting it follows recent discussions on staff salary increases. He emphasized that most residents, especially retirees like himself, are facing limited income growth tied to the CPI and may see rising Medicare costs. While he acknowledged and appreciated the Council's hard work, he cautioned that the proposed raise may not sit well with the public right now.

Marie Gallelli, 1104 N. Tangerine Ave. – Town resident, Marie Gallelli, a former council member, recalled voting to cut council pay during her term, believing it was the right thing to do. She expressed concern over the proposed 50% increase, stating that public service should be motivated by community commitment, not compensation.

Ann Griffin, 215 E. Laurel Ave. – Town resident, Ann Griffin, agreed with previous speakers and urged Council members to carefully consider the broader budget context, particularly proposed salary increases. She emphasized the importance of serving the Town with a focus on responsibility and public trust.

Motion made by Councilor Lannamañ to approve Ordinance 2025-006 to a second reading; seconded by Mayor Wells. Motion failed by roll call vote.

Voting

Yea: Mayor Wells

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

Motion made by Councilor Miles to approve Ordinance 2025-006 to a second reading, with an amendment that all five Town Councilor positions (including Mayor and Mayor Pro Tem) receive a raise of just \$100 a month; seconded by Councilor Arnold. Motion approved by roll call vote.

Voting

Yea: Councilor Arnold, Councilor Lannamañ, Councilor Miles

Nay: Mayor Pro Tem Everline, Mayor Wells

DEPARTMENT REPORTS

7. Town Manager

Town Manager, Sean O’Keefe, announced that all property owners had signed the mylar for the Citrus Avenue project plat, and a start date from contractor Paquette is expected soon. He also reminded everyone of the next budget workshop on August 7th at 1:00 p.m. In response to Councilor Miles, Mr. O’Keefe confirmed that the Town has cleared the way for Paquette to begin work on Citrus and that remaining delays on Gardenia are due to utility issues.

COUNCIL MEMBER COMMENT

8. Mayor Pro Tem Everline

Mayor Pro Tem Everline informed the Council that he had been asked by the Heartland League of Cities to serve on a new legislative action committee. Following an initial meeting, members were encouraged to join a Florida League of Cities Policy Committee, and Mayor Pro Tem Everline had submitted an application to join the Public Works Policy Committee. Mayor Pro Tem Everline requested that the Town cover the \$650 registration fee for the upcoming Florida League of Cities annual conference in Orlando, while stating that he would personally cover all other expenses.

Mayor Wells questioned why this request was the first time the Council was hearing about Mayor Pro Tem Everline’s involvement, noting that previous appointments to committees such as the MPO and the Florida Municipal Insurance Trust had all come before the Council for approval. Mayor Pro Tem Everline responded that the committee was new, he had been invited on short notice, and there was no cost associated with the position itself.

Councilor Miles suggested the matter be deferred to the upcoming budget workshop, recommending that the Council consider whether to allocate funds in the new fiscal year for conference or training participation by Council members, noting the Town’s limited financial resources.

In response, Mayor Pro Tem Everline expressed frustration and announced his intention to withdraw from the committee, stating that he had believed his participation would benefit the Town but would respect the Council's lack of support. Mayor Wells emphasized that his concern was about the lack of Council approval for the appointment, not the initiative itself. Mayor Pro Tem Everline reiterated his decision to withdraw and concluded the discussion.

9. Councilor Arnold

Councilor Arnold raised the topic of a forthcoming Town ordinance regarding noise and light, noting that, although Lake County has an ordinance in place, Howey-in-the-Hills must adopt its own version. Town Attorney, Tom Wilkes, reported that a draft was in preparation and expected to be delivered to the Town Manager within the week. Councilor Arnold emphasized the importance of such an ordinance, especially in light of anticipated construction activity and ongoing disturbances reported by residents living near the golf course, who have complained about early morning lawn maintenance noise and bright lights. He noted that, while some may tolerate early activity, residents were justifiably frustrated, particularly by the lighting. Councilor Miles agreed and asked whether the ordinance would need to be expanded to include light as well as noise, which was confirmed. Councilor Arnold clarified that both issues were being addressed in the draft.

10. Councilor Miles

Councilor Miles updated the Council on the proposed Oaks Grove subdivision, located in a Lake County enclave near SR 19 and the bridge. He noted that, at a July 1st County Commission meeting, commissioners advised the developer to limit density to R2 zoning, equivalent to the Town's Medium Density Residential (MDR) zoning, rather than the R4 zoning originally requested. The commissioners also encouraged the developers to coordinate with the Town, since they would require Town utility services.

Councilor Miles pointed out that nearly 30 of the 90 days given for the developers to consult with the Town had passed, yet no contact had been made. He asked the Town Manager to reach out to the developers and initiate a conversation about annexation and working within the Town's development framework. Mayor Wells supported this approach, emphasizing that any provision of water or sewer services by the Town should be conditional upon annexation.

Councilor Miles further requested that the Town clarify on all utility rate documents that non-residents receiving water service are subject to a 25% upcharge, which Town Clerk, John Brock, confirmed is already noted in the Town's fee schedule. Mayor Wells, supported by other Council members, reiterated that the Town should not provide utilities to unincorporated developments without annexation and directed the Town Manager to meet with the developer. This direction received informal consensus from the Council. The Mayor also suggested that the Town Manager attend the future County meeting when the rezoning matter is revisited, ensuring that the Town's position is clearly represented.

11. Councilor Lannamañ

Councilor Lannamañ took a moment to formally recognize and congratulate Police Chief Rick Thomas on his 30 years of service. She expressed appreciation for his dedication and contributions to the Town, offering heartfelt thanks and best wishes for many more years of continued service.

12. Mayor Wells

None

ADJOURNMENT

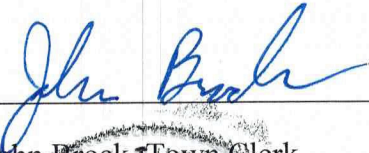
There being no further business to discuss, a motion was made by Councilor Arnold to adjourn the meeting; Councilor Lannamañ seconded the motion. Motion was approved unanimously by voice vote.

The Meeting adjourned at 8:05 p.m. | Attendees: 37



Graham Wells, CMC, Mayor

ATTEST:



John Brock, Town Clerk

