Town Council Meeting

October 26, 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 6:03 p.m.
Councilor Jon Arnold 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 (via Zoom) | 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

Mayor Wells asked for a motion to allow Councilor Lannamañ to participate and vote in the meeting remotely, due to her being at home and sick.

Motion made by Mayor Pro Tem Everline to allow Councilor Lannamañ to participate and vote in the meeting remotely due to illness; seconded by Councilor Miles. Motion approved unanimously by voice vote.

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

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Councilor Arnold, on behalf of the Town Council and the community, presented Councilor Miles with a commemorative display case recognizing his 31 years of municipal service. Councilor Arnold noted Councilor Miles' prior 25 years of service in the U.S. Army and explained that the presentation included commemorative coins and a watercolor depicting recognizable Howey-in-the-Hills landmarks. The inscription honored Councilor Miles as a "soldier, statesman, and friend" and thanked him for his years of community service.

Councilor Miles thanked the Council and acknowledged that, although he had sometimes taken positions that caused disagreement, he believed Howey-in-the-Hills was a better community because of the work accomplished by the Council collectively.

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.

Frances Wagler, 409 W. Central Ave. – Town resident, Frances Wagler, commended the Town Council for conducting two consecutive meetings efficiently, noting that shorter meetings could encourage greater public participation. She wished Councilor Lannamañ a speedy recovery and expressed disappointment regarding the Council's earlier vote concerning remote participation, emphasizing the importance of applying consistent standards to all Council members. Mayor Wells clarified that the Town Charter permits Council members to participate and vote remotely under extenuating circumstances, such as illness, but not for personal reasons such as vacations. He explained that the Town had previously allowed broader remote participation but had corrected its practices to comply with the Charter. Mrs. Wagler thanked Mayor Wells for the clarification and suggested that the distinction should have been explained to the public earlier in the meeting.

Tina St. Clair, 143 E. Central Ave. – Town resident, Tina St. Clair, expressed concerns regarding the status of grant funding for the septic-to-sewer conversion project and the lack of a response to a public records request she had submitted nearly two weeks earlier. She requested information identifying grants applied for, application dates, deadlines, and funding decisions, emphasizing the need for greater transparency. Councilor Miles noted that grant funding would be addressed under upcoming agenda items. Mayor Wells distinguished between the grant discussion and the outstanding public records request, directing Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, to respond. Mr. O'Keefe explained that no records responsive to the request existed because Town staff had not submitted formal grant applications for the project. Instead, staff had met with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) and its Onsyte Sewage Program team, which was pursuing grant funding directly with FDEP on the Town's behalf. He further noted that representatives from Woodard & Curran would discuss additional funding opportunities later in the meeting. Mrs. St. Clair expressed frustration that this information had not been clearly communicated during previous meetings. Councilor Miles reiterated that he intended to discuss the potential use of an existing grant during Agenda Item # 5.

Marie Gallelli, 1104 N. Tangerine Ave. – Town resident, Marie Gallelli, asked for clarification regarding restrictions on yard sale signs ahead of the upcoming Town-wide yard sale. Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, explained that signs may be placed on private property, including neighboring properties with the owner's permission, but are prohibited within Town or Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) rights-of-way. He noted that the restriction had been in place for some time, although enforcement may have increased with the addition of a Code Enforcement Officer. Ms. Gallelli expressed concern that these restrictions could discourage participation in community yard sales. She also raised concerns regarding delays in replacing damaged garbage cans and lids through GFL Environmental. Mr. O'Keefe advised residents to contact Town Hall for assistance and indicated that replacements generally should be addressed within approximately one week. Ms. Gallelli reported that a neighbor had waited more than two weeks without resolution but that she had contacted GFL directly and arranged for a replacement during the next scheduled collection. Councilor Miles shared that a previous replacement of his damaged lid had taken approximately two weeks. Mr. O'Keefe offered to investigate the reported delay and follow up on the matter.

Andi Everline, 1012 N. Lakeshore Blvd. – Town resident, Andi Everline, expressed concerns regarding the handling of a neighbor's complaint about a damaged garbage can lid. She described an interaction between the neighbor and Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, and stated that the neighbor subsequently contacted GFL directly after the issue remained unresolved. According to Mrs. Everline, GFL indicated that numerous garbage cans had been damaged, including some that had been run over, and suggested that the neighbor's broken lid was a less

significant concern. Mrs. Everline expressed disappointment with the response and the manner in which the complaint had been handled.

Joshua Husemann, 671 Avila Pl. – Town resident, Joshua Husemann, shared his positive experience resolving a damaged garbage can issue by submitting a request directly through GFL Environmental's website. He reported receiving a response within 24 hours and having his damaged can replaced within one week, recommending the online process to other residents. Mayor Wells clarified that the Town's established procedure is for residents to report damaged cans or lids to Town Hall, where staff coordinates with GFL, maintains a log of complaints, and follows up to ensure resolution. He emphasized that contacting GFL directly could prevent the Town from tracking complaints and ensuring accountability. Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, confirmed that Town staff member Kim Bohrer oversees this process. Following additional discussion regarding a complaint that had remained unresolved for more than two weeks, Mayor Wells indicated that staff would follow up on the matter.

Tom Ballou, 1005 N. Tangerine Ave. – Town resident, Tom Ballou, commented on the recent community block party held at JB Boondocks, noting that the event was well attended and expressing appreciation for the Council members and Town staff who participated. He questioned why the event had been relocated from its originally proposed location at Virginia's Pancake Palace, emphasizing the benefits of hosting community events in the downtown area. Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, explained that questions remained regarding state alcohol licensing requirements, particularly the sale of poured alcoholic beverages at a location not ordinarily licensed for such sales. Town Clerk, John Brock, clarified that the event, which had been advertised as including live music, alcohol sales, and a street party, required a special event permit under the Town's existing procedures. He explained that the application submitted was incomplete and lacked information identifying the alcohol vendor and the vendor's license number. Mr. Brock further noted that the Town had approximately 72 hours to review the proposed event before organizers withdrew the application and relocated the gathering to JB Boondocks. Mr. Ballou suggested that the situation appeared to result from miscommunication, and Mr. Brock indicated that a properly completed application could have allowed the event to proceed at its original location, subject to applicable requirements.

Banks Helfrich, 9100 Sams Lake Rd., Clermont, FL – County resident, Banks Helfrich, began his remarks with a farming tip about propagating fig and mulberry trees from cuttings. He then reflected on his public comments before the Town Council over the previous 22 months, highlighting recurring themes of reducing property taxes and insurance costs, civic engagement, government accountability, community service, and the importance of kindness, compassion, and responsibility in political discourse. He emphasized that government exists to protect and serve its citizens and that taxes support essential public services. Helfrich concluded by identifying himself as a candidate for Florida House District 25 and expressing his desire to serve the community.

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 October 12, 2026, Town Council Meeting.

2. The approval of the minutes and ratification and confirmation of all Town Council actions at the October 13, 2026, Town Council Workshop.

Motion made by Councilor Miles 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

None

NEW BUSINESS

3. Consideration and Approval: **Stonehill Development (Watermark PUD) - Phase 1 Hardscape and Landscape Plan Approvals**

Town Planner, April Fisher, presented the Stonehill Phase 1 Hardscape and Landscape Plans, explaining that the hardscape portion had been deferred when the final subdivision plan was approved on December 8, 2025, to allow the developer, Pulte, to prepare its proposal. Ms. Fisher stated that the proposed plans complied with the Town's Land Development Code and the development agreement and included landscaping enhancements beyond the original subdivision plans. She recommended approval.

Pulte representative, Christopher Anderson, presented the proposed improvements, including a landscaped entrance, pedestrian walkways, mail kiosks, benches, a pergola, decorative pavers, lighting, trash receptacles, and landscape buffers along the northeastern and southern boundaries. Mr. Anderson also provided a conceptual overview of the Phase 2 amenity center, which was not part of the current approval request. He indicated that approximately $1.7 million was budgeted for amenities, including a fitness center, infinity pool, hot tub, fire pit, outdoor grilling station, and covered gathering space.

Mayor Pro Tem Everline requested consideration of changing rooms and restrooms at the proposed swimming pool and suggested using durable materials for the pergola. Mr. Anderson confirmed that restrooms would be included in the final design and agreed to consider incorporating changing rooms.

Councilor Miles discussed the subdivision's compliance with changes to the Town's lot-size requirements, explaining that the development was among the first to incorporate larger lots following amendments to the Town's Land Development Code. He noted that quarter-acre lots had been included as part of Phase 3 and subsequently distributed throughout the development, along with 70-foot-wide and 80-foot-wide lots.

Mr. Anderson concluded the presentation and offered to answer any additional questions from the Town Council. Mayor Wells opened this item for public comment.

George Lehning, 1004 N. Citrus Ave. – Town resident, George Lehning, expressed concerns regarding the potential for delays in the Stonehill development due to current housing market conditions. He referenced the Venezia development, where infrastructure had remained in place for several years without further development, and questioned whether Stonehill could experience similar delays. Mr. Lehning asked about the status of pre-sales and suggested that the Town consider the possibility of delayed development when discussing contingency planning later in the meeting.

Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, responded to Mr. Lehning's concerns, explaining that, while performance bonds provide financial protection to ensure the completion of required infrastructure and amenities, they do not guarantee that residential lots will be developed or homes constructed within a particular timeframe. He deferred questions regarding pre-sales and market conditions to the developer.

Pulte representative, Christopher Anderson, stated that he could not provide specific pre-sale figures because he was not directly involved in sales or market analysis. However, he indicated that the development's outlook appeared positive and that additional information would be available following an upcoming meeting with Pulte's project team. Mr. Anderson confirmed that a performance bond was

in place to ensure completion of the subdivision's infrastructure and that, in the unlikely event the developer could not complete the project, the Town would have financial security available to cover the remaining infrastructure construction costs.

Mayor Wells closed public comment and asked for a motion on this item.

Motion made by Councilor Miles to approve the Stonehill Development (Watermark PUD) - Phase 1 Hardscape and Landscape 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

4. Presentation: **Woodard and Curran Projects Status Updates**

Woodard & Curran representative, Scott Shannon, presented an update on the Town's wastewater planning and design project, funded through a $3.185 million federal appropriation administered by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP). Mr. Shannon explained that the project is intended to address future wastewater capacity needs, accommodate anticipated growth, improve water quality, and reduce reliance on existing and future septic systems. He reported that the initial planning phase had been completed and that work was underway on two primary components: preliminary design of a wastewater collection system for Old Howey and evaluation of the potential acquisition of wastewater treatment capacity at the existing wastewater treatment plant serving the Central Lake Community Development District (CDD).

Mr. Shannon explained that preliminary design of the Old Howey collection system was expected to be completed by the end of 2026, with the wastewater treatment plant acquisition evaluation anticipated by April 2027. The collection system design would identify proposed pipeline locations, pipe sizes, flow directions, lift stations, and estimated construction costs. The study would also compare the costs of a centralized sewer collection system with distributed wastewater treatment alternatives. Regarding treatment capacity, Mr. Shannon stated that the consultant was reviewing the existing facility's design, operational records, capacity, and potential improvements needed to accommodate the Town's future wastewater demands. He emphasized that no negotiations with the facility's owners had been initiated and that the evaluation would help establish a potential acquisition value for future Council consideration. Approximately $2 million of the original grant would remain available for additional planning and design work, with the grant scheduled to expire in May 2028.

Councilor Miles asked several questions regarding the project's estimated costs and scope. Mr. Shannon confirmed that the preliminary estimate included approximately $4 million for acquiring wastewater treatment capacity, although the actual acquisition cost would depend on negotiations and the Town's existing contractual rights. Councilor Miles clarified that the wastewater treatment plant was privately owned and leased to the CDD rather than owned directly by the CDD. Mr. Shannon also confirmed that the estimated construction costs did not include private-property expenses associated with abandoning septic tanks or installing sewer laterals to individual homes, which would represent additional costs.

Councilor Miles questioned the approximately $13 million construction estimate for the collection system, noting that the preliminary design assumed sewer mains would be installed beneath existing roadways. He suggested that placing sewer lines along the sides of roads, where feasible, could significantly reduce construction and roadway restoration costs. Mr. Shannon acknowledged that the preliminary estimate reflected a conservative approach and that alternative alignments would be evaluated during subsequent design phases. Councilor Miles also asked about future wastewater treatment plant expansion needs. Mr. Shannon explained that the initial planning study projected a potential need for expansion around 2044, depending on actual development and population growth, and confirmed that expansion costs were not included in the current estimates.

Councilor Miles further questioned whether the remaining approximately $2 million in grant funding could be used to evaluate and design wastewater improvements for four areas not included in the initial study: Mission Santa Cruz, Island Drive, the Maryland Street area near Number Two Road, and residential properties south of Town near Venezia. He noted that several of these areas were located near existing wastewater infrastructure and suggested that connecting them might be relatively economical. He also discussed the failing septic system serving Mission Santa Cruz and the potential use of an advanced onsite wastewater treatment alternative. Mr. Shannon indicated that additional engineering evaluations and designs could potentially qualify under the grant, although eligibility and project costs would need to be confirmed. Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, noted that some areas may have been excluded from the original study because their estimated costs per household exceeded applicable planning criteria.

Councilor Miles requested that an agenda item be prepared for Council consideration regarding the feasibility and estimated costs of incorporating these four additional areas into the grant-funded design work. Mr. Shannon agreed that a proposal could be prepared, subject to Council direction, but could not provide a cost estimate without further evaluation. Mayor Wells expressed support for exploring additional eligible engineering and design work while grant funds remained available, particularly given the May 2028 expiration date.

Public Services Director, Morgan Cates, raised an additional concern regarding the potential acquisition of the wastewater treatment plant. He explained that acquiring the facility could result in the Town serving wastewater customers who did not receive their drinking water from the Town, including customers within Mission Inn. He noted that the Town's existing utility billing and enforcement procedures rely in part on its ability to discontinue water service for nonpayment, which could present challenges for sewer-only customers. Councilor Miles acknowledged the concern and suggested that the Town might also consider acquiring the associated water utility as part of any future negotiations, allowing the Town greater control over utility services and operations.

Mayor Wells opened this item for public comment.

Tom Ballou, 1005 N. Tangerine Ave. – Town resident, Tom Ballou, asked whether any unspent grant funds remaining after the May 2028 deadline would be returned to the federal government.

Following the public comment, Mayor Wells thanked Woodard & Curran representative Scott Shannon for the presentation and requested that Mr. Shannon prepare cost estimates for the four additional wastewater service areas identified by Councilor Miles and return to the Town Council with that information at a future meeting. Mr. Shannon agreed to do so.

5. Discussion: **Public Services Grant Update**

Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, introduced Public Services Director, Morgan Cates, who provided an update on grants awarded to the Town and the status of ongoing grant-funded projects. Mr. Cates explained that the presentation was intended to inform the Town Council and residents about the Town's grant acquisition efforts over the previous four years and address concerns raised during Council meetings, candidate forums, and public discussions regarding the Town's pursuit of outside funding.

Mr. Cates reviewed several significant grants, including state appropriations for the Town's new water treatment plant, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) hazard mitigation grants, the South Dixie drainage improvement project, Lower Floridan Aquifer well construction, and stormwater improvements funded through the Lake County Water Authority. He explained that several projects had been completed and were awaiting reimbursement from state or federal agencies. Regarding the South Dixie project, Mr. Cates noted that the Florida Division of Emergency Management had required the project to be divided into design and construction phases, with the Town continuing to coordinate land acquisition and surveying with the affected property owner and Town Attorney.

Mr. Cates reported that the grants included in his presentation represented approximately $7,957,071.97 in total project costs, with anticipated grant reimbursements of $7,143,108 and a remaining Town contribution of approximately $813,963.97, representing roughly 10% of the total costs. He stated that Public Services staff, working with the Town Manager, were currently administering eight grants. Mr. Cates emphasized that Town staff had prepared the applications and managed the grants internally without hiring outside grant writers or administrators.

Councilor Miles commended Mr. Cates, Mr. O'Keefe, and Town staff for their efforts in obtaining grant funding and completing projects. He noted that several completed projects were still awaiting reimbursement and asked whether the Town could accelerate the process of obtaining funds from state and federal agencies. Mr. O'Keefe indicated that staff could contact the Town's legislative representatives to seek assistance with outstanding reimbursements.

Mr. O'Keefe clarified that the presentation did not include every grant awarded to the Town, including the approximately $3.185 million federal wastewater planning and design grant being administered by Woodard & Curran. Mr. Cates noted that smaller grants, including landscaping improvements funded through Keep Lake Beautiful, were also excluded. Councilor Miles observed that including these additional grants would bring the Town's grant funding efforts to more than $10 million over recent years. He expressed appreciation for the collective efforts of Town staff and current and previous Town Councils in securing funding for major infrastructure improvements.

Mr. Cates emphasized that Council support and authorization were essential to successfully obtaining and administering grant funding. He also discussed the potential financial implications of proposed Amendment 3, explaining that many grants operate on a reimbursement basis and require municipalities to provide upfront construction funding and, in some cases, matching funds. Mr. Cates expressed concern that a significant reduction in property tax revenues could limit the Town's ability to finance projects initially, even when grant reimbursements would eventually cover much of the expense.

Councilor Miles raised concerns regarding financial assistance for individual property owners who may be required to connect to a future centralized wastewater collection system. He noted that septic tank abandonment, private sewer lateral installation, and applicable connection fees could create substantial financial burdens for homeowners. Councilor Miles asked whether grant programs were available to help offset these private-property expenses, emphasizing that securing funding for public infrastructure was only part of the challenge.

Woodard & Curran representative Scott Shannon explained that grant opportunities for improvements on private property were considerably more limited than those available for public infrastructure. However, he identified Community Development Block Grants and certain Water Management District funding programs as potential sources of assistance. Mr. Shannon confirmed that Woodard & Curran had experience working with these types of grants. Councilor Miles emphasized the importance of pursuing these opportunities to assist property owners who may struggle to afford mandatory sewer connections.

Mayor Wells thanked Mr. Cates for the presentation and opened the floor for public comment on the agenda item.

Mitzi Maxwell, 803 Camino Real Blvd. - Town resident, Mitzi Maxwell, thanked the Town for including the Public Services grant outline in the meeting packet and acknowledged the Town's success in securing infrastructure funding. Drawing on her professional experience in nonprofit grant administration and grant review for the State of Florida and the National Endowment for the Arts, Ms. Maxwell suggested expanding the report into a comprehensive Town-wide grant inventory. She recommended identifying funding sources, administering agencies, application and award dates, expenditure deadlines, reporting requirements, reimbursement status, and grant closeout information. She also encouraged tracking unsuccessful applications and potential funding opportunities currently under consideration.

Ms. Maxwell emphasized that grant funding is often competitive and requires careful planning, knowledge of application requirements, and advocacy. She specifically requested greater transparency regarding grant opportunities being pursued to assist residents facing mandatory septic-to-sewer connection costs, including which programs had been investigated and the status of any applications. Ms. Maxwell concluded by offering to volunteer her professional experience to help the Town identify and pursue additional funding opportunities, emphasizing that residents possess valuable skills and expertise that could benefit the community beyond participation in public comment.

Mayor Wells closed public comment on this item and asked for a motion for a three-minute recess at 7:36 p.m.

Motion made by Councilor Miles for a five-minute meeting recess; 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

6. Discussion: **Amendment 3 Contingency Planning**

Mayor Wells reconvened the meeting at 7:42 p.m. and introduced the discussion regarding contingency planning for proposed Amendment 3. Councilor Lannamañ explained that she had requested the agenda item following conversations with residents about the potential financial impacts of the amendment. She acknowledged that specific contingency measures would depend on the outcome of the November 3, 2026, election but emphasized the importance of preparing to maintain the Town's financial stability, essential services, and staffing levels should the amendment pass.

Mayor Wells expressed opposition to Amendment 3, describing it as a potential threat to municipal home rule and local government funding. He estimated that the Town could lose approximately $500,000 to $550,000 in property tax revenue during the first year of implementation, with annual losses potentially increasing to $900,000 to $1 million in the following year. Mayor Wells noted that the Town had strengthened its financial reserves, including an additional $500,000 set aside during the previous fiscal year, which could help offset initial revenue losses. He also anticipated additional revenues from residential development and future commercial establishments, including Publix. However, he expressed concern about the Town's longer-term ability to absorb substantial reductions in property tax revenue.

Mr. O'Keefe explained that staff had evaluated the potential impacts of Amendment 3 and discussed the issue with neighboring municipalities and Lake County officials. He indicated that Howey-in-the-Hills was comparatively well positioned because of its relatively limited public safety expenditures, existing water and wastewater utility revenues, anticipated development, and financial flexibility. Unlike some municipalities, the Town does not operate its own fire department, emergency medical services, or dispatch center. Mr. O'Keefe estimated that the construction of approximately 120 to 130 additional homes could generate sufficient property tax revenue to offset much of the projected first-year reduction, assuming development proceeded as anticipated.

Mr. O'Keefe cautioned that the amendment could also create indirect financial consequences through intergovernmental agreements and shared services. He explained that Lake County and other governmental entities experiencing revenue reductions might reconsider existing arrangements, potentially resulting in additional costs to the Town for services such as emergency dispatch, library operations, and other cooperative programs. He also identified the potential loss of grant funding and shared resources as concerns. Mr. O'Keefe emphasized that meaningful contingency planning would

require evaluating not only the Town's direct revenue losses but also decisions made by other governmental agencies following the election.

Councilor Arnold referenced a recent University of North Florida poll indicating approximately 50% support for Amendment 3, 35% opposition, and 14% undecided voters, noting that the measure required 60% approval to pass. He also mentioned an upcoming state-level review of taxes and expenditures as a possible alternative opportunity to address property tax relief. Councilor Miles stated that he had already voted against the amendment.

Councilor Lannamañ also stated that she had voted against Amendment 3 and reiterated that her purpose in requesting the discussion was to ensure that the Town Council publicly addressed the potential financial consequences rather than leaving the matter unresolved. She thanked the Council for participating in the discussion. Mayor Wells subsequently opened the floor for public comment on the agenda item.

Mike Sears, 541 Avila Pl. – Town resident, Mike Sears, expressed concerns about the potential financial impact of Amendment 3 on property owners. He referenced a church in Winter Garden that reportedly faced a $12,000 property-related assessment and questioned whether the Town Council would consider increasing property taxes or imposing additional assessments on residential, commercial, or otherwise tax-exempt properties to offset potential revenue losses if the amendment passed.

Councilor Miles explained that religious institutions are generally exempt from property taxes and questioned whether the assessment referenced by Mr. Sears might instead be a non-ad valorem assessment for municipal services. Councilor Miles noted that the Town had reduced its millage rate by approximately three mills over the previous five years, from more than nine mills to the recently adopted rate of 6.6250 mills. While emphasizing the Council's efforts to reduce property taxes, he acknowledged that a future Council might need to consider increasing the millage rate to maintain municipal operations. Mayor Pro Tem Everline and Mayor Wells discussed statutory limitations and voting requirements associated with millage increases, including the Town's maximum allowable rate of 10 mills.

Mr. O'Keefe stated that anticipated residential and commercial growth could potentially offset most or all of the revenue losses associated with Amendment 3. He explained that future Councils would need to determine whether to maintain the current pace of capital improvements, reduce expenditures, or consider additional property tax revenues to support ongoing projects. Mayor Wells reiterated that the Town's financial reserves and anticipated growth placed Howey-in-the-Hills in a comparatively favorable position to manage potential revenue reductions. No commitment was made regarding future millage rates or additional assessments.

The discussion also addressed concerns about language in the proposed amendment relating to property reassessments beginning January 1, 2027. Mayor Wells expressed concern that the language could result in properties being reassessed at current market values. Councilor Arnold reported that he had consulted representatives from the Florida League of Cities and the Lake County Property Appraiser's Office, both of whom indicated that the amendment was not expected to supersede existing Save Our Homes protections or require a general reassessment of homesteaded properties at full market value. Councilor Arnold acknowledged that a different judicial interpretation could potentially arise. Mayor Wells noted that differing interpretations of the proposed language remained a concern.

Mayor Wells thanked Mr. Sears for his questions and, following an opportunity for additional comments, closed the public comment portion of the agenda item.

7. Consideration and Approval: **Strategic Plan**

Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, presented the Town's proposed Strategic Plan for consideration and approval. He explained that the document incorporated feedback received during a previous Town Council workshop, along with updated formatting and graphics reflecting the Town's identity and colors. Mr. O'Keefe acknowledged Councilor Arnold's significant contributions to developing the plan and thanked those involved in reviewing and editing the document. He emphasized that adoption of the plan would represent an important milestone, as it would be the first officially approved Strategic Plan in the Town's history.

Councilor Arnold explained that the Strategic Plan was intended to establish long-term goals and priorities rather than serve as a rigid schedule of required actions. He described the document as a framework for identifying important projects, such as future police facilities and a municipal complex, while allowing flexibility to respond to changing circumstances and emerging needs. Mayor Wells agreed, describing the Strategic Plan as a living document that could be revised as the Town's priorities and circumstances evolved.

Councilor Miles indicated that he had submitted several minor corrections to the Town Manager, including replacing his photograph and adjusting language related to wastewater and septic-to-sewer project timelines. Mr. O'Keefe clarified that the proposed revisions would change references to fiscal years 2031 and 2032 to "by FY 2031–2032" to provide greater flexibility. He also noted a proposed change from "inactive proposals" to "other proposals" when referencing the Westminster and Thompson developments. Mayor Wells confirmed that an outdated reference to Donnelly in connection with the naming of a Town park had been removed.

Following the discussion, Mayor Wells invited public comment. Hearing none, he closed public comment and requested a motion to approve the Strategic Plan.

Motion made by Councilor Miles to approve the Strategic Plan; 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

DEPARTMENT REPORTS

8. Town Manager

Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, provided several community updates, reporting that installation of the 12-inch water main was underway along DuPont Circle and N. Florida Ave. He also reminded residents that the Town-wide Fall Yard Sale would take place from Friday, October 30, through Sunday, November 1, 2026, coinciding with the daylight-saving time change. Additionally, Mr. O'Keefe announced that the Town's Trunk-or-Treat Halloween event would be held at Central Park on Saturday, October 31, 2026, from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.

COUNCIL MEMBER COMMENT

9. Mayor Pro Tem Everline

Mayor Pro Tem Everline thanked Public Services Director, Morgan Cates, and his staff for their work on the lakeshore docks, noting that an additional walkway had been installed and materials were being delivered for the remaining docks. Mayor Pro Tem Everline also asked whether residents had been notified about the ongoing 12-inch water main installation project. Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, confirmed that door hanger notices had been distributed to affected residents.

10. Councilor Arnold

Councilor Arnold expressed disappointment regarding the vandalism of several of his campaign signs, reporting that the signs had been cut from their supporting posts while nearby campaign signs remained undamaged. He stated that a police report had been filed and noted that destruction of campaign signs could carry criminal penalties. Despite the incidents, Councilor Arnold indicated that he intended to replace the damaged signs.

Councilor Arnold also commented positively on the recent community gathering at JB Boondocks, noting the strong attendance and favorable weather. He expressed interest in organizing a future Oktoberfest event, mentioning that the establishment's manager was receptive to the idea. Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, added that the manager previously worked in Helen, Georgia, a community known for its Bavarian-themed atmosphere and celebrations.

11. Councilor Miles

None

12. Councilor Lannamañ

Councilor Lannamañ expressed her appreciation to her fellow Town Council members for their dedication and accomplishments over the previous four years, acknowledging the challenges they had faced and the importance of teamwork. She specifically thanked Councilor Miles for sharing his knowledge and experience throughout their time serving together. Councilor Lannamañ also expressed interest in observing the Town's continued progress under future Councils.

Councilor Lannamañ extended her gratitude to Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, Town Clerk, John Brock, Public Services Director, Morgan Cates, and the entire Town staff for their contributions and support. She emphasized that the Council's accomplishments would not have been possible without the efforts of Town employees and expressed her hope that the staff would continue to serve the community in the years ahead. She concluded by wishing Councilor Miles well.

13. Mayor Wells

Mayor Wells echoed Councilor Lannamañ's appreciation for the outgoing Town Council members and thanked Councilor Miles for his service and contributions, particularly during the Mayor's previous two years in office. He reflected on the Council's accomplishments and expressed appreciation for the opportunity to work with his fellow Council members. Mayor Wells noted that he and Mayor Pro Tem Everline would continue serving on the Council and acknowledged that the upcoming election could bring new members. He emphasized that significant work remained to be accomplished and expressed his commitment to working collaboratively with whoever was elected to serve the Town.

ADJOURNMENT

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

The Meeting adjourned at 8:15 p.m. | **Attendees: 40**

Timothy A. Everline

Timothy A. Everline, Mayor

ATTEST:

John Brock, Town Clerk