



Town Council Meeting

August 11, 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 6:00 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 | Tom Wilkes, Town Attorney | Rick Thomas, Police Chief | Morgan Cates, Public Services Director | Lisa Busto, Town Planner | April Fisher, Town Planner (via Zoom) | John Brock, Deputy Town Manager / Town Clerk

Motion made by Councilor Lannamañ to approve Mayor Pro Tem Everline's ability to participate and vote during this meeting remotely via Zoom; 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

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

None

AGENDA APPROVAL/REVIEW

Motion made by Mayor Pro Tem Everline to move agenda item #5 to occur directly behind the Public Hearing section of the meeting; seconded by Councilor Lannamañ. Motion approved by voice vote.

Voting

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

Nay: Councilor Arnold, Councilor Miles

Motion made by Councilor Lannamañ to approve the meeting's agenda as amended by the earlier motion; 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 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, Tom Ballou, expressed appreciation to the Council for placing a high-interest item earlier on the agenda rather than at the end. He noted that, when controversial or widely followed topics are scheduled last, many residents who attend to voice their opinions may leave early due to fatigue or time constraints. He encouraged the Council to continue prioritizing such items earlier in meetings, as was done that evening.

Tina St. Clair, 135 E. Central Ave. – Town resident, Tina St. Clair, inquired about a notice she had seen on the Town board concerning crosswalks and pedestrian safety. She noted that she could not find the event listed on the Town calendar and was unsure of the details.

Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, explained that the police department organized a pedestrian safety operation in which officers dressed in civilian clothes used the crosswalk to monitor driver compliance. Officers stationed nearby issued citations to those who failed to yield, as required when a pedestrian steps into the crosswalk. Mr. O'Keefe commended the police department for their educational efforts during the event.

Public Services Director, Morgan Cates, provided additional context regarding the pedestrian safety operation, explaining that it was part of a broader countywide initiative in partnership with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT). The program involved monitoring driver compliance at crosswalks, including counting how many cars failed to stop when pedestrians entered the crosswalk. He expressed hope that the data collected would lead to a reevaluation of the intersection's safety features.

Mrs. St. Clair responded with skepticism about stepping into traffic to test driver behavior, expressing concern for her safety. She stated that, as a pedestrian, she would hesitate to enter the crosswalk if cars were not clearly stopping. Mr. Cates replied that those who did not yield during the operation were met with enforcement.

Marie Gallelli, 1104 N. Tangerine Ave. – Town resident, Marie Gallelli, raised two primary concerns during public comment. First, she reiterated a previous suggestion to improve the Town's audio setup for hybrid meetings. She noted that, during a recent meeting, remote participants could not be heard clearly by those attending in person. This lack of clarity, she said, made residents feel as though their presence and participation did not matter. Mrs. Gallelli offered to donate an external speaker for use during Zoom calls, suggesting it could be connected to the Town Clerk's computer to enhance sound quality. She emphasized that improving audio should not rely on the mayor having to repeat everything said by remote participants.

Second, Mrs. Gallelli followed up on a prior discussion regarding grant opportunities. She recalled that Mrs. Brianna Pino was hired to assist with grants, particularly for the administration, and questioned whether she or someone similar could help the police chief identify and apply for public safety grants. She referenced a recent instance where the police chief had candidly acknowledged missing a grant deadline and asked whether additional staffing support could help prevent such situations in the future. Chief Rick Thomas responded that grants vary widely by type and source, and while some, such as those for stormwater, fall outside his purview, the department typically pursues grants related to equipment and public safety needs. He acknowledged Mrs. Gallelli's concern and affirmed her broader point about seeking additional support for grant identification and application.

Andi Everline, 1012 N. Lakeshore Blvd. – Town resident, Andi Everline, voiced ongoing frustration with the Town’s waste collection service (GFL). She noted that yard waste is now being collected together with regular trash on Mondays, despite prior practice of separating yard debris for later pickup. She also reported that palm fronds left at the curb were not collected due to allegedly exceeding the three-cubic-foot limit, though she questioned that assessment and found conflicting information when researching the volume limit online. Mrs. Everline expressed concern about debris remaining at the curb for extended periods and emphasized she should not be expected to transport it back and forth herself.

In response, Councilor Miles proposed that the Town begin systematically documenting resident complaints regarding waste service. He suggested that the Code Enforcement Officer, who is regularly in the field, could track these issues to build a record that may justify invoking the separation clause in the Town’s contract with the waste hauler. Town Manager, Sean O’Keefe, encouraged residents to call Town Hall directly on the day issues occur so that staff can immediately record and resolve the complaint. Councilor Miles agreed that gathering this data could form the basis for formal action, noting that, without intervention, the Town remains under contract for another three years.

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.

None

PUBLIC HEARING

1. Consideration and Approval: (Second 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.

The Town Council held the second reading of Ordinance 2025-006, which pertains to revising the monthly compensation for the Mayor, Mayor Pro Tem, and Town Council Members. Town Manager, Sean O’Keefe, clarified that the only change from the first reading was a reduction in the proposed increase, setting compensation at \$100 more per month for each position rather than the previously discussed 50% overall increase (however this is still 50% more for the standard Town Councilors, just not the Mayor and Mayor Pro Tem).

During Council discussion, Mayor Pro Tem Everline proposed an amendment to delay the implementation of the new compensation until after each council member’s next election cycle, to avoid the appearance of voting for their own raises. Mayor Wells acknowledged the concern, noting that staggered election cycles might still result in most members benefiting during their current terms. He emphasized that the decision ultimately rests with each council member’s conscience, and those uncomfortable with the measure could vote against it.

Mayor Wells called for public comment on this item, but no members of the public commented on the ordinance.

Motion made by Councilor Miles to approve Ordinance 2025-006; seconded by Councilor Lannamañ. Motion was approved by roll call vote.

Voting

Yea: Councilor Arnold, Councilor Lannamañ, Councilor Miles

Nay: Mayor Pro Tem Everline, Mayor Wells

OLD BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

5. Consideration and Approval: **Resolution 2025-012 - Official Town Representation**

This item was moved to this position in the meeting during the Agenda Approval section of the meeting.

Mayor Wells read Resolution 2025-012 out loud by title only.

A RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN COUNCIL OF THE TOWN OF HOWEY-IN-THE-HILLS, FLORIDA, ESTABLISHING A FORMAL POLICY GOVERNING OFFICIAL REPRESENTATION OF THE TOWN BY ELECTED OFFICIALS ON EXTERNAL BOARDS, COMMITTEES, OR AT EVENTS; PROVIDING FOR PROCEDURES, LIMITATIONS ON EXPENDITURES, AND AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

The Council considered Resolution 2025-012, which would establish a formal policy governing official representation of the Town by elected officials when participating in external boards, committees, or public events. The resolution also outlines procedures for such representation, including limitations on expenditures and reimbursement policies for travel, conference attendance, and per diem expenses.

Town Manager, Sean O’Keefe, explained that the resolution was developed in response to prior Council discussions regarding representation and the need for a clear, consistent framework for covering associated costs. The proposed policy aims to ensure all Council members understand the expectations and financial parameters related to representing the Town.

Councilor Miles expressed skepticism, questioning the need for a formal policy after the Town has operated for 100 years without one.

Mayor Wells opened Public Comment for this item only.

Tom Ballou, 1005 N. Tangerine Ave. – Town Resident, Tom Ballou, strongly opposed Resolution 2025-012, expressing concern that it would limit elected officials' ability to represent the Town and participate in valuable networking opportunities. He emphasized the importance of council members attending external meetings and conferences to gather ideas and best practices that could benefit the Town, arguing that such participation helps avoid unnecessary duplication of effort. Mr. Ballou questioned the origin of the resolution and requested transparency regarding its authorship. Town Manager, Sean O’Keefe, clarified that the resolution was drafted collaboratively by the Town Manager and Town Clerk, with input from the Town Attorney. Mr. Ballou concluded by drawing a historical

parallel to the principle of "taxation without representation," suggesting that the resolution undermines the representative role of elected officials.

Tina St. Clair, 135 E Central Ave. – Town resident, Tina St. Clair, voiced her opposition to Resolution 2025-012, expressing concern that it reflected an overly controlling or bureaucratic approach inconsistent with the character of a small town like Howey-in-the-Hills. She argued that residents who volunteer their time to represent the Town at events and engage in networking to gather ideas should be appreciated, not subjected to restrictive oversight. Drawing a parallel to previous attempts to impose HOA-like regulations through code enforcement, Mrs. St. Clair suggested that the resolution felt similarly heavy-handed. She questioned whether any undisclosed incident might have prompted the proposal, such as misconduct while representing the Town, but emphasized that, in the absence of such context, she saw no valid justification for implementing the proposed policy.

Kathleen Ormsbee, 301 N. Lakeshore Blvd. – Town resident, Kathleen Ormsbee, briefly spoke against Resolution 2025-012. She noted that elected officials already take a pledge to serve the Town to the best of their abilities upon assuming office and expressed the view that this commitment should be sufficient. In her opinion, the proposed resolution was unnecessary.

Marie Gallelli, 1104 N. Tangerine Ave. – Town resident, Marie Gallelli, a former Council member, voiced strong opposition to Resolution 2025-012, characterizing it as unnecessary regulation and bureaucratic overreach. She stated that the Town has historically operated well without such a policy and saw no evidence of excessive spending by Council members attending meetings or serving on committees. Mrs. Gallelli questioned whether the resolution was prompted by a specific incident of misuse, noting that, during her time on Council, no such concerns were raised. She further pointed out that the Town Manager himself serves on numerous committees, suggesting that, if oversight is needed, it should be applied equitably. Ultimately, she argued that the resolution appeared to be more about controlling elected officials than ensuring fiscal responsibility, and she rejected the implication that Council members need such oversight, given the volunteer nature of their service.

Ann Griffin, 215 E Laurel Ave. – Town resident, Ann Griffin, expressed deep concern about the direction of the Town and voiced strong agreement with previous speakers opposing Resolution 2025-012. She conveyed frustration over recent developments, stating that she felt disheartened by what she perceives as division and unnecessary policymaking.

Mr. O'Keefe explained that the resolution was drafted in response to previous Council discussions about representation and reimbursement practices. He noted the lack of a current policy and suggested that having a clear framework could provide consistency moving forward.

Councilor Arnold raised concerns about unchecked spending, citing the potential cost of multiple council members attending conferences. He questioned whether all five members should attend events or whether it would be more prudent to send one representative to report back. However, Mayor Pro Tem Everline countered that any council member interested in attending should be permitted to do so, as is common in other municipalities, and pointed out the importance of having Howey-in-the-Hills represented at state-level gatherings.

Mayor Pro Tem Everline strongly opposed the resolution, arguing it was unnecessary and restrictive, particularly in cases where timely opportunities arise. He emphasized that elected officials already require Council approval for reimbursements and cannot unilaterally authorize expenditures. He also criticized the perceived double standard that allows staff to attend conferences without similar constraints and noted that he would be attending the Florida League of Cities conference at his own expense due to a prior Council vote denying reimbursement. He questioned the motivation for the resolution and suggested it implied a lack of trust in elected officials.

Town Attorney, Tom Wilkes, confirmed that most cities and counties in Florida do not have resolutions like this. Instead, they typically rely on budget allocations and ad hoc Council decisions to determine attendance and reimbursement, emphasizing that conferences offer significant value for elected officials and staff.

Councilor Lannamañ acknowledged the concerns but maintained that having a policy could provide protection for future councils and better budgeting clarity. She emphasized that such a policy need not be restrictive but could serve as a guideline for accountability and financial planning.

After extensive discussion, Councilor Miles moved to deny Resolution 2025-012, stating that the Town had operated effectively without such a policy for over a century and that prudent fiscal behavior and open communication had guided past decisions. Councilor Arnold seconded the motion.

Following brief additional comments, including agreement on the importance of budgeting for training and education, the Council voted on the motion to deny the resolution. Prior to the vote, members expressed a consensus that each council member should continue to notify Council in advance of any training or event participation and seek approval for reimbursements on a case-by-case basis. There was also a tacit agreement that council members who fail to attend pre-paid events should reimburse the Town.

With it appearing that the resolution would be formally denied, Mayor Wells instructed the Town Clerk to document the discussion thoroughly for future reference.

**Motion made by Councilor Miles to deny resolution 2025-012; 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

Following the denial of Resolution 2025-012, Councilor Arnold requested to add a new item to the agenda to consider reimbursement for Mayor Pro Tem Everline's expenses related to his attendance at the upcoming Florida League of Cities annual conference. Councilor Arnold acknowledged that his perspective had shifted after recent discussions and interactions at a luncheon, which underscored the importance of engagement and advocacy in the face of potential threats to home rule and municipal funding.

Councilor Arnold commended Mayor Pro Tem Everline for taking the initiative to attend the conference and initially made a motion to approve the reimbursement. Upon clarification from the Town Clerk that a four-fifths vote was required to add a new consideration item to the agenda, Councilor Arnold amended his motion, accordingly, moving first to add the discussion and reimbursement of Mayor Pro Tem Everline's travel expenses as a formal agenda item. The motion to amend was seconded, allowing the Council to proceed with addressing the reimbursement request.

Motion made by Councilor Arnold to bring up consideration and approval of reimbursement for Mayor Pro Tem Everline's costs for attending the Florida League of Cities annual conference in Orlando; seconded by Councilor Miles. Motion approved by roll call vote.

Voting

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

ADDED NEW BUSINESS ITEM - Consideration and approval: Reimbursement for Mayor Pro Tem Everline's costs for attending the Florida League of Cities (FLC) annual conference in Orlando

Following the addition of a new discussion item, the Council considered the reimbursement of \$766 in expenses for Mayor Pro Tem Everline to attend the upcoming FLC annual conference in Lake Buena Vista. Mayor Pro Tem Everline clarified that he would not be seeking reimbursement for hotel accommodations or meals, and that the total amount included conference registration, parking, gas, and tolls.

Town Manager Sean O'Keefe confirmed that, while there were no remaining funds in the current fiscal year's budget for this expense, the reimbursement could be accommodated through an end-of-year budget reconciliation and transfer.

Mayor Wells opened Public Comment for this item only.

Tom Ballou, 1005 N. Tangerine Ave. – Town resident, Tom Ballou, thanked the Council for bringing up this discussion item.

Seeing no further public comment, Mayor Wells closed Public Comment for this item.

Motion made by Councilor Arnold to reimburse Mayor Pro Tem Everline's cost for attending the FLC annual conference; seconded by Councilor Lannamañ. Motion approved unanimously by roll call vote.

Voting

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

Nay: None

2. **Consideration and Approval: (Town Council acting as the Audit Committee) Town Auditor RFP Selection**

The Council considered the selection of an audit firm in response to the recent RFP 2025-005 for Town auditing services. Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, presented the two submitted proposals: one from James Moore & Co. and the other from Mauldin & Jenkins. He noted both firms were qualified and based in Florida, though James Moore's proposal was approximately \$9,000 less for the first year when including the anticipated single audit, with a projected cost of \$32,000 compared to \$41,000 for Mauldin & Jenkins.

Councilor Miles asked for context on past audit costs, and Mr. O'Keefe confirmed that the Town previously paid approximately \$23,000–\$24,000 for annual audits, anticipating future increases due to the scale of current projects and grant activity. Council members discussed each firm's qualifications, with Mayor Wells strongly endorsing James Moore based on positive prior experience during his tenure in Astatula, noting their reliability, responsiveness, and expertise.

Town Clerk, John Brock, suggested holding a workshop to hear from both firms directly, but the Council ultimately chose not to pursue that route. However, a representative from James Moore, Mr. Noah Leonard, was present and answered several questions from Councilor Miles and others, clarifying that the firm's government audit team was highly integrated across offices and experienced in working with both large and small municipalities. He also confirmed James Moore's readiness to meet the Town's deadlines and willingness to support future efforts to qualify for the GFOA Certificate of Achievement in Financial Reporting, if the Town chooses to pursue it.

Councilor Miles stated that James Moore & Co. were to be approved, the engagement would be for three years, with the option to extend for up to six additional years.

Mayor Wells opened Public Comment for this item only.

Marie Gallelli, 1104 N. Tangerine Ave. – Town resident, Marie Gallelli, asked for clarification on the pricing and personnel details of the audit contract with James Moore & Co. Mayor Wells confirmed that the contract includes set pricing for each of the three initial years, with the base audit fee starting at \$29,000 and increasing by \$2,000 annually, reaching \$33,000 by the third year. The cost for a single audit, if required, remains fixed throughout the three-year term.

Mrs. Gallelli also inquired about the audit team assignment. It was clarified that, while Mr. Noah Leonard represented the firm during the meeting, the Town would receive a dedicated audit team, and the Council would have the ability to engage with and identify who would be assigned to their account.

Motion made by Councilor Arnold to approve James Moore & Co. as the Town’s auditor in accordance with their RFP submission; seconded by Councilor Lannamañ. Motion approved unanimously by roll call vote.

Voting

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

Nay: None

3. Consideration and Approval: (First 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 Lisa Busto introduced Ordinance 2025-005, which amends the Town's Land Development Code (LDC) to align with recent changes to Chapter 177 of the Florida Statutes under Session Law 2025-164. These changes mandate that plats and replats undergo administrative rather than Town Council review. Since the Town's current procedures require Council approval for all plats, this ordinance is necessary to bring local code into compliance. The Planning and Zoning Board held a public hearing on July 24, 2025, and voted unanimously to recommend adoption. During discussion, the Mayor inquired about the ordinance’s consistent substitution of the word “shall” with “must.” Town Attorney Tom Wilkes explained that “shall” can be ambiguous, whereas “must” provides clearer legal direction, in line with modern drafting standards used by Florida legislative staff. The change does not alter the substance of the ordinance but enhances its clarity and legal precision. Council generally supported the update, acknowledging the necessity of the amendment due to state law.

Mayor Wells opened Public Comment for this item only.

Marie Gallelli, 1104 N. Tangerine Ave. - Town resident, Marie Gallelli, expressed support for replacing “shall” with “must” in the ordinance, recalling a similar issue from her time on the Town Council involving ambiguous language related to road connections. She emphasized that “shall” felt noncommittal, while “must” conveyed clear obligation. Mayor Wells noted that other substantive changes were also included in the ordinance. Mr. Wilkes clarified that while the Town Council retains authority through the approval of final engineering and subdivision plans, the new state law removes Council authority over final plat approval, which must now be handled administratively. Mr. Wilkes reiterated that this change ensures compliance with updated state statutes and avoids redundancy in the approval process. Mayor Wells further pointed out that the ordinance includes a provision requiring Town Council approval for gated communities and noted his concerns regarding the interpretation of “shall” in previous charter revisions.

After confirming there were no further public comments, the Mayor closed the public hearing and returned the matter to Council for consideration.

Motion made by Councilor Miles to approve Ordinance 2025-005 to a second reading; seconded by Councilor Lannamañ. Motion approved unanimously by roll call vote.

Voting

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

4. Consideration and Approval: (First Reading) **Ordinance 2025-004 - Amending Pool Setbacks in LDC**

Mayor Wells read Ordinance 2025-004 out loud by title only.

AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF HOWEY-IN-THE-HILLS, FLORIDA, PERTAINING TO THE USE OF LAND; PROVIDING FINDINGS; AMENDING PARAGRAPHS 2.02.04.D.10, 2.02.14.D.8, 2.02.15.D.8, 2.03.03.B.10, 5.01.08.B.1, 5.01.08.B.2, 5.01.08.B.3, 5.01.08.F.2, AND 5.01.08.F.1, AND SUBSECTION 5.01.08.D OF THE TOWN'S LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE, AND ADDING NEW SUBSECTION 5.01.08.G TO LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE, ALL OF WHICH RELATE TO ALLOWABLE SETBACKS FOR RESIDENTIAL POOLS; PROVIDING FOR CODIFICATION, SEVERABILITY, AND AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

Councilor Miles raised concerns about whether Ordinance 2025-004 was necessary, characterizing it as a “closing the barn door after the cows have escaped” scenario. He noted that the Town had experienced a surge of variance requests related to pool setbacks, primarily from the Talichet community, over two years ago. Following the denial of one such request, the stream of applications ceased, and no variance fees have been collected in the current fiscal year. He questioned whether the ordinance addressed an ongoing issue or one that had already resolved itself and asked for insight from the Planning and Zoning Board, noting the ordinance had only been recommended narrowly by a 4-3 vote.

Town Planner, Lisa Busto, was asked to summarize the ordinance. She explained that, at the direction of the Planning and Zoning Board during its April 24, 2025, meeting, staff prepared language to amend the Land Development Code to provide alternative pool setback standards. The proposed changes allow for reduced rear setbacks, from 10 feet to 5 feet, for pools, decking, screen enclosures, and pool equipment on lots 9,600 square feet or smaller. Additionally, side setbacks for these features would match the principal structure's setback or be 10 feet, whichever is less, and pool equipment would be allowed in the side yard setback on any lot. However, no structures would be permitted within easements. The intent of the ordinance is to provide more practical flexibility for smaller lots that have consistently required variances under the current standards.

Planning and Zoning Board Chair, Tina St. Clair, and Planning and Zoning Board Member, Joshua Husemann, provided additional context on Ordinance 2025-004, which would reduce rear and side pool setback requirements for smaller residential lots. Mr. Husemann explained that he originally proposed the change to proactively address a recurring problem, an influx of variance requests, before future developments are built. He shared detailed estimates indicating that approximately 1,600 of the roughly 2,000 homes in upcoming developments would be on lots smaller than 9,600 square feet, thus affected by the current, more restrictive setback rules. He noted that other jurisdictions, including Lake County, already allow similar five-foot setbacks on small lots, and argued that property owners should not be unduly restricted from installing pools within legally approved building envelopes.

Mrs. St. Clair added that the Town had historically been inconsistent in approving variance requests, and the current ordinance would bring uniformity and fairness. She acknowledged the close 4-3 vote at the Planning and Zoning Board, attributing opposition largely to concerns about preserving green space and a philosophical divide between long-term “Old Howey” residents and newer residents from subdivisions such as Talichet and Venezia. Mayor Pro Tem Everline specifically asked why Board Member Alan Hays voted against the ordinance; Mrs. St. Clair confirmed his reasoning was a desire to preserve green space. Mr. Husemann acknowledged that, on very small lots, such as 6,000 square feet in Hillside Groves, pools would likely be infeasible anyway due to impervious surface limitations, and that developer agreements already restrict pool installation in some cases. Councilor Miles reflected on the history of small lot approvals and stated that past council action had already moved to prevent overly dense subdivisions like Talichet Phase 2 from recurring. Both Mr. Husemann and Mrs. St. Clair emphasized that the ordinance aligns with common practice in surrounding jurisdictions and avoids punitive restrictions on homeowners.

Further discussion of Ordinance 2025-004 continued with Planning and Zoning Board Member, Richard Mulvany, expressing opposition to the proposed changes, citing a preference among residents for the traditional character and wider separations of “Old Howey.” He argued that the ordinance would unnecessarily increase density and limit green space and suggested the Town should wait to see if new variance applications arise before altering the Land Development Code.

Mayor Pro Tem Everline questioned whether new subdivisions would have community pools, to which Mr. O’Keefe and Councilor Miles confirmed that several, including Mission Rise, were planned to include at least one pool. Mrs. St. Clair and Councilor Miles then discussed the financial burden of applying for variances, which typically require an up-front cost of around \$1,400, including a \$400 application fee and a \$1,000 pass-through deposit. Mrs. St. Clair emphasized that this added cost could discourage residents from seeking relief for small design adjustments.

Public Services Director, Morgan Cates, raised a critical operational concern regarding the placement of pool equipment and other impervious surfaces within the reduced five-foot side setbacks. He explained that such placement, especially in developments like Talichet Phase 2, can obstruct stormwater flow and create drainage problems. Mr. Cates recommended that, if the ordinance is adopted, it should include a requirement that any impervious surface placed in the five-foot side setback be elevated (e.g., on a platform or pillars) to allow stormwater conveyance underneath. He also suggested referencing Lake County’s standard, which limits impervious surfaces to 32 square feet within stormwater setbacks, and clarified that while pool equipment should not be placed in rear or side easements, he had no issue with reducing the rear setback itself, provided easements were respected.

Councilor Miles and Mr. Cates also noted that newer developments now generally require larger side setbacks, often 7.5 to 10 feet, and recommended that Town planning staff review existing and upcoming subdivisions like Hillside Groves to identify and prevent potential drainage conflicts. The discussion concluded with general consensus that the rear setback reduction was manageable with proper safeguards, but that the side yard provisions should include specific language to address stormwater impacts if impervious surfaces are permitted.

Mayor Wells opened up Public Comment for this item only.

Tom Ballou, 1005 N. Tangerine Ave. – Town resident, Tom Ballou, raised a concern about whether residents who were previously denied variances for pool setbacks might have legal grounds to challenge the Town if the ordinance is now changed to allow what they were once denied. Councilor Arnold acknowledged that he had posed the same question earlier in the day.

Marie Gallelli, 1104 N Tangerine Ave. – Town resident, Marie Gallelli, asked whether, if the Town incorporates Public Services Director Morgan Cates' recommendation regarding elevating pool equipment in side setbacks, the ordinance would need to specify materials or construction standards for the elevation (e.g., metal platforms or specific dimensions). Mr. Cates indicated that such detailed definitions were not necessary, and the Council accepted his guidance.

Councilor Miles reiterated his opposition to the ordinance, stating he believed the issue of pool setbacks had already been resolved through prior variances and code enforcement. He emphasized that past applicants were able to redesign their pools to comply with existing regulations and argued in favor of preserving green space rather than relaxing standards.

Mayor Pro Tem Everline concurred with Councilor Miles, expressing concern that allowing more structures into limited yard space would lead to overcrowding. Mayor Pro Tem Everline also pointed out Planning and Zoning Board member Richard Mulvany (who has experience in construction and drainage) had voted against the change, reinforcing his opposition to the ordinance.

Motion made by Councilor Lannamañ to approve Ordinance 2025-004 to a second reading; seconded by Councilor Arnold. Motion failed by a roll call vote.

Voting

Yea: Councilor Arnold, Councilor Lannamañ

Nay: Mayor Pro Tem Everline, Councilor Miles, Mayor Wells

5. Consideration and Approval: **Resolution 2025-012 - Official Town Representation**

This item was moved to appear as the first item of New Business (directly after the Public Hearing section of the meeting) during the Agenda Approval section of the meeting.

6. Consideration and Approval: **Resolution 2025-013 - Dedication of a Portion of S.R. 19 to Sheriff Gary S. Borders**

Mayor Wells read Resolution 2025-013 out loud by title only.

A RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN COUNCIL OF THE TOWN OF HOWEY-IN-THE-HILLS, LAKE COUNTY, FLORIDA, SUPPORTING THE DEDICATION OF THAT PORTION OF S.R. 19 AND C.R. 48 IN HOWEY-IN-THE-HILLS IN LAKE COUNTY AS “SHERIFF GARY S. BORDERS MEMORIAL HIGHWAY”; PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

At this point Town Attorney, Tom Wilkes, stood and began to exit the meeting. Town Clerk, John Brock, asked for a 5-minute recess so that he could get required signature from Mr. Wilkes before he left.

Mayor Wells called a 5-minute recess at 8:32 p.m.

Mayor Wells reconvened the meeting at 8:36 p.m.

Town Manager, Sean O’Keefe, introduced a Resolution 2025-013 which was designed to designate a portion of roadway in honor of Gary S. Borders, a longtime Howey-in-the-Hills resident and former Lake County Sheriff. He explained that, although the Town had passed a similar resolution years ago, the effort stalled at the state level due to improper phrasing. State Representative Nan Cobb, who is currently supporting the effort, recently requested the Town resubmit the resolution with exact wording now required by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), which includes a reference to County Road 48.

Councilor Miles expressed concern about including County Road 48 in the resolution, noting that it is under county jurisdiction and questioning how much of the road is meant to be designated. He recommended either removing CR 48 from the language or coordinating with Lake County to ensure consistency and support. He proposed tabling the item until more clarity could be obtained and a coordinated approach ensured success.

Mr. O’Keefe responded that FDOT had explicitly required this specific wording and that each entity (municipality and county) must pass matching resolutions. He emphasized that the proposed language had already been thoroughly vetted, and that delaying action could jeopardize state-level progress. Mayor Wells ultimately supported moving forward, stating trust in the Town Manager’s due diligence.

Motion made by Councilor Lannamañ to approve Resolution 2025-013; 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

DEPARTMENT REPORTS

7. Town Hall

Department report was included in the meeting's packet.

8. Police Department

Department report was included in the meeting's packet. Police Chief Thomas amended his report by saying that the Police Department had only responded to one drowning call during the month, not four as was printed on the Police Department report.

9. Code Enforcement

Department report was included in the meeting's packet.

10. Lake County Fire Rescue

Lake County Fire Rescue monthly report was included in the meeting's packet.

11. Public Services Department

Department reports were included in the meeting's packet.

12. Parks & Recreation

None

13. Library / Community Events

Department report was included in the meeting's packet.

14. Town Attorney

None

15. Finance Supervisor

Department report was included in the meeting's packet.

16. Town Manager

Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, announced that bids for Water Treatment Plant No. 3 would be opened on Tuesday, August 12th, at 2:15 p.m., with submissions due by 2:00 p.m. The engineer's estimate, including a 12-inch water main component, is approximately \$10.25 million. Although no bids had been received at the time of the meeting, six or seven entities attended the pre-bid meeting, suggesting competitive interest.

Mr. O'Keefe also reminded Council of the third budget workshop scheduled for Monday, August 18th, at 6:00 p.m., and noted that Woodard & Curran would present at the Council's second August meeting on the 25th.

Councilor Miles revisited a previous request for staff to identify properties within 300 feet of an existing solid waste line, recalling that approximately 84 such units had been identified. He proposed using the Town's remaining \$3 million in grant funds to connect these properties to the wastewater system at no cost to the homeowners, which would also eliminate existing septic tanks. Mr. O'Keefe confirmed that he thought this would be an acceptable use of the grant funds; however, the Town does not currently have sufficient equivalent residential units (ERUs) to serve those connections. When asked whether grant funds could be used to purchase additional ERUs from the CDD, Mr. O'Keefe noted that this had been previously explored and determined ineligible under the grant's terms, since the CDD may not qualify as an acceptable recipient entity. Councilor Miles requested that a formal proposal for this potential use of funds be brought to Council for a vote at the September 10th meeting.

Separately, Mayor Wells confirmed that letters would be sent to property owners on Palm Avenue regarding the proposed road resurfacing and parking changes. These letters are intended to solicit feedback prior to Council consideration of the project at the second meeting in August.

COUNCIL MEMBER COMMENT

17. Mayor Pro Tem Everline

Mayor Pro Tem Everline requested a copy of the results from the recent pedestrian crosswalk safety survey, referencing information previously mentioned by Lieutenant Mike Giddens. He stated his intent to forward the data to the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT). Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, relayed the request to the Police Chief, asking for a written report summarizing the outcomes and statistics from the pedestrian safety initiative. Mayor Graham Wells asked that the report be distributed to all Council members. The request was acknowledged without objection.

18. Councilor Arnold

Councilor Arnold raised a pedestrian safety concern regarding the crosswalk at Central Avenue and State Road 19, noting a recent near-miss incident. He recommended that the two parking spaces adjacent to the crosswalk be removed or blocked off to improve visibility for both pedestrians and drivers. He also suggested re-marking the crosswalks to enhance their visibility, emphasizing that, while FDOT plans to resurface the road, the Town should not delay improvements due to potential state project delays. He urged staff to prioritize and implement these safety measures as soon as possible.

19. Councilor Miles

Councilor Miles followed up on a request from the July regular meeting regarding outreach to the developer of Oak Groves, a small, proposed subdivision under county jurisdiction. He reminded Council that the County had given the developer 60 to 90 days to coordinate with the Town. Town Manager, Sean O'Keefe, confirmed that he had attempted contact but had not yet received a response. Councilor Miles emphasized the importance of documenting the Town's efforts and suggested sending a formal letter to ensure there is a written record of outreach, as that was the expectation expressed by the County.

20. Councilor Lannamañ

Councilor Lannamañ informed the Council she would be unavailable for the August 18th budget workshop due to travel, expressing concern about missing discussion on the proposed salary increases. She noted that several residents had contacted her with concerns about the scale of the proposed increases, particularly given current economic uncertainty and the unpredictability of future development. She urged her colleagues to be mindful of fiscal responsibility and resident sentiment during the workshop.

Recognizing the importance of having all five council members present for this critical discussion, Mayor Graham Wells proposed rescheduling the workshop. After reviewing each member's availability, the Council agreed to move the workshop to **Monday, August 25th at 3:00 p.m.**, ahead of the regularly scheduled council meeting. Councilor David Miles expressed concern about a potential scheduling conflict with a medical appointment but agreed to try to reschedule it.

The Council formally approved the change through a motion by Councilor Jon Arnold, seconded and passed unanimously. The August 18th workshop was officially canceled, and the rescheduled session will now take place on August 25th at 3:00 p.m. to allow full participation and adequate time for salary-related discussions.

Motion made by Councilor Arnold to reschedule the third Town Council Workshop (originally scheduled on August 18, 2025 at 6:00 p.m.) to Monday, August 25, 2025, at 3:00 p.m.; seconded by Councilor Lannamañ. Motion approved by voice vote.

Voting

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

Nay: None

21. Mayor Wells

None


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 9:06 p.m. | Attendees: 38

ATTEST

John Brock, Town Clerk


Graham Wells, CMC, Mayor