



# Meeting Minutes

*Tuesday, January 16, 2024, 7:00 PM CT*

*at Esto Town Hall, 3312 2nd Ave South, Esto, FL 32425*

*The data reflected in these proceedings constitute an extrapolation of information elicited from notes, observations, recording tapes, photographs, and/or videotape. Comments reflected herein are sometimes paraphrased, condensed, and/or have been edited to reflect essential subject matter addressed during the meeting. Parties interested in receiving a verbatim account of the proceedings are responsible for coordinating with the Esto Town Clerk and providing their own representative and equipment pursuant to Chapters 119 and 283, Florida Statutes.*

## **Town Council Members in Attendance**

Seat 1 - Josh Davenport (JD), Council Vice President

Seat 2 - Greg Wells (GW)

Seat 3 - Gareth Skipper (GS)

Seat 4 - Maxie Yates (MY)

Seat 5 - Teresa Harrison (TH), Council President

## **Town Council Members Absent**

## **Others Present**

Ben Tew (BT), Town Clerk

Billy Martin (BM), Director Public Works Director

Michelle Blankenship, Town Attorney

Trinity Nolan and Tyler Bausby from Students Working Against Tobacco

Ashley Register, the Fire Chief from Noma, FL

Wilmer Stafford, candidate for District 1, Holmes County Commission

## **Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance**

TH- Opening prayer, Pledge of Allegiance, and called meeting to order at 7:01 PM CT.

## **Swearing in of New Council Members**

Town Clerk swore in two new council members Maxie Yates for town council seat 4, and Greg Wells for town council seat 2. Yates & Wells took their places on the town council.

## **Consent Agenda**

- TH called for Consent to agenda items, Consent to previous council minutes including special meetings, and Consent to bills to be paid. JD motioned. GS seconded. All in Favor -- Motion Carried.

## Public Comment

Students Working Against Tobacco representative made a presentation to the council. Trinity Nolan and Tyler Bausby spoke about the dangers of secondhand smoke and asked the council to consider instituting a no smoking ordinance at Esto's John Clark Park.

Ashley Register, the Fire Chief from Noma, FL addressed the town council about an incident at a fire that both Noma and Esto Fire Departments responded to. He also had issues with the way the Esto Fire Department does boot drives at the Hamilton's Store intersection.

Wilmer Stafford a candidate campaigning for the District 1 position on the Holmes County Board of County Commissioners spoke to the town council and introduced himself and asked if the town council had any concerns with the county governments.

## EVFD Report

- **Response to Noma Fire Dept Comment**

Fire Chief CK responded to the previous comments made by Ashley Register, the Fire Chief from Noma.

- **Activity Report for December 2023**

Fire Chief CK presented a report on the department's activities in December and overall numbers for 2023.

- **State Mutual Aid Agreement**

The Florida Department of Emergency Management has a new Statewide Mutual Aid Agreement. The Town Council adopted Resolution 24-08 Adopting the 2023 State Mutual Aid Agreement. GS motioned to adopted Resolution 24-08. JD seconded. All in Favor -- Motion Carried.

- **Attack Truck Vehicle Repairs**

A Fire Department attack truck needs further repairs. After replacing some of the injectors and the turbo on the vehicle more went injectors out and need to be replaced. Estimated cost is about \$1,700. GW motioned for the expenditure of \$1,800 to repair vehicle. GS seconded. All in Favor -- Motion Carried.

## Town Clerk's Report

- **Financial Report**

The Town Clerk, Ben Tew, gave an update on the town's financial accounts. After outstanding checks and bills are paid BT reported the General Fund will have approximately \$8,000. Water Works will have ~\$500. And the Fire Department will have ~\$7,700.

- **Updated FY2023-24 Budget**

The Town Clerk, Ben Tew, updated the council on the 2 solar projects the council was investigating. Tew had contacted a commercial solar installer to discuss the projects. The solar representative pointed out hurdles that might hamstring the proposed projects. Council member JD suggested solar installations at the wells could offset those installations and might be seen more favorably by WFEC. Council member GS requested the issue be tabled till after the first of the year, so more research could be done.

- **Carr, Riggs & Ingram Engagement Letter**

Carr, Riggs and Ingram have presented an engagement letter for bookkeeping services for FY 2022-23 and the FY 2023-24. They will prepare our books for an audit for FY 2022-23 -- reconcile bank statements, check payroll records, check accounts, and make adjustment entries. They will also do the same for FY 2023-24 going forward. JD motioned to accept the engagement letter. GW seconded. GS abstained due to a conflict of interest. TH, JD, GW, MY voted in favor -- Motion Carried.

- **Ferguson Sizemore Associates Engagement Letter**

Ferguson Sizemore and Assoc. have presented an Engagement Letter to perform an audit of the town's books for FY 2022-23. The price for the audit would be \$8,000. The issue had been tabled in January's meeting. GS wanted the council to consider if the town needed an annual audit since they were employing a bookkeeping agency, and the state only required an audit biannually. BT brought up that an audit would provide info required for the State's annual AFR report. JD asked if the bookkeeper could help with the AFR data. The issue was tabled until the February town council meeting so that information could be gathered about if the bookkeeper about the town's FY 2022-23 audit requirements and help with the AFR report.

- **WFECA Franchise Fee Ordinance**

The town's Franchise Fee Ordinance with West Florida Electric Cooperative will expire in February. The current franchise fee is 5% and was last passed in February 2023 for 1 year. The town clerk was directed to prepare a new ordinance for first reading at the February town council meeting. JD motioned the town raise the franchise fee 1.5% to a total of 6.5%. GS seconded. All in Favor -- Motion Carried.

- **Rural Billing Transition Report**

The town's transition to the Rural Billing Utility Billing Software has continued. January bills will be computed and printed from Rural Billing, and that will complete the transition from the Asyst software. The Asyst software will be kept for historical / previous transaction records only.

- **Town Hall Phone System Change**

The town's hall's phone system is changing from AT&T to Verizon. The transition should be complete by the end of January. The price for the new phones came in at \$301, \$1 over the town clerk's approval limit. GS motioned to pay for the new phones. GW seconded. All in Favor -- Motion Carried.

- **Graceville News Special Publication Ads**

The Graceville News sent a flyer listing their special editions throughout 2024. The town clerk asked the council if they wanted to have ads in any of the special editions. The clerk was authorized to use his own initiative since the costs were less than his approval limit.

## Public Works Director Report

- **Backflow Valve Tests Update**

The town clerk sent letters to the businesses that hadn't turned in an updated backflow valve test. The letters warned businesses that tests were required to be completed before January 31, 2024, or the property's water service would be cut off. So far 3 businesses have provided updated certifications and 2 businesses have requested exemptions. 11 businesses have not responded.

- **Truck Transmission Replacement**

BM said the Public Works truck needs a new transmission. The cost would be \$4,500 with a 12,000 mile/12-month warranty. BM said the repair didn't have to happen immediately, but it was needed eventually.

- **Sunshine811 Service Membership**

The town clerk contacted 811 Sunshine and updated the town's membership with the service. Contact info was updated along with new map coordinates marking the town's service area. The town should now be notified when contractors or others call 811 asking for water lines to be marked prior to digging. The town will be billed per marking request.

## Parks Report

- **Community Garden & Open House Update**

The Community Garden Open House event is moving forward. The Health Department is working to organize a workday to spruce up the park on Feb 24th. That's when the Born Learning Trail will be installed and any other projects like the disc golf, raised beds, etc. can be set up. GW made a motion to spend up to \$500 for bounce houses for the Community Garden Open House event. GS seconded. All in Favor -- Motion Carried.

- **Homeless camping/living at Park**

There have been reports of a homeless person camping / living at John Clark Park. A resident called asking if the town has a homeless ordinance. The council discussed the issue. The town attorney said the town would need an ordinance then the Sheriff's Dept would have to enforce it. Options to increase locks and security on town property were discussed.

- **Park Internet Update**

Verizon should have the equipment for setting up Wi-Fi at the Community Center to the town before the end of the month. Council member Davenport volunteered his expertise to install the equipment.

- **Solar Project**

After the December town council meeting, an article on the town's proposed solar projects headlined the Holmes County Advertiser newspaper. In the newspaper article a WFECA representative said they did not have any rules or regulations to impede solar projects. The town council requested that a West Florida Electric Coop representative be asked to be at the next town council meeting.

## Council Member Items

- **Seat 1 - Council Member Josh Davenport**

Council Member Davenport proposed the town institute a Sick Leave policy. He suggested town employees should receive 7 days of sick leave annually. The sick leave policy would be in addition to the town's PTO policy. GS made a motion to adopt the proposed Sick Leave policy. GW seconded. All in Favor -- Motion Carried.

JD requested that town employees contact him as the HR contact is sick leave or PTO was being taken.

- **Seat 2 - Council Member Greg Wells**
- **Seat 3 - Council Member Garet Skipper**
- **Seat 4 - Council Member Maxie Yates**
- **Seat 5 - Council Member Teresa Harrison**

Council Member Harrison welcomed new Council Member Yates and returning member Wells.

## Adjourn

TH adjourned the meeting at 8:50 PM CT.

Meeting minutes typed and prepared by Ben Tew, Town Clerk.

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Council Member Seat 1, Josh Davenport,  
Council Vice President

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Council Member Seat 2, Greg Wells

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Council Member Seat 3, Garet Skipper

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Council Member Seat 4, Maxie Yates

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Council Member Seat 5, Teresa Harrison,  
Council President