



# Meeting Minutes

*Tuesday, November 19, 2024, 7:00 PM CDT*

*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 - Krystal Bien (KB)

Seat 2 - Greg Wells (GW)

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), Public Works Director

Michelle Blankenship (MB), Town Attorney

Michael Chestnut (MC), Water Operator

John Lewis (JL), Holmes County Health Department

Students Working Against Tobacco (SWAT)

## **Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance**

TH- Opening prayer, Pledge of Allegiance, and called meeting to order at 7:03 PM CT.

## **Consent Agenda**

- Motion to Approve: The minutes of the following meetings were approved:
  - October 15, 2024, Town Council Meeting
- Bills to be Paid: The bills for payment were reviewed and approved.
- GW motioned for approval of consent agenda including final agenda, previous meeting minutes, and bills to be paid. KB seconded. All in Favor -- Motion Carried.

## Public Comment

- James Lewis from the Holmes County Health Department, along with 2 youth, Ryan Michon and Trinity Nolin, from Students Working Against Tobacco (SWAT), spoke to the Town Council. They advocated for an ordinance banning smoking, tobacco products and vaping at the town parks. Council members were receptive to the idea and directed the Town Clerk to prepare an ordinance for First Reading at the December Town Council Meeting.

## Resolutions & Ordinances

- **Resolution 25-04: Adopting Cybersecurity Standards**  
Town Clerk, Ben Tew, presented Resolution 25-04, which is designed to adopt cybersecurity standards for the town. These standards are in line with the Florida Digital Service requirements, including the NIST Cybersecurity Framework, and must be adopted by January 1, 2025. KB motioned for approval of Resolution 25-04. GW seconded. All in Favor -- Motion Carried.

## Special Agenda Items

- **Water Operator Position**

Town Clerk Ben Tew provided an update regarding the hiring of a new Water Operator. The job opening was advertised, and Michael Chestnut was the only qualified applicant. Council Member Wells conducted an interview with Chestnut on October 22, 2024, and offered him the position, which he accepted. Chestnut began working on November 1, 2024. Council Member GW made a motion to ratify the hiring of Michael Chestnut as the new Water Operator, which was seconded by Council Member KB. All in Favor -- Motion Carried.

MC was present at the Town Council meeting and discussed the state of the town's water system with the council. He advised the council that the Florida Department of Environmental Protection would likely be doing an audit of the town's water system in August 2025, and that the water tower would need to be cleaned and serviced in the next year. The town clerk was directed to contact USA Tanks that had previously worked on the water tower to get an estimate and information on payments plans. The Public Works Director discussed pursuing a Florida Water Operators License, as a backup for the town.

## Fire Department Report

- Fire Chief Cliff Kimble presented the Fire Department's report for the month of October. The Council discussed the key updates, but no action was required, and the report was accepted as presented.



## Town Clerk's Report

- **Financial Report**

The town reviewed its financial status, including bill payments and account balances. Major bills include payments to Primo Pest Control, AT&T, USA BlueBook, and other vendors across various funds. The Council also reviewed the balances in each fund and discussed the expected revenue from WFEC franchise fees and Ad Valorem taxes. The Clerk highlighted several outstanding bills, including utility expenses, insurance premiums, and payroll. The financial report was discussed in detail, and no action was required.

- **Evaluate Water Works FY2025 Budget**

The Town Clerk presented an evaluation of the Water Works FY2025 budget, which needs adjustment due to several unexpected expenses. These include higher costs for the Water Operator's salary, lab testing, system repairs and maintenance, and annual pest control. The Council discussed the possibility of moving \$3,500 from the Water Works Maintenance Fund to help offset these increased expenses. The council decided to take no action at the present time.

- **Update on FY2022-2023 Audit**

The FY2022-2023 audit, performed by Mark Smith of Ferguson Sizemore Associates, has been completed and will be submitted to the Florida Department of Financial Services and the Legislative Auditing Committee. The invoice for the audit has been received, with a \$1,000 discount applied due to the audit's overdue status.

- **Backflow Valve Tests & Business Receipt Tax Notices**

The town has sent out reminder letters to business owners, with one business already renewing their tax receipt and completing the necessary backflow testing. The Florida League of Cities offers a program to collect delinquent local business taxes, but the town's current business tax ordinance does not meet the requirements for participation. The Clerk presented Ordinance 2025-01, which amends the town's business tax ordinance to comply with state statutes. The council will have the first reading of Ordinance 2025-01 at the December Town Council Meeting.

- **Capital Improvement Program**

The Clerk outlined the process and timeline for developing the Capital Improvement Plan, which includes forming a planning team, gathering data, developing and prioritizing projects, and adopting the final plan. The timeline for the process was set to begin in January and conclude with adoption in August 2025.

- **Diamond Communications Proposal**

Diamond Communications LLC, a national firm based in Delray Beach, FL, that specializes in developing new cell towers had a proposal for the town council. Diamond Communications expressed interest in evaluating town properties for potential cell tower sites and offered to cover all costs for design, construction, and maintenance. The proposal includes a revenue-sharing model between Diamond Communications and the town. The Council discussed the proposal, and the town clerk was directed to request more information from Diamond Communications. The town attorney suggested the town could post a Request For Proposal to invite other interested companies.

## Public Works Report

- **Lead Service Line Inventory Update**

The town has completed the federally required lead service line inventory. The town has zero lead service lines. The final results have been submitted to FDEP and the EPA.

- **Leak at Base of Water Tower**

A pipe at the base of the water tower is leaking. The line will have to be replaced from the top of the water tower on down.

- **Road Damage at the Family Dollar Driveway**

There are significant potholes on either side of the entrance to the Family Dollar parking lot on 3rd Avenue South. The Public Works Department had closed the entrance to prevent residents from damaging vehicles. The issue was discussed. The Public Works Director was to contact FDOT to see if they would repair the potholes, if not then the town would try to do so with cold patch.

- **Code Enforcement Letters**

The issue of enforcing the town's nuisance, eyesore, junk codes was discussed. The town clerk was to get a policy and forms and procedures in place and then work to make the public aware of these enforcement methods.

- Also discussed was the Junkyard property. The potential leasee for the property had contacted the town clerk inquiring about the status of the Brownfield testing and cleanup on the property. The town council directed the clerk to get an update from FDEP and the testing company and invite the leasee to the December Town Council meeting.

## Parks Department

- **Spring Farmers Market**

Town Clerk Ben Tew proposed the idea of hosting a weekly farmers market in the green space next to the fire department. The market would require permission from Family Dollar, which owns the adjacent property. The goal is to provide fresh produce to local residents, create a community gathering spot, and attract visitors to the town. Vendors would pay a small fee. The Clerk suggested using the \$240 in the Community Garden fund for advertising banners. The Council discussed the proposal, and were receptive to the idea, directing the clerk to pursue permission from Family Dollar for the use of the space.



## Council Member Items

- **Seat 1 - Council Member Krystal Bien**

Council Member Bien asked the town employees to be aware of time and use their hours productively, and if there is nothing to do, or they are able to clock out early. She stressed the town's financial needs.

- **Seat 2 - Council Member Greg Wells**

Council Member Wells proposed the town create a new bank account to be used for saving funds towards new equipment, a public works vehicle, new golf cart, etc. GW motions to create the account with an initial contribution of \$400 taken from the General Fund. KB seconded. All in Favor -- Motion Carried.

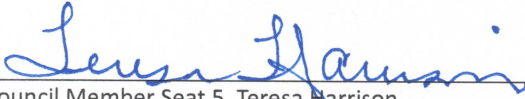
- **Seat 4 - Council Member Maxie Yates**

- **Seat 5 - Council Member Teresa Harrison**

## Adjourn

TH adjourned the meeting at 8:40 PM CT.

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



Council Member Seat 5, Teresa Harrison,  
Council President