



Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, December 17, 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 **called in via phone**

Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance

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

Consent Agenda

- Motion to Approve: The minutes of the following meetings were approved:
 - November 19, 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

- No members of the public wished to address the council.

Resolutions & Ordinances

- **Ordinance 2024-01 - West Florida Electric Cooperative Franchise Agreement**

Town Clerk, Ben Tew presented an update on the franchise agreement. The Council discussed the failed ratification of Ordinance 2024-01 by the West Florida Electric Cooperative (WFEC) Board.

The Council reviewed franchise fee agreements from neighboring towns and the various challenges associated with WFEC's reluctance to accept the new agreement. The town clerk was directed to reach out to WFEC counsel and set up a meeting in January. Either to come to the regular town council meeting or to arrange a special meeting of the Esto Town Council to discuss the issue with WFEC's counsel and representatives.

- **Ordinance 2025-01 - Tobacco Free Outdoors**

The Town Clerk provided an overview of the proposed ordinance following a presentation made by the Holmes County Health Department and Students Working Against Tobacco at the November 19, 2024, meeting. The Council discussed the implications of instituting a tobacco-free policy in the town's parks. A motion was made and seconded for the passage of the first reading of "Ordinance 2025-01, AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN COUNCIL OF ESTO, FLORIDA, PROHIBITING SMOKING AND VAPING IN PUBLIC PARKS WITHIN THE TOWN." GW motioned for approval on first reading of Ordinance 2025-01. KB seconded. All in Favor -- Motion Carried. The ordinance will be advertised in a local paper and will be presented for 2nd reading at the January 2025 town council meeting.

- **Ordinance 2025-02 - Amending Business Tax Ordinance**

The Town Clerk presented Ordinance 2025-02, which amends the town's business tax ordinance to align with state statutes and allow participation in the Delinquent Local Business Tax Collection Program from the Florida League of Cities. No vote was taken at this time. The Council will await further confirmation from Florida League of Cities lawyers on whether the updated ordinance satisfies their requirements.

Special Agenda Items

- **Certification of 2024 Town Council Election Results**

Town Clerk acting as the Supervisor of Elections certified the results of the 2024 Town Council election.

Election Results:

Seat 1: Krystal Bien elected to fill the remainder of the term.

Seat 3: No candidates qualified; therefore the seat remains vacant.

The Council signed the certification of election results, and the winning candidate, Krystal Bien, will be sworn in at the January 21, 2025 Town Council meeting.

Fire Department Report

- Fire Chief, Cliff Kimble provided a report for the month of November 2024. The Council discussed the key updates, but no action was required, and the report was accepted as presented.

- The Fire Chief reported to the Council regarding an incident that occurred at the Fire Station. While pulling out a fire engine, the roll-up door over the engine bay malfunctioned and slipped down. As a result, the door was struck when the fire engine exited, causing the door to become inoperable. The fire engine itself sustained only minimal damage. The Fire Chief presented quotes for the repair or replacement of the door, with the lowest quote being \$1,860 from Tri State Door Company, Inc. in Hartford, AL. The Council discussed the matter and authorized the payment of half of the quoted repair cost. GW motioned for approval for the expense. KB seconded. All in Favor -- Motion Carried.

Town Clerk's Report

- **Financial and Town Billings Report**

Town Clerk, Ben Tew reviewed the financials for the month, noting the payment of various bills, including significant amounts owed for utilities, insurance, and audit fees. The financial report was discussed in detail, and no action was required.

- **Holiday Hours / PTO Policy**

A permanent change to the town's PTO policy was discussed to allow employees to receive holiday pay even if they take PTO the day before or after a holiday. An exception had been made for Thanksgiving 2024. The Council discussed the implications of the policy change but decided to leave the current policy in place. An exception was made for town employees that chose to take PTO before or after the Christmas Eve 2024 and Christmas Day 2024 holidays.

- **Backflow Valve Tests / Business Tax Receipts Update**

The Town Clerk updated the Council on the status of backflow valve tests and business tax receipts, noting the businesses that have passed or failed their backflow tests and the status of their tax receipts. The clerk was directed to send business that have failed to complete their required backflow valve tests a final notice that their service would be disconnected if the test is not completed before February 1st. The clerk was also directed to send a strongly worded notice to businesses that have not paid their annual business tax.

- **Capital Improvement Plan Program**

A meeting for the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) is scheduled for Thursday, January 16, 2025 at 6:00 PM at the Esto Town Hall.

Public Works Report

- **Flow Meter Replacement**

A quote from Southerland Environmental to replace and calibrate the flow meter at Commerce Street well for \$2,500. GW made a motion to approve the expenditure and move \$2,500 from the Water Works Maintenance Account into the Water Works account to cover the expense. KB seconded. All in Favor -- Motion Carried.

- **Leaking Tank Water Line**

A quote of \$500 for replacing the leaking line connected to the water tank. KB made a motion to approve the expenditure. GW seconded. All in Favor -- Motion Carried.

- **Chlorine Barrel Purchase**

A discussion of the need to purchase a second chlorine barrel for \$500. No action was taken at this present.

- **Other Discussion**

Public Works Director, Billy Martin presented updates on other public works issues: A county project to repave John Calrk Road from Hwy 79 to the Alabama state line, will begin after the holidays. Also, the county will perform work on the culvert at 1st Avenue North.

- **Junkyard Property Update**

Town Clerk, Ben Tew provided an update on the Lamb's Recycling Facility site, noting the ongoing environmental testing and plans for additional assessment. No action was taken, but the update was acknowledged.

- **Water and Wastewater Treatment Facility Energy Efficiency Program Grant**

The Town Clerk presented information on the \$5 million grant from the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to support energy efficiency improvements for rural water and wastewater systems. The Council discussed pursuing the grant and directed the Town Clerk to move forward with the application process.

Streets Department

- **Small County Outreach Program Grant**

Town Clerk, Ben Tew discussed the Small County Outreach Program grant for municipal projects for the FY2027 – FY2031 period. The Council considered submitting an application for the repaving of 1st Avenue North. The Council directed the Town Clerk to proceed with the grant application.

Two-Toed Tom Festival

- **Two-Toed Tom Festival Planning Meeting**

2024 Festival organizer, Ben Tew requested approval to use the John Clark Park Community Center for a planning meeting for the Two-Toed Tom Festival on Sunday, January 26, 2025. The Council approved the request.

Council Member Items

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

Council Member Bien inquired about the status of the Public Works Director's Worker's Compensation Claim. KB also discussed an issue with a recent rental at the John Clark Park Community Center, where the renter was unable to get inside the building.

- **Seat 2 - Council Member Greg Wells - none**

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

Council Member Yates discussed the issue of storm water culverts and their availability.

- **Seat 5 - Council Member Teresa Harrison - none**

Adjourn

TH adjourned the meeting at 8:07 PM CT.

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



Este Town Council President