



# Meeting Minutes

*Tuesday, February 18, 2025, 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), Council President

Seat 4 - Maxie Yates (MY)

Seat 5 - Teresa Harrison (TH), Council Vice 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\**

Dylan Rivers

Penny Bryan

Donetta & John Luke

Melissa Smith

Sarah Lamb

Heather Huckaby

## **Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance**

TH - Opening prayer

GW - 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:
  - January 28, 2025, Town Council Meeting Minutes
- KB motioned for approval of consent agenda including final agenda, previous meeting minutes, and bills to be paid. TH seconded. All in Favor -- Motion Carried.

## Public Comment

- Members of the public were present but decided to address the council later in the meeting on specific topics.

## Resolutions & Ordinances

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

Discussion was held regarding Ordinance 2025-01, prohibiting smoking and vaping in town parks. KB made a motion to approve second reading and adopt Ordinance 2025-01. MY seconded. All in Favor -- Motion Carried.

## Special Agenda Items

- **West Florida Electric Cooperative Franchise Fee Agreement**

Representatives from WFEC were present, Dylan Rivers, WFEC's attorney, and Penny Bryan, WFEC VP of Administration. Rivers raised concerns about the existing franchise fee ordinance, suggesting that WFEC would prefer a more conventional agreement format rather than an ordinance enacted by the Town of Esto and later accepted by WFEC. However, he acknowledged that the 2024 Ordinance was nearly identical to agreements previously adopted by the town and WFEC.

The Esto town attorney, MB, stated that the town has legal precedent to enact the franchise fee and that WFEC would be considered a "holdover tenant" under the existing state law. The Town Council was resistant to changing the agreement format since previous versions had been sufficient.

WFEC VP Penny Bryan noted that the proposed 6.5% franchise fee would make Esto's rate higher than any other municipality, claiming the next highest rate was 6.0%. In response, the Town Council proposed amending the 2024 ordinance to set the franchise fee at 6.0% for a five-year term. Rivers and Bryan indicated that this compromise would likely be acceptable to the WFEC board.

KB motioned to direct the creation of a new updated Ordinance with the terms of a 6.0% franchise fee for a term of five years. TH seconded. All in Favor -- Motion Carried.

- **Nuisance Code Violations**

The Council discussed the existing Nuisance Ordinance and the need for enforcement following recent citizen complaints. The Town Clerk was directed to send a certified letter to the owner of the property that complaints had been made about. The clerk was also directed to contact the Holmes County Health Department to see if assistance could be found for the property owner. The council will reevaluate the situation at the March Town Council Meeting.

Esto residents, Donetta & John Luke, requested clarification from the council about the town's nuisance ordinance. They and their landlord, Michelle Smith, wanted to understand how the Nuisance Ordinance might apply to rental properties.



## Fire Department Report

- Fire Chief Cliff Kimble presented the January Fire Department Report. He also presented the December 2024, final 2024 Year End report.
- An issue Chief Kimble discussed with the council was further mechanical problems with the Tanker vehicle.

## Town Clerk's Report

- **Financial and Town Billings Report**  
Town Clerk BT presented the financial report, noting the major bills paid and remaining fund balances. The financial report was discussed in detail, and no action was required.
- **Backflow Valve Tests / Business Tax Receipts Update**  
The Council reviewed compliance updates on business tax receipts and backflow valve testing. The town clerk was directed to investigate if two businesses were included based on a 1999 annexation.
- **Capital Improvement Plan Program**  
The Council discussed ongoing community survey responses and the need for monthly progress to meet the September 2025 grant deadline.
- **Proposal for TechRadium IRIS Notification System**  
Discussion was held regarding implementing a phone call and text notification system for emergencies and routine town updates. The Town clerk was directed to check with the Florida department of Environmental Protection that phone call and text message would meet their boil water notice requirements. The issue would be discussed further at the march Town Council meeting.

## Public Works Report

- Public Works Director Billy Martin provided updates on:
- **Leaking Tank Water Line** – Still looking for a company to come repair the line.
- **Leaking water lines at the Hwy 79 & Hwy 2 intersection** - The Public Works team had repaired one of the leaks. KB motioned to approve up to \$600 in purchases for materials to repair the 2nd leak. TH seconded. All in Favor -- Motion Carried.
- **Water Tank Cleaning & Inspection** - The town council requested the town clerk to work with the Water Operator to seek a 1-year extension on the required tank cleaning and inspection.

## Streets Department

- **On-Street Parking & Road Damage**  
The Council discussed an ongoing issue of a resident damaging a drainage ditch by repeatedly driving off the road. Discussion included possible regulations for on-street parking and property damage ordinances. The town clerk was directed to send a certified letter to the property owner about the roadway obstruction and ditch damage.

Council member KB requested the town clerk also investigate the process for the town to implement business, economic and other impact fees.

### **Park Department**

- **Farmers Market** - Town Clerk, BT discussed progress on setting up a farmers market starting in April.

### **Council Member Items**

- **Seat 1 - Council Member Krystal Bien** - none
- **Seat 2 - Council Member Greg Wells** - none
- **Seat 4 - Council Member Maxie Yates** - none
- **Seat 5 - Council Member Teresa Harrison** - none

### **Adjourn**

GW adjourned the meeting at 8:15 PM CT.

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



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Esto Town Council President