



CITY OF BELLE ISLE, FL EXECUTIVE SESSION AND CITY COUNCIL MEETING

Tuesday, October 21, 2025 * 5:30 PM

MINUTES

Present was:

Mayor – Jason Carson
District 1 Commissioner – Frank Vertolli
District 2 Commissioner – Holly Bobrowski
District 3 Commissioner – Karl Shuck
District 4 Commissioner – Bobby Lance
District 5 Commissioner – Beth Lowell
District 6 Commissioner – Stan Smith
District 7 Commissioner – Jim Partin

Absent was:

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1. Call to Order

Mayor Carson called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m., and the Clerk confirmed the presence of a quorum. Mayor Carson opened the Executive Session, and the City Clerk excused herself from the hearing.

2. Mayor Carson opened the City Council meeting to order at 6:30 pm.

City Manager Rudometkin, Chief Grimm, Attorney Langley, and City Clerk Yolanda Quiceno were also present.

3. Discussion and potential action on matters relating to the Executive Session Case No. 2025-CA-000848-O

Attorney Langley stated that the Council did not recommend any action.

3. Presentations

Lobbyists – Christopher Dawson, Gray Robinson

Christopher Dawson, City Lobbyist from Gray Robinson, provided a presentation and gave a snapshot of activity and key stats from the 2025 Legislative Session.

3. Public Comments & Announcements

Mayor Carson opened for public comment. There being none, Mayor Carson closed the public comments.

5. Consent Items

- a. Approval of the City Council Meeting Minutes - October 7, 2025
- b. Proclamation - Election March 2026 Districts 1 & 7
- c. Proclamation - Celebrating Week of the Family - Nov 1-8, 2025
- d. September 2025 Monthly Reports: PD, Finance (<https://cleargov.com/florida/orange/city/belle-isle>), and OC Fire

Mayor Carson called for a motion to approve the consent items.

Comm Vertolli moved to approve the consent item as presented.

Comm Lowell seconded the motion, which passed unanimously 7:0.

6. Unfinished Business

a. Bing Grant Protocol/Criteria

City Manager Rudometkin provided a refresher on the Belle Isle grant criteria, noting three potential applications for the current fiscal year. He discussed the criteria for neighborhood improvement projects, including a 50/50 match requirement and the types of eligible projects. He highlighted the importance of exhausting all financial resources before applying for a grant, as well as the city's flexibility in approving projects.

Commissioner Partin recommended that applicants who have previously received awards be required to wait two years before reapplying for new funding opportunities. He also noted that many residents may not be aware of the Orange County Grant Program and suggested that staff distribute information about the programs offered by Orange County.

Commissioner Partin stated that applicants should be encouraged to pursue available Orange County grant opportunities before applying to the City.

Mayor Carson shared his opinion regarding the two-year wait and said he wouldn't want to punish any residents/neighborhood for being proactive in beautifying their neighborhood. After discussion, the Council reached consensus to have the City Manager make the necessary changes to the criteria for Council consideration and approval.

b. Review and Approve Credit Card Reward Redemption Policy

City Manager Rudometkin presented an update regarding the City's Reward Redemption Policy. After review, it was noted that the City should continue using the existing rewards card program. The purpose of this agenda item is to request Council approval for the use of accumulated rebate points. Staff recommend redeeming the points for Amazon gift cards, as Amazon is a primary vendor used by multiple City departments, including the Police Department. This option provides flexibility in purchasing a wide range of items needed for City operations. Each \$100 Amazon gift card requires 13,000 points for redemption. The City currently has approximately 149,000 points available, which will not expire until the end of next year. Staff further recommended amending the current Reward Redemption Policy to include a provision allowing the redemption of reward points for Amazon gift cards for municipal uses only. Any future changes to the use of rewards will be brought back to the Council for review and approval.

Comm Partin moved to authorize the city manager and finance director to amend the current credit card policy governing redemption and use of the gift card rewards for Amazon gift cards for municipal expenses only.

Comm Bobrowski seconded the motion.

Comm Bobrowski asked if the Council would consider donating some of the points for gift cards for the Special Events Committee Silent Auction items fundraiser. After discussion and in an effort to maintain transparency and record-keeping, the Council agreed to use the points for municipal operations only.

After the discussion, the motion passed unanimously 7:0.

7. New Business

a. Discuss Lobbyists' Contract with Gray Robinson

City Manager Rudometkin provided an overview of the City's current lobbying services contract with Gray Robinson, represented by Chris Dawson, who has worked with the City since June 2021 to discuss options and determine the best course of action. CM Rudometkin explained that during recent discussions with representatives from other municipalities, several agencies shared that they had redirected funds previously allocated for lobbyist services toward other needs, such as grant writing or contract management support. As the City's current agreement with Gray Robinson is approaching renewal, staff recommended that Council discuss whether to:

1. Continue services with Gray Robinson under a new contract;
2. Issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) to explore other lobbying firms; or
3. Discontinue the use of a lobbyist and consider alternative uses for the funds.

CM Rudometkin noted that he has worked with lobbyists throughout his career and expressed his appreciation for Gray Robinson's professionalism and effectiveness. However, he emphasized that the decision should be based on the City's current and future needs rather than personal preference.

Council discussed projects to date recommended by the lobbyists and communication with staff.

Chief Grimm noted the overall value of retaining a City lobbyist. He stated that the City had not fully utilized its lobbying services over the past two years but emphasized the importance of maintaining such representation and referenced previous visits to Tallahassee, during which meetings with state representatives highlighted the significance of an active lobbying presence. It was noted that without a lobbyist, the City may not have the same access to key appointments and legislative discussions. He supported continuing to engage a lobbyist and encouraged other Council members to participate in future advocacy trips to Tallahassee and Washington, particularly given current property tax issues and potential federal funding opportunities, which are essential to increasing the City's visibility and influence at both the state and federal levels.

Comm Smith said it would be prudent and moved that we move forward with an RFP and continue with Gray Robison on a month-to-month basis until after the close of the Legislative Session.

Comm Lance said Mr. Dawson has made strong connections in Tallahassee on our behalf and believes we may be jumping ship too early, which will cost us more money in the long run and possibly require hiring somebody else to start all over again. He believes we should stick with what we have and give it at least one more year and see what happens.

After discussion, Comm Partin seconded the motion, which passed 6:1 with Comm Lance nay.

b. Approval of Fisher Planning & Development Services, Inc. Contract Extension

City Manager Rudometkin presented the proposed contract extension with Fisher Planning and Development Services, Inc., represented by April Fisher, for continued planning and development services. He noted that funding for this contract was approved in the current fiscal year's budget. The City's decision to contract planning services rather than maintain a full-time City Planner position has resulted in annual savings of approximately \$58,000. The proposed contract extension would continue services through September 30, 2026, aligning with the City's fiscal year and approved budget. The City Manager stated that April Fisher has agreed to remain under contract through that date, and that this agenda item serves to amend the contract. During the discussion, the Council requested an update on current projects and activities being managed by the Planner. CM Rudometkin explained that the Planner reports directly to him and commended her performance, noting that she has significantly improved departmental operations and community relations. He offered to provide the Council with a summary of her ongoing work or to invite her to a future meeting to present an update.

Comm Vertolli raised concern regarding the clause allowing the City Manager to extend the contract for an additional year. The City Manager clarified that this language carried over from the previous agreement but stated that he would remove that provision if Council preferred to review the contract annually. Following the discussion, the City Manager requested a motion to approve the contract extension through September 30, 2026, with revisions to remove the automatic extension clause if desired by the Council.

After discussion, Comm Lance moved to approve the contract between Fisher Planning and Development Services, Inc., for the city planner position as outlined in the extended contract through September 30, 2026, and remove the clause "the city manager shall have the right to extend the term of this agreement for up to one additional year."

Comm Smith seconded the motion, which passed unanimously 7:0.

8. Attorneys' Report

Attorney Langley emphasized that planning services are an essential function of the City and not an optional activity. The City must have qualified personnel to process permits, prepare variance reports, and review land development applications. He commended April Fisher for her work and stated that no other current staff member is equipped to perform these duties. The member concluded by reiterating that planning services are a necessary function of local government, regardless of specific cost considerations.

9. City Manager's Report

City Manager Rudometkin reported that he will give his and Public Works report. Mr. Price was not in attendance due to some family commitments. CM Rudometkin provided an update on ongoing Public Works projects that included:

- Sidewalk improvements around City Hall have been completed, with work scheduled to continue into the Conway area next.
- Landscaping maintenance is ongoing.
- Staff is coordinating with the County on the sewer line installation along Judge Road, with some night work anticipated near Conway; public notice will be provided in advance.
- The lease for the new dually truck, approved in the budget to tow the vac trailer for storm drain maintenance, is in progress with an expected delivery in three to four months.
- The City is also planning enhancements at Judge Road and Detwiler Drive, including potential guardrail installation, sidewalk and crosswalk improvements, and safety measures following a recent vehicle accident in the area.

CM Rudometkin reminded the community of the upcoming "Boogie on the Bridge" event on Wednesday, October 29, from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m., featuring food trucks, a DJ, vendors, and a costume contest.

CM Rudometkin provided a summary of his City Manager's update on several ongoing matters as follows:

- Final documentation for the Soul Avenue project has been submitted and approved, and the City is awaiting release of funds. Follow-up communications with the funding agency will continue until payment is received.
- He continues to work with KPMG regarding the Hurricane Ian reimbursement application, which appears to be facing rejection. Once a formal response or letter is received, a Council workshop will be scheduled to review the findings and discuss possible next steps, including legal or legislative options.
- He gave an update and noted that BioTech confirmed that all mitigation work for the proposed Municipal Complex must be completed before construction.

10. Chief's Report

Chief Grimm gave an update on upcoming events as follows:

- Homecoming Parade and Seatbelt 5K have been completed.
- Upcoming events include the DEA Drug Take Back from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. and Oktoberfest from 4:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., which will result in temporary road closures at Randolph and Fairlane.
- Boogie on the Bridge event will also impact traffic, and advance notices will be posted via signs, e-alerts, and social media. While efforts are made to communicate road closures, some disruptions are unavoidable during large events, and residents are encouraged to contact the city for assistance. Chief Grimm explained that one-lane closures are not feasible for safety reasons, but efforts are always made to assist residents and deliveries when possible.

11. Public Works Report – (See CM Report)

12. Mayor's Report

Mayor Carson acknowledged the proclamation declaring November 1–8, 2025, as National Family Week, which was approved under the consent agenda. The Proclamation emphasizes the importance of family support and strengthens the City's relationship with community organizations. Mayor Carson thanked staff, Comm Vertolli, and Comm Smith for organizing and hosting the recent Tri-County League of Cities meeting.

Additionally, the Mayor discussed exploring improvements to the City's meeting broadcast system, suggesting that meetings be streamed on YouTube as well as Facebook to increase public accessibility and transparency. He noted this could also allow agendas or timestamps to be shared alongside broadcasts. Council shared their support for moving to YouTube and Facebook. Mayor Carson concluded by thanking all staff and commissioners for their continued dedication and offering condolences to Mr. Price and his family following a recent loss.

13. Council Report

The council thanked staff, PD, and Commissioners, and especially the sponsors, Fishback, Groundwerks, and Ace Wrecker, for their support of the Tri-County meeting. Comm Lance asked for a follow-up on the presenter's PowerPoint to share with the Council. Comm Lowell thanked staff member Heidi Peacock for all her hard work and follow-up.

14. Adjournment

There being no further business, Mayor Carson called for a motion to adjourn the meeting, which passed unanimously at 8:35 pm.