



CITY OF BELLE ISLE, FL PLANNING & ZONING BOARD MEETING

Tuesday, July 22, 2025 * 6:30 PM

MINUTES

The Belle Isle Planning & Zoning Board met on July 22, 2025, at 6:30 p.m. at the City Hall Chambers at 1600 Nela Avenue, Belle Isle, FL 32809.

Present was:

Board member Agrusa
Board member Zimmerman
Board member Hobbs
Board member Thompson
Board member Squires
Board member Conduff

Absent was:

Board member Holihan

City Manager Rick Rudometkin, Attorney Hilary Griffith, City Planner April Fisher, and City Clerk Yolanda Quiceno were also present.

1. Call to Order and Confirmation of Quorum

Vice Chairman Squires opened the meeting at 6:30 p.m., and the Clerk confirmed the quorum.

2. Invocation and Pledge to Flag

Board member Conduff gave the invocation and led the pledge to the flag.

3. Approval of Minutes - na

4. Public Hearings

- a. Planning and Zoning Case Number 2025-07-001: PURSUANT TO SECTION 42-64 (THE CITY OF BELLE ISLE PLANNING AND ZONING BOARD SHALL REVIEW AND TAKE ACTION ON A REQUESTED VARIANCE FROM SECTION 50-78 (A) (1) AND (E) TO ALLOW BLACK ARTIFICIAL TURF INSTEAD OF THE REQUIRED GREEN COLOR, SUBMITTED BY APPLICANT AND PROPERTY OWNER LESLIE ARMSTRONG, LOCATED AT 5705 COVE DRIVE, BELLE ISLE, FLORIDA 32812, ALSO KNOWN AS PARCEL ID #20-23-30-1662-00-020.

Vice Chair Squires read the Public Hearing case number 2025-07-001 by title.

City Manager Rudometkin asked City Attorney Griffith to give a summary of the existing city code.

Attorney Griffith provided an overview of Florida House Bill 683, specifically Section 125.572, which addresses the regulation of synthetic turf. The bill includes a recommendation that the Florida Department of Environmental Protection establish minimum standards for the installation and use of synthetic turf.

At this time, the bill has not been enacted into law and therefore is not in effect. As such, House Bill 683 does not preempt or override the City's current code definitions and regulations related to synthetic turf. Should the bill be passed and signed into law, the City will review its current policies and make any necessary updates to ensure compliance with state requirements.

Vice Chairman Squires opened for the Staff Report.

April Fisher, City Planner, presented the variance request submitted to permit the installation of artificial turf in a color not currently allowed under the City's Land Development Code (LDC). Specifically, the applicant is seeking approval to install black artificial turf. The applicant has provided supporting background information and photographs illustrating the proposed material.

Ms. Fisher noted that the variance request represents the minimum deviation necessary and appears to align with the general purpose and intent of the Code. However, the application does not satisfy all of the criteria required for granting a variance as outlined in Section 42-64(1) of the City Code. The Board has the authority to: (1) Approve the variance as submitted, potentially with special conditions; (2) Continue the item to a future meeting if additional information is needed; or (3) Deny the application.

City staff recommend denying the request to allow black artificial turf, as it does not meet all the required criteria for approval under the applicable variance standards.

Vice Chairman Squires opened for public comment.

- Leslie Armstrong, the applicant residing at 5705 Cove Drive, addressed the Board in support of the variance request. She explained that when she purchased the property, it featured dense landscaping with trees and shrubs extending from the front of the home to the street. Since acquiring the property, she has removed much of the existing landscaping and is seeking to implement a new design. As an artist, Ms. Armstrong stated that her vision for the landscape includes a creative layout resembling the frame of a picture. The use of black artificial turf would provide a distinct contrast to the surrounding natural grass, helping to achieve this visual effect. She also noted that the proposed turf material is permeable.
- Gary Dave, the applicant, also residing at 5705 Cove Drive, spoke in support of the application. He emphasized that another motivation for selecting artificial turf is its environmental benefits. Unlike natural grass, synthetic turf does not require fertilizers or insecticides, thereby supporting the preservation of local wildlife and reducing chemical use in the area.
- Debra Turner, 4200 Cove Drive, 42-year resident, spoke in opposition to the variance request. She is opposed to artificial turf due to the carcinogens it contains, which can affect groundwater and disrupt the ecology. Additionally, the value of our homes may be impacted. She shared her opinion on other alternatives.
- Barbara Foley, residing at 5707 Cove Drive, spoke in opposition to the variance request. She spoke of her opposition to artificial turf, along with the commercial concrete blocks and large planters she had placed in the front yard and on the right-of-way.
- Kimberly Cheslock, residing at 5716 Cove Drive, spoke in opposition to the variance request. She spoke about the flooding currently surrounding the property due to the current change.

Board member Zimmerman shared his observations, stating that he had researched the permit records and could not find any building permits in the system. He asked if the product is permeable because the product approval was not provided. There also appears to be recent installations in the ROW on the right side of the driveway.

Board member Conduff spoke briefly about utilizing materials other than those proposed.

Board member Thompson asked if there is anything in the code that will allow the applicant to return with a new application if the proposed law changes in the coming weeks. CM Rudometkin said that at this time, it is not allowed. If the law changes, there may not be a requirement for a variance.

Board member Agrusa asked if the applicant could propose extending the driveway to the fence line on the left side. The applicant said it would not be possible because that is where they have their septic tank. He further asked what the time frame was for removing the unpermitted work. CM Rudometkin said this was not for discussion at this time; however, staff had given them 30 days.

The Board briefly discussed the planting of trees in the ROW and stones in the yard. CM Rudometkin said that it is a separate issue and is being addressed by staff and Code Enforcement.

There being no further comments, Vice Chairman Squires closed the public comment.

After further discussion, BOARD MEMBER ZIMMERMAN MOVED TO DENY THE VARIANCE TO ALLOW BLACK ARTIFICIAL TURF INSTEAD OF THE REQUIRED GREEN COLOR DUE TO IT BEING SELF-CREATED (SECTION 42-64(1)e SEEKING APPROVAL FOR AN ARTIFICIAL TURF COLOR THAT IS NOT ALLOWED BY THE LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE SUBMITTED BY APPLICANT AND PROPERTY OWNER LESLIE ARMSTRONG, LOCATED AT 5705 COVE DRIVE, BELLE ISLE, FLORIDA 32812, ALSO KNOWN AS PARCEL ID #20-23-30-1662-00-020.

VICE CHAIRMAN SQUIRES SECONDED THE MOTION. Board member Thompson stated that the genesis of his pending no vote is recognizing that there is a requirement under the current code to maintain the artificial turf in a green state.

WHICH PASSED 4:2 WITH BOARD MEMBER THOMPSON AND BOARD MEMBER CONDUFF, NAY.

April Fisher, City Planner, stated that the Public has 15 days to appeal the Board's decision.

5. Adjournment

There being no further discussion, Vice Chairman Squires moved to adjourn, which was unanimously approved at 7:15 pm.