



CITY OF BELLE ISLE, FL CITY COUNCIL 1ST BUDGET HEARING & COUNCIL MEETING

Tuesday, September 16, 2025 * 6:30 PM
MINUTES

Present was:

Mayor – Jason Carson
District 1 Commissioner – Frank Vertolli
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:

District 2 Commissioner – Holly Bobrowski

1. Call to Order

Mayor Carson called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m., and the Clerk confirmed the presence of a quorum. City Manager Rudometkin, Deputy Chief Millis, Attorney Langley, Public Works Director Phil Price, and City Clerk Yolanda Quiceno were also present.

2. Invocation and Pledge to Flag

Comm Lance gave the Invocation and led the Pledge to the Flag.

Mayor Carson called for a motion to excuse Comm Bobrowski from this evening's session.

Comm Smith moved to excuse Comm Bobrowski.

Comm Vertolli seconded the motion, which passed unanimously 6:0.

3. First Public Budget Hearing – FY 2025/2026

Mayor Carson called for a motion to open the First Budget Public Hearing.

Comm Lance moved to open the First Budget Public Hearing.

Comm Lowell seconded the motion, which passed unanimously 6:0.

City Manager Rick Rudometkin presented the FY 2025-2026 Proposed budget, discussing the millage rate increase from 4.1618 to 5.0000 mills. This increase, over the rolled-back rate, represents a 20.14% rise, necessary to maintain the current level of service, account for inflation, and cover the rising costs associated with Orange County fire service. Orange County Fire Millage increased to 0.6, resulting in an additional cost of \$629K to the City for the Fiscal year 2025-2026. Mr. Rudometkin discussed the city's reserve percentage and the importance of maintaining a healthy reserve. He spoke briefly on the future uncertainty due to the potential Governor's initiative to cut or eliminate the property tax reform. He presented a 10-year graph on expenditures by department and Fund balances. He presented the annual Five-Year Capital Improvement Plan, noting that it is part of the requirement process when passing the annual budget. Mayor Carson called for public comment; there being none, he closed citizen comments.

After the discussion, City Manager Rudometkin asked for approval of Resolution 25-09.

Comm Smith moved to adopt Resolution 25-09 as presented.

Comm Lowell seconded the motion, which failed upon roll call with Comm Vertolli, nay.

Comm Vertolli stated that he does not see the need for such a big increase in the budget surplus, as he feels it is too much to place on the residents.

After further discussion, City Attorney Langley stated that Resolution 25-09 should be revised with the new millage rate of 4.7845 mills. City Manager Rudometkin states the new tentative millage rate and the percentage increase over the rollback rate to be 4.7845, with a 14.96% increase over the rolled-back rate.

Comm Smith moved to amend Resolution 25-09 with a millage of 4.7845.

Comm Lance seconded the motion, which passed upon roll call 5:1 with Comm Vertolli, nay.

After adoption, City Manager Rudometkin stated the City Council adopted a tentative millage rate of 4.7845 mills for the fiscal year, beginning October 1, 2025, and ending September 30, 2026. The tentative millage of 4.7845 mills is greater than the rollback rate of 4.1618 mills by 14.96%.

City Manager Rudometkin presented and read by title Resolution 25-10.

Mayor Carson opened for Council discussion. After the discussion, Mayor Carson called for a five-minute break to allow staff to calculate the new total budget amount due to the reduction of the tentative millage rate from 5.0000 to 4.7845 mills, which was unanimously approved.

City Manager Rudometkin read the amended Resolution 25-10 by title.

Comm Smith moved to amend Resolution 25-10 with a millage of 4.7845 to \$15,139,674.

Comm Lowell seconded the motion, which passed unanimously upon roll call 6:0.

Mayor Carson called for a motion to close the First Budget Public hearing for FY25-26.

Comm Lance moved to close the First Budget Public Hearing for FY 25-26.

Comm Lowell seconded the motion, which passed unanimously 6:0.

Mr. Rudometkin reminded Council that the next budget hearing and final budget adoption are scheduled for Tuesday, September 30, 2025, at 6:30 pm.

3. Public Comments & Announcements

Mayor Carson opened for public comment.

Todd Zimmerman, residing at 6517 Cay Circle, spoke on the proposed Fee Schedule and the inclusion of the PPI policy. He expressed concerns over the blending of fee schedules with policy and procedures, recommending they be separated. He shared experiences with permits involving Private Provider Inspection (PPI) services, with specific objections including the use of the term "complete" in the eligibility requirements of the fee structure. He proposed striking restrictive "plan" and "contract" language, adjusting reduction percentages, and suggesting a 90% administrative fee reduction instead of 50%, a reduction of 100% of the total permit fees, and 90% for the inspection fee under Florida Statute 553.791.

There being no further comment, Mayor Carson closed public comments.

4. Presentations

- a. Deputy Chief Millis introduced and swore in Officer Karlos Ramos and welcomed Officer Mendez back from his military deployment.

- b. CE Appeal – 2504 Trentwood

Mayor Carson opened the Public hearing for 2504 Trentwood Blvd.

Patrick Aberly, Code Enforcement Office for the City of Belle Isle, presented CE Case number 25-0341 related to the unauthorized removal of a large tree at 2504 Trentwood. On July 14, during routine patrol, he observed signs that a tree had been freshly cut without a visible permit or arborist report on file. He issued two violations, one for using an unregistered tree service and another for removing a tree without proper permits, totaling \$1,000 in fines. He said he spoke briefly with the resident at the time, explaining the city's tree protection policy. He acknowledged that he did not initially inform the resident about the 10-day window to submit an arborist report. A follow-up attempt was made on August 11, but the resident was not home. A return call was received; however, he was unavailable. CE Officer Aberly stated he would have been willing to resolve the issue without fines if appropriate documentation had been submitted.

Comm Lance and Mayor Carson attested that the tree was leaning backwards with dead branches for a long period of time. Council discussed the process of obtaining a permit, removing a tree with an unauthorized vendor, and emergency removals. Council discussed the importance of notifying the community of the tree removal process and the updated State laws.

Mr. Dwayne Henry spoke on behalf of the homeowner, Desmond Lewis, residing at 2504 Trentwood Blvd. Mr. Henry explained that Mr. Lewis was out of town when the issue arose and was unaware of the permitting requirements. The

tree in question was reportedly leaning and posed a safety concern, with branches nearing power lines. Out of caution, Mr. Lewis coordinated with the family to have the tree removed to prevent potential property damage or electrical hazards. Mr. Henry noted that Mr. Lewis is a part-time resident and was unfamiliar with the city's tree removal procedures. He emphasized that there was no intent to bypass regulations and requested a waiver or exemption of the associated fines, citing the emergency nature of the situation. He added that the family values their trees and did not remove it unnecessarily, only out of concern for public safety. Mr. Henry expressed their apologies and appreciation for the Council's time and consideration.

Comm Partin noted that the City's ordinances specifically allow for emergency tree removal in cases where a tree poses an immediate danger. Based on the facts presented, the property owner acted appropriately under this provision, responding to a neighbor's concern about a hazardous tree while out of town and arranging for its removal. Comm Partin said that the ordinance was designed to allow for this type of urgent action without requiring full permitting procedures and suggested that the situation qualified under that exemption, recommending that the violation may be dismissed rather than reduced. Discussed ensued.

After discussion, Comm Vertolli moved to reduce the fine to \$400, payable within 60 days, with the stipulation that the homeowner plants two new trees on his property within the same time period. If the homeowner fails to comply, the fine will revert to the original fine imposed. He further added that a list of trees can be found in the City's Code of Ordinances. Comm Lance seconded the motion, which passed 5:1 with Comm Partin nay.

5. Consent Items

- A. Approval of the City Council Meeting Minutes – August 19, 2025
- B. Approval of Surplus of Admin Office Equipment

Mayor Carson called for a motion to approve the consent items

Comm Lance moved to approve items A and B as presented.

Comm Smith seconded the motion, which passed unanimously 6:0.

6. Unfinished Business - na

7. New Business

- a. 2024-2025 Red Light Camera Survey

On behalf of the Police Chief, City Manager Rudometkin presented the annual Red Light Camera Program report, as required by Florida Statute, for Council review. The report includes safety data and program performance. Both the vendor and city staff recommend continuing the program with no changes. Council is asked to acknowledge the report and consider maintaining the program in its current form.

Comm Smith moved to acknowledge the council's review of the submitted 24-25 red light camera report and to continue the program as is pursuant to Florida Statute 316.0083(4)(c).

Comm Partin seconded the motion, which passed unanimously 6:0.

- c. Review of Updated Fee Schedule

City Manager Rudometkin presented the updated Fee schedule for review and adoption at the September 30th scheduled meeting. He noted that the fee schedule is given with the budget each year, and the changes are minor for this upcoming year. Council discussed the Private Provide Inspection (PPI) addition. Attorney Langley noted that Florida statutes permit private property owners to use their own inspectors, thereby bypassing city-provided plan review and inspection services. The statute mandates a fee reduction in such cases. It was noted that the administrative fee must reflect actual costs incurred by the city, which in this case are consultant-based. Since the city contracts out these services, the costs are fixed and directly tied to consultant rates. A 50% fee reduction was described as consistent with what other municipalities are implementing. Some jurisdictions may offer slightly lower reductions, but they typically have in-house staff rather than using consultants.

8. Attorney's Report -na

9. City Manager's Report

- a. City Manager's Report

City Manager Rudometkin provided the City Manager Work Plan and spoke on the following items;

- Mr. Rudometkin reported on the ongoing efforts to secure FEMA reimbursement for Hurricane Ian-related expenses. The original project amount was \$1.265 million, later revised to approximately \$775,000. After meeting with KPMG, it appears

the City may not receive any reimbursement due to documentation and procedural issues that could void the project entirely. A formal report from KPMG is expected within 2–4 weeks. Once the report is received, he will schedule a workshop to review the findings, determine next steps, and discuss them in more detail at a future open meeting. He noted that full reimbursement was received for Hurricane Milton within seven months.

- Mr. Rudometkin reported an increase in resident concerns about wake damage caused by large boats on the lake, particularly from wake-surfing and deep-V hull boats. While some residents have requested ramp closures due to erosion concerns, it was noted that lake levels are currently at normal levels and do not meet the criteria for closures. The City's current code enforces a 5 mph no-wake zone within 100 feet of any dock, and marine patrol is actively monitoring and educating boaters to comply with these regulations. The only occurrence for closure is during a hurricane event due to safety hazards. The City continues to work with County and State agencies, including St. Johns River Water Management District and South Florida Water Management District, regarding the removal and permitting process for the weir, which could help lower lake levels in preparation for storms.
- Mr. Rudometkin provided an update on recent changes to Florida State law, noting that the previous prohibition on open carrying firearms has effectively been reversed. Florida will now allow open carry in line with laws already in place in several other states. Residents and visitors may begin to see individuals openly carrying firearms in public spaces. The public was advised not to panic if they see someone lawfully carrying a weapon. However, if there are concerns about suspicious behavior or safety, individuals are encouraged to contact the police. It was acknowledged that some may choose to carry firearms openly to exercise their rights. Further clarification on enforcement and public safety will be provided by the Police Chief as needed. DC Millis said from a law enforcement standpoint, the Attorney General has sent to all law enforcement agencies not to arrest for any open carry. Now that doesn't still include government buildings, bars, and schools; there are still some requirements in those buildings.

b. Chief's Report

Deputy Chief Millis provided the August stats for the Agency. He announces that Officer Belle and Officer Hernandez have passed their certifications for both the officer and the dog who are now certified to work in the community. He also gave an update on the massage parlor in the City. A worker was arrested for performing massages without a license, and the business was under investigation for concerns of human trafficking. After further investigation, there were no signs of human trafficking. The BIPD continues to focus on DUI offenses within the City limits.

c. Public Works Report

Phil Price reported that sidewalk repairs are ongoing throughout the city. He and the City Manager held their annual meeting with Duke Energy, who confirmed that tree trimming is approximately 80% complete, with no additional trimming scheduled in the area after this quarter. He reported that the Orange County project in Conway Lakes Landings will begin in approximately two weeks. The contractor will be installing a force main from the lift station along Judge Road to Conway Road. This work will result in increased activity and equipment in the area, including temporary sidewalk closures. Due to limited space, pedestrians, bicycles, and golf cart traffic may need to be rerouted to the opposite side of the road. Mr. Price informed Council of potential resident concerns and reminded Council that the section of Conway does not fall under the jurisdiction of the City. He said he will communicate with the Contractor to ensure proper signage.

10. Mayor's Report

Mayor Carson reported that a formal letter was sent to Orange County requesting that the City be included in future discussions related to lake levels and weir operations. Confirmation of receipt was received, though no response has yet been provided. The Mayor emphasized the importance of having a seat at the table in these conversations, given the City's stake in the outcomes, and highlighted ongoing collaboration with Orange County representatives. Mayor Carson also extended heartfelt condolences to the Edgewater Police Department following the tragic and unexpected loss of an officer earlier in the day. He expressed appreciation for City staff and commissioners, acknowledging the hard work and collaboration throughout the budget season and commending their dedication to the City's future.

11. Commissioners' Report

- Comm Lance asked about the process and fee for parking permits within the City. He wondered if the Council would consider waiving charges for certain circumstances. Comm Lance clarified that the existing weir structure has space for an additional board, which was intentionally left out during reconstruction after the Daetwyler Road bridge collapse, resulting in a slightly lower lake level than possible. He said that the ultimate control over lake management lies with the state, not the county. The commissioner expressed support for implementing speed limits and potential no-wake zones, but stressed that the primary need is boater education, particularly for wakeboarding and skiing activities, understanding the strong/weak side of wakeboarding boats to direct wakes away from the shoreline. He noted that the State implies that the shoreline loss is considered a natural occurrence; however, he argued it is happening in an "unnatural way" due to increased boating activity and that education is the most effective solution.
- Comm Vertolli reminded Council of the upcoming Tri-County meeting on October 16th and would appreciate the Mayor and Commissioners' attendance, if possible.

12. Adjournment

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