CITY OF BELLE ISLE, FL

CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP

Tuesday, August 4, 2026 * 6:00 PM

MINUTES

Present:	**Absent:**
Mayor – Jason Carson	
District 1 Commissioner – Ed Gold	
District 2 Commissioner – Holly Bobrowski	
District 3 Commissioner – Karl Shuck	
District 4 Commissioner – Bobby Lance	
District 5 Commissioner – Beth Lowell	
District 6 Commissioner – Christopher Oller	
District 7 Commissioner – Jim Partin	

1. Call to Order and Confirmation of Quorum

Mayor Carson called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm, and the Clerk confirmed quorum.
City Manager (CM) Rick Rudometkin, Chief Grimm, Deputy Chief Millis, Sgt Wasmund, Public Works Director Phil Price, Finance Director Tracey Richardson, and City Clerk Yolanda Quiceno were also present.

2. Review Draft Budget FY 2026/2027 Budget

City Manager Rudometkin (CM) presented the proposed budget V2 and provided an overview of changes made since the previous discussion. The revised budget included a synopsis of the changes and additional explanations related to the Public Works Department, as previously requested by Council. Staff also identified three potential funding requests that were not included in the proposed budget for Council's consideration. CM Rudometkin spoke briefly on the request involving JJ's Recycling and Waste. The proposed budget includes approximately $872,000 for solid waste services, which incorporates a 26% landfill cost increase passed through from Orange County. JJ's also requested a temporary gasoline surcharge due to increased fuel costs. Funding the surcharge for a full 12 months would increase the annual amount to approximately $923,000, an additional $52,000, or approximately $4,333 per month. Staff advised that the fuel surcharge is not required under the existing contract and therefore was not included in the proposed budget. JJ's indicated the surcharge would be discontinued if gasoline prices decrease. Council may consider whether to include funding for the surcharge during the budget process.

CM Rudometkin also discussed a request for a residential composting program previously presented to the Budget Committee. The composting company indicated approximately 200 participating residents would be needed for the program to become sustainable and requested that the City subsidize the program during its initial four months at an estimated cost of approximately $20,000. The Budget Committee heard the presentation but did not make a recommendation to move the request forward. They advised that the company could independently solicit interested residents, obtain the necessary City business license, and establish the service without a City subsidy.

CM Rudometkin further discussed Comm Bobrowski's requested agenda item to discuss the canal dredging at the Venetian Canal. Additional information is being gathered, and the matter will be placed on the August 20 agenda for further discussion. He advised that Council could fund canal dredging regardless of ownership considerations; however, additional information and comments from the City Attorney will be provided when the item is discussed. Depending on Council's direction, funding for canal dredging could potentially need to be incorporated into the budget.

CM Rudometkin reminded Council of the scheduled budget workshops prior to the statutorily required public hearings for adoption of the final budget and millage rate. Staff concluded the overview and opened the workshop for Council questions and discussion.

Council discussed JJ's Recycling and Waste's request for an additional gasoline surcharge. Mayor Carson expressed concern with the request, noting that the existing contract does not contain a fuel escalation clause or establish a baseline fuel price that would provide for adjustments when gasoline prices increase or decrease. He stated that fuel is a normal cost of doing business for a waste collection company and expressed concern about modifying the contract to account for fluctuations in operating costs that were not included in the original agreement.

Vice Mayor Lowell concurred, stating that fuel expenses are part of the company's cost of doing business and that JJ's should consider operational efficiencies, including more fuel-efficient vehicles, when managing those expenses. She also expressed concern that establishing a fuel surcharge could become difficult to administer as gasoline prices fluctuate, requiring the City to continually determine when a surcharge should be added or removed. Mayor Carson and Council further discussed the cyclical nature of fuel prices and questioned whether approving the request could result in similar requests whenever gasoline prices increase in the future. It was also noted that JJ's had operated under previous contracts during periods when gasoline prices were higher, and that fuel costs should have been considered when establishing its contractual pricing. Following discussion, Council reached a consensus not to support or include the requested gasoline surcharge, determining that the additional fuel expense was not required under the existing contract and should remain a cost of doing business for the contractor.

Council discussed the request for City funding to subsidize the proposed composting program. Comm Bobrowski expressed that composting is a private business and that providing City funding could establish a precedent for other private companies to request seed money. It was also questioned whether the company could obtain the approximately 200 Belle Isle residents needed to participate at a cost of $18 to $34 per month. Council reached a consensus not to fund the composting request. Staff noted that the City and Budget Committee had previously suggested that the composting company explore a potential partnership with JJ's. It was also suggested that the company may be able to pursue other available funding opportunities.

CM Rudometkin explained that insurance rates remained flat from the prior year, following a significant increase the previous year. The City remained with the Florida League of Cities pooled insurance program and did not solicit other insurance options. Staff did not have an immediate dollar amount available for the overall difference between the two budget versions. Council further requested clarification regarding several expenditures that had been moved or recoded. Ms. Richardson explained that the changes were made to better align the budget with the Uniform Accounting Systems Manual (UASM) and to more accurately reflect the true costs within individual departments. Examples included moving the City Manager's cell phone expense from General Government to the department in which the City Manager's position is budgeted and reclassifying certain software subscription and maintenance expenses that had previously been included under professional services. As a result, some line items decreased to zero while corresponding amounts appeared as increases in other, more appropriate accounts. Ms. Richardson stated that an internal guide identifying the specific account changes is available and could be provided for reference.

Council discussed the importance of carefully reviewing the proposed budget and identifying opportunities for savings in preparation for the potential passage of homestead/property tax changes. Comm Bobrowski stated that the budget had been reviewed line by line to determine where expenses might be reduced or require additional clarification. She discussed revenue from building permit fees and asked if they had been increased within the last couple of years. The City Clerk said it was a couple of years back by a relatively small amount. Council questioned why building permit revenue was budgeted at approximately $150,000, representing a significant decrease from FY 2024/25 actual revenues of approximately $396,000, and asked whether the City anticipated a reduction in building permit activity. Ms. Richardson explained that building permit revenues were budgeted lower based on historical trends. The charter school project accounted for a substantial portion of building permit revenues during the previous two years, including approximately $396,000 in FY 2024/25. Staff indicated that this level of revenue was not typical and anticipated permit revenues returning closer to historical levels, resulting in the proposed estimate of approximately $150,000.

Council also questioned the projected decrease in red-light camera revenues, noting a reduction from approximately $615,000 to $420,000 despite no apparent decrease in traffic. Chief Grimm explained that red-light camera revenues have historically declined over time as drivers become more aware of camera locations and comply with traffic signals. He noted that the cameras are becoming more widely recognized and that newer navigation technology may also alert drivers to red-light camera locations. The decline in revenue was characterized as an indication that the cameras are working as intended.

Council questioned approximately **$**737,000 in lease proceeds reflected in the FY 2024/25 actual budget that did not appear in the proposed budget. Ms. Richardson explained that the amount represented by vehicle leases is offset by corresponding expenditure within the applicable departments. The lease proceeds record the value of vehicles leased during the fiscal year, while principal and interest payments are reflected in departmental expenditures. CM Rudometkin advised that the exact amount is not known until closer to the end of the fiscal year and that the budget will be amended to reflect the final amount. He clarified that the lease proceeds and corresponding expenditures offset one another and therefore do not have a net impact on the overall budget.

Comm Bobrowski discussed the proposed cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) in light of the recently implemented employee compensation and step program. She noted that she could not support a Citywide COLA this year, noting that employees had received two compensation adjustments within six months and that some employees received increases of up to 31% between the adjustments. CM Rudometkin clarified that COLA and step increases serve different purposes, with the COLA addressing inflation and the step increase representing salary progression. The proposed 4% COLA was included as a placeholder based on inflation and recommendations from the compensation study. Staff noted that inflation had since decreased from 4.2% to 3.5% and stated that the proposed COLA would be adjusted to follow the updated Consumer Price Index (CPI). CM Rudometkin stated that Council could also establish a maximum COLA or choose not to provide one. Comm Bobrowski stated that she is trying to break the public perception and convince people that we're trying to be really good stewards with their money, and we understand that they're hurting too. Chief Grimm stated that when reviewing a pay plan, you have to look at the whole package and study because it places all staff at a different step at market value.

Comm Bobrowski identified crossing guards as an exception because they are part-time employees without benefits and were not included in the compensation study. Belle Isle crossing guards currently earn $17.50 per hour, compared with $18.18 per hour for Orange County Public Schools crossing guards. It was noted that the Orange County rate was anticipated to receive a 4% COLA, increasing it to approximately $18.92 per hour. Comm Bobrowski proposed to help reduce the difference between the two rates by providing a 4% COLA for Belle Isle crossing guards, equivalent to approximately $0.70 per hour. Council also discussed reimbursement of crossing guard expenses by Cornerstone. Chief Grimm indicated that the City is believed to receive 100% reimbursement for crossing guard costs; however, the specific reimbursement arrangement and whether an increased hourly rate would also be fully reimbursed required clarification. Staff noted that the City provides the crossing guard costs for billing to CCA, while the exact terms of the reimbursement arrangement were not immediately available. CM Rudometkin addressed the proposed crossing guard increase and recommended providing a direct pay increase rather than applying a COLA, stating that this would be the cleaner approach.

Comm Bobrowski discussed the proposed millage rate increase. She noted that the millage rate had remained at approximately 4.40 for a number of years before being increased last year to 4.7845. Comm Bobrowski stated that last year's increase represented approximately $248 per property, and that the proposed additional increase of approximately 0.21 mills, bringing the rate to approximately 5.0 mills, could add another $166 per residence. She expressed concern that the combined increase over two years could exceed $400 per residence and could be significant for residents on fixed incomes. Comm Bobrowski also acknowledged efforts by the Police Department 6% to 5%. However, she commented that additional alternatives should be explored before increasing the millage rate again. Suggestions included obtaining a grant writer to identify funding opportunities for capital equipment and other expenses, including approximately $72,000 for police radios, as well as reviewing utility franchise fees or taxes and development permitting fees for potential additional revenue. She emphasized the importance of reviewing the budget line by line for additional savings, noting that smaller reductions across multiple accounts could result in meaningful overall savings. After discussions with residents, Comm Bobrowski stated that she could not support raising the millage rate for a second consecutive year.

Comm Lowell clarified that setting the maximum doesn't mean that it will be the final number and that the City can approve a lower percentage if necessary. CM Rudometkin clarified that Council will formally vote on the final millage rate during the required public hearing and that the proposed rate of approximately 4.9999 mills represents the maximum rate that may be considered. He emphasized that the proposed millage increase was not requested to fund general operations, but rather to help offset continuing increases in the cost of Orange County fire services. Staff stated that the City is already absorbing approximately $300,000 to $400,000 of the increased fire costs. He further discussed the proposed ordinance related to a fire feasibility study and the possibility of separating fire service costs from the millage rate. He explained that the City could not charge residents for fire service through both the millage rate and a separate assessment. If fire costs were ultimately separated from the millage, the millage rate would need to be reduced accordingly. He noted that a separate fire assessment may not recover the full cost of the service, potentially requiring other non-ad valorem revenues to continue supporting fire and police services. CM Rudometkin reminded Council that the City had not increased its millage rate for approximately 15 years prior to the recent increase and reiterated that the current proposal was intended specifically to address rising fire service costs, with the final decision to be made as part of the budget adoption process.

Comm Gold discussed the continued increase in Orange County fire service costs, noting that costs have increased by approximately $1 million over three years and are based on the City's assessed property values rather than call volume. CM Rudometkin stated that Orange County had declined previous requests to change its billing formula or bill residents separately. The City is considering a feasibility study to evaluate separating fire costs from the millage; however, staff noted that any separate assessment would require a corresponding millage rollback and may not fully recover the City's fire costs. Council discussed the possibility of a public safety model incorporating fire and EMS services. The Police Chief advised that similar models exist elsewhere in Florida but would require a feasibility study and significant planning, training, equipment, and facilities, potentially making implementation a five-year project. Comm Gold expressed concerns regarding the substantial cost of operating a municipal fire department, response times, insurance/ISO ratings, and the benefits of the three existing Orange County stations serving the area. CM Rudometkin stated that the staff will continue evaluating options while monitoring the proposed property tax amendment. The proposed budget was prepared under normal operating assumptions; if the amendment passes, staff will reevaluate expenditures and services with Council and prioritize critical services. CM Rudometkin noted that any budgeted funds not expended during the fiscal year return to the unrestricted fund balance during year-end reconciliation.

After further discussion, CM Rudometkin reviewed the remaining budget calendar and asked whether Council wanted the proposed budget returned to the Budget Committee for additional review before the August 20 workshop. Budget Committee representatives Evertsen and Leff supported another review, noting that additional discussion could provide another opportunity to identify items or concerns that may have been missed. Council reached consensus to return the proposed budget to the Budget Committee for review on August 10. The next Council budget workshop will be held on August 20, prior to the September public hearings for final budget and millage adoption.

3. Adjournment

There being no further business, Mayor Carson adjourn the meeting at 7:00 pm.