



CITY OF BELLE ISLE, FL CITY COUNCIL MEETING

Tuesday, January 6, 2026 * 6:30 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:

1. Call to Order and Confirmation of Quorum

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

2. Invocation and Pledge to Flag - Commissioner Bobby Lance, District 4
Comm Lance led the invocation and Pledge to the Flag.

3. Public Comments & Announcements

Mayor Carson opened for public comment.

- Chris Whittaker, residing at 5220 Oak Island Road, addressed the Council regarding golf cart usage and pedestrian safety, based on a review of the City's golf cart brochure. He emphasized that his intent was not to eliminate golf carts, but to improve public safety. He noted increased school-related golf cart traffic and expressed concern about pedestrian safety. Mr. Whittaker requested formal consideration of the issue as a future agenda item and presented two recommendations: (1) revise golf cart access on Hoffner Avenue to allow golf carts on the roadway east of Embassy Street, rather than on sidewalks, and (2) maintain sidewalk use but prohibit golf cart operation between 7 a.m. and 9 a.m., when pedestrian activity is highest.

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

4. Presentations

a. Eagle Scout Project – Levi Davis

The Council welcomed Mr. Levi Davis. CM Rudometkin clarified that Mr. Davis would not present his project at this meeting but would observe it as part of his Eagle Scout project. Staff will meet with him at a later date regarding his Eagle Scout project, after which he will return to present the project to the Council.

b. Universal Engineering Services (UES) – Keeneth Derick, Sr Principal Engineer

CM Rudometkin welcomed and thanked Universal Engineering staff for their attendance. CM Rudometkin noted that UES has been with the City for over 10 years and works together with the City Planner and staff. Present were Kenneth Derick, David Oliveri, and Alan Johnson.

Council discussed permitting procedures with representatives from UES, including prior concerns regarding demolition permits and vegetation clearing. Comm Lowell referenced a past incident in which a demolition permit included language allowing vegetation removal. UES and staff confirmed that the issue was identified and corrected, and clarified that demolition permits no longer authorize vegetation or tree removal, which remains subject to City review in accordance with Belle Isle's Tree City standards.

UES representatives explained that tree regulation falls outside the Building Department's scope and is reviewed separately through City processes. They acknowledged the prior error, apologized, and stated procedures have been tightened to prevent recurrence.

Comm Partin inquired about permit timelines and reliance on Orange County. UES confirmed that most residential permits and inspections are handled locally and are not subject to Orange County backlogs, while certain commercial projects require Orange County Fire review. Routine permits, such as roofing, HVAC, and plumbing, can typically be processed quickly when applications are complete. UES emphasized that permit delays are most often due to incomplete applications and encouraged applicants to submit all required documentation at the outset. Council was advised that staff are available to assist residents and contractors throughout the process. UES confirmed that Belle Isle generally has consistent plan review and inspection personnel assigned, and residents may contact UES directly for inspection scheduling or permitting concerns.

Comm Lowell had questions regarding wildlife mitigation during demolition, which were addressed, with clarification that such matters fall outside the building department and may be addressed under code enforcement, housing, or property maintenance regulations. Council and staff thanked UES for their service, responsiveness, and continued coordination with the City. Comm Lance noted positive feedback from a resident on Trentwood Blvd regarding his experience with Universal Engineering and City staff.

Comm Shuck asked about the appropriate point of contact for residents experiencing delays with permitting or inspections. UES advised that residents may contact UES directly for scheduling or inspection concerns, particularly for time-sensitive inspections such as concrete pours. UES noted that while exact inspection times cannot always be guaranteed, communication allows staff to accommodate requests when possible. UES provided an overview of staff experience and emphasized their customer-service approach, stating their goal is to work collaboratively with residents, contractors, and the City while ensuring compliance with applicable codes. Council was advised that the timely issuance of permits and Certificates of Occupancy depends on the submission of complete documentation throughout the project, including final required materials.

CM Rudometkin said that he will provide UES contact information to the Council for reference and resident assistance. He noted that some permits are handled directly through UES, while others require coordination with the City Planner. Staff will continue to work collaboratively to address resident needs.

5. Consent Items

- a. Approval of meeting minutes – December 16, 2026

Mayor Carson called for a motion to approve the consent agenda as presented.

Comm Lowell moved to approve the consent agenda as presented.

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

6. Unfinished Business

- a. 3904 Arajo Court – Update

City Manager Rudometkin provided an update on the condition and progress of work at the subject property. Council was advised that limited exterior work had been completed, including partial painting, minor landscaping, and pressure washing. Some vegetation was removed and mulch added; however, rotted exterior wood has not yet been replaced, and several exterior repairs remain outstanding. An interior inspection indicated that significant renovation is still in progress, with substantial drywall removal, visible termite damage, and ongoing remediation. Staff noted that additional exterior work is planned, including soffit repairs, garage header and door replacement, removal of a shed, debris and metal cleanup, and further landscaping. He reported communicating with the contractor regarding delays and received confirmation that additional work, debris removal, and repairs are scheduled in the coming weeks. Updated photographs were provided to Council, and further updates will be shared. The contractor is scheduled to return to Council on January 20 to present progress updates and respond to questions.

Comm Vertolli inquired about Bernard's comment that there was no termite damage; how would one know? CM Rudometkin clarified that termite damage can be observed on the exterior in some areas; however, a full assessment requires removing the drywall. Interior inspections revealed significant termite damage and wood rot, particularly in areas adjacent to the garage, kitchen, and rear portions of the home. Damage was consistent with, or more severe than,

what was visible on the exterior. He noted that water intrusion has contributed to the deterioration, and several affected areas exhibited extensive structural compromise.

Mayor Carson stated that the Council has previously emphasized the need to address longstanding issues rather than defer action. Mayor Carson noted that the property owner provided proof of funds and that the Council's expectation is for the required work to be completed in a timely manner. He acknowledged hope that enforcement will not be necessary but reiterated that the City must uphold its standards and follow through on required actions if progress is not made.

Comm Partin asked if the City had received proof of financing. CM Rudometkin said no. We have not received confirmation. Comm Partin said they have not made as much headway as he had hoped. He asked if they would have a consultation on the paint color. Comm Smith said the HOA has no written approval process.

Comm Shuck asked if Bernard could provide a list of what has been completed and what remains to be completed. CM Rudometkin advised that substantial work remains outstanding on the property. The owner has indicated an intention to provide a detailed schedule outlining planned repairs. He said that the scope of work includes completing repairs to the entire exterior of the home prior to painting, followed by interior renovations. He noted that limited exterior painting was completed without necessary repairs, and that anticipated work during the holiday period did not proceed due to contractor availability. He reiterated the expectation that the owner present a comprehensive and continuous work schedule at the January 20 meeting and maintain consistent progress. CM Rudometkin reminded Council that the owner had previously estimated that the property could be brought into compliance within three to six months and emphasized the importance of adhering to that timeline.

Comm Shuck asked if Universal Engineering Services will be involved in the permitting and inspection process, including review of mechanical, electrical, plumbing, structural, and window replacements, to ensure the property is brought into full code compliance. CM Rudometkin said yes, they will proceed through the permitting process to ensure compliance with all applicable codes.

Mayor Carson noted that, due to the property's current condition, restoration will take a significant amount of time. A detailed checklist of tasks and their anticipated timeline has been requested from the owner, including coordination with subcontractors and the importance of adhering to a consistent schedule. Council discussed expectations for progress by the January 20 meeting. CM Rudometkin clarified that, to date, the owner has been asked to address basic exterior concerns, including trash removal, yard cleanup, and minor improvements to the front of the property. No definitive schedule or full scope of work had been formally provided, though initial steps were intended to demonstrate progress. The intent is to maintain the property's appearance while work continues, preventing it from appearing neglected. Council discussed that the January 20 meeting should include a formal work schedule and proof of funding, and noted that if sufficient progress is not made, the city may need to consider further action.

Comm Bobrowski asked if the neighbors had shared any concerns. CM Rudometkin reported that, despite the property's condition, the city has not received complaints from neighboring residents. The neighbor to the right, who has a chain-link fence and a large backyard, has not contacted the city regarding any issues. Similarly, the neighbor to the left has shown little activity or concern; the property may be a rental, though no complaints have been received. He confirmed that site visits have been conducted with both the police department and code enforcement, and contractors have also been on site. No reports of rodents, hazards, or other issues have been submitted. Residents are now hopeful about the current efforts to address the property and are generally supportive of progress being made. Staff referenced a similar situation with a property on Cove, which remained abandoned for years until it was eventually addressed, noting that community response tends to improve when visible action is taken.

7. New Business

FIRST READING AND CONSIDERATION - ORDINANCE 2026-01: AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY OF BELLE ISLE, FLORIDA, AMENDING CHAPTER 42, ARTICLE III, TO CREATE A NEW SECTION 42-73 TO ESTABLISH REGULATIONS AND PROCEDURES FOR CERTIFIED RECOVERY RESIDENCES, INCLUDING A PROCESS FOR REQUESTING REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION AS REQUIRED BY CHAPTER 2025-182, LAWS OF FLORIDA; PROVIDING FOR DEFINITIONS; PROVIDING FOR A REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION PROCESS IN ACCORDANCE WITH FEDERAL AND STATE LAW; PROVIDING FOR APPLICATION

REQUIREMENTS, REVIEW PROCEDURES, AND DEADLINES; PROVIDING FOR REVOCATION AND REINSTATEMENT; PROVIDING FOR SEVERABILITY; PROVIDING FOR CODIFICATION; AND PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

CM Rudometkin read Ordinance 2026-01 by title.

CM Rudometkin noted that the ordinance pertains to Chapter 2025-182, Laws of Florida, adopted during the most recent legislative session. Specifically, SB 954 requires all cities and counties to adopt a process for approving reasonable accommodation for certified recovery residences. Compliance with this legislation must be established no later than January 1, 2026. Due to only one council meeting in December, this ordinance is presented at the first meeting in January. A copy of Chapter 2025-182 was provided for review, along with a draft prepared by staff that incorporates the necessary provisions.

Comm Lowell noted that a few constituents had expressed concern about the ordinance. She asked for clarification, stating that while there may be personal opinions about the measure, compliance appears mandatory. The primary concern raised was how to mitigate any potential negative impacts on the neighborhood, including maintaining property values and preserving a positive community atmosphere.

The City Attorney explained that while the city is required to comply with Florida law regarding reasonable accommodations for certified recovery residences, the city retains certain rights and oversight authority. The statute does not automatically override local land use or zoning entirely. Recovery residences must submit an application for reasonable accommodation, which is reviewed according to consistent, objective criteria. The City retains authority to deny applications if they are deemed unreasonable or incompatible with the zoning or land use of a particular location. Applicants may revise and resubmit applications if initially denied, but the city must apply the same standards consistently to all applicants, in compliance with federal housing and disability laws. The City Attorney said that the process is not a "free-for-all." Applicants must receive city approval to operate, and the structured review process encourages compliance with local standards and ensures that operations are reasonable and appropriate for the surrounding neighborhood.

Comm Lance asked how many recovery residences are allowed within the city. The City Attorney clarified that Florida law does not limit the number of certified recovery residences that can be located in a neighborhood or district. There are different levels of recovery residences, with Level Four having the most subjective standards. Specifically, a Level Four residence cannot be located in a neighborhood of fewer than 25 contiguous single-family homes, which limits its applicability in most city neighborhoods. Levels One through Three could potentially be located in most neighborhoods.

Comm Lance noted that one Level One through Three residence already exists in the Windsor Place neighborhood. The City Attorney said that the city cannot enact local ordinances to limit the number of recovery residences per capita. State law, in alignment with the federal Fair Housing Act, prohibits blanket bans or restrictions based solely on personal preference or opposition to these facilities. The statute provides a process for applicants to request reasonable accommodation when the city has general policies or preferences against such facilities in certain areas. The city may establish objective criteria for reviewing applications, but these criteria must comply with state and federal law. Applications must be considered fairly and consistently, and a blanket denial without a legitimate reason is not permissible.

Comm Vertolli asked if we have any ordinances on the books or anything now that pertain to this situation. He asked if someone wanted to put eight people in a home; can they do that? The City Attorney said that while state law prevents the city from outright prohibiting certified recovery residences in certain zoning or land use categories, all other applicable laws and standards still apply. This means the facility cannot simply exceed occupancy limits or ignore safety, building, or health regulations. The law applies only to licensed operators, so it does not allow unregulated "fly-by-night" operations. Operators must go through the licensing process, and failure to comply can result in loss of their license, which would revoke any rights granted under this statute. Essentially, the law allows these facilities to be established in permitted areas, but once operational, all other regulations, including occupancy, safety, and building codes remain in effect. The ordinance does not override existing laws; it simply provides a process for these licensed facilities to seek reasonable accommodations within applicable zoning and land use categories. Comm Vertolli noted that the law in question was passed in June and said that this is not a matter of assigning blame. Other towns and counties had already begun establishing the required criteria. He suggested that the City consider implementing a

process to be notified promptly when new laws are passed, so that the city has adequate time to research, review, and prepare for compliance. The goal is to ensure the city can respond proactively rather than reactively to new legislation.

The City Attorney noted that once a certified recovery residence is in operation, it must still comply with all applicable city rules and regulations, just like any other residence. This includes compliance with noise ordinances, lighting ordinances, limits on gatherings, and other local codes. Mechanisms exist to address violations, ensuring that facilities can be shut down if they fail to adhere to these standards. The Council discussed that state regulations governing these facilities are also strict, and the local ordinance does not exempt them from compliance with existing laws. The purpose of state legislation is to ensure that a process exists for licensed, legitimate operations while preventing arbitrary denials by cities. This framework allows cities to review applications, apply objective criteria, and maintain oversight, while also aligning with federal Fair Housing law, which would likely prohibit blanket bans on such facilities.

The City Attorney also noted that the state law establishes a structured mechanism for operation rather than a free-for-all. Licensed operators must comply with both state and city regulations, and unlicensed or non-compliant operators are subject to licensing restrictions. The legislation provides cities with a role in oversight while balancing compliance with federal and state law. Council discussed that the law may have been influenced by broader legislative or advocacy efforts, potentially including a history of litigation related to Fair Housing. Regardless, the fundamental purpose of the law is to maintain consistency with federal standards while providing cities with a mechanism to responsibly regulate and oversee certified recovery residences.

After discussion, Comm Smith moved to advance Ordinance 2026-01 to second reading and adoption at the next Council meeting. Comm Partin seconded the motion and passed unanimously 7:0.

- a. Appointment of Primary and Alternate Members for Advisory Committees: TSMO, TAC, and Vision Zero Task Force. Mr. Rudometkin presented the appointments of primary and alternate members for the advisory committees TSMO & TAC and the Vision Zero Task Force.

After discussion, Comm Smith moved to appoint as follows:

- **TAC & TSMO – Phil Price**
- **Vision Zero - Chief Grimm**
- **Alternate for all three committees – April Fisher**

The motion was seconded by Comm Partin, which passed unanimously 7:0.

8. Attorney's Report – No report.

9. City Manager's Report

- a. City Manager Report and Work Plan - CM Rudometkin provided a copy of the work plan and gave a brief as follows,
- **County Tax Updates:** Provided updates on county meetings regarding the proposed transportation and infrastructure surtaxes. Both initiatives are still in progress. The infrastructure surtax includes a revenue-sharing component. He will continue to forward updates as more information becomes available.
 - **Property Tax Reform:** The upcoming 60-day session in Tallahassee, beginning January 13, will focus on property tax reform. Discussions include potential increases in the state sales tax to offset reductions in ad valorem revenue, with the goal of maintaining economic vitality and resident retention. The Governor has emphasized protecting long-term homeowners from excessive property tax increases.
 - **Upcoming RFPs:** Four Requests for Proposals (RFPs) are planned for February, covering:
 1. Lobbying services
 2. Information Technology (IG services)
 3. Debris monitoring
 4. Debris removal - The debris monitoring RFP ensures an independent company oversees debris removal for accountability and compliance with FEMA requirements, allowing the Police Department to focus on security.
 - **Lancaster Property Update:** Ongoing discussions with Billy Morgan and the executive board regarding language updates and fence responsibilities. A follow-up is expected at the January 20th meeting.
 - **Hoffner Avenue Project:** The City, along with engineers, will review and revise the project scope to reduce costs while remaining eligible for grant funding. The grant splits are approximately 52% grant and 48% local match. Once the revised scope is approved, funding and council approval for local match allocation will be requested.

- **Sol Avenue Reimbursement:** Coordination with the contractor is ongoing to finalize required anti-discrimination affidavits for reimbursement. He anticipates submission of the final request within the next one to two weeks, totaling approximately \$196,000 for the project's \$488,000 cost.
- **Florida Department of Environmental Protection Grant – Lake Conway Sub-Basin:** The City was notified that the Lake Conway Sub-Basin BMP Design project on Waltham Street has been approved for \$600,000 in state funding toward a \$1.1 million total project. The grant will fund the construction of a baffle box and related drainage improvements near the police boat dock. City staff plan to coordinate with the contractor regarding paving and drainage improvements for private sections adjacent to the project. No city funds are involved; the project is fully funded through the grant and County oversight.

b. Chief's Report

Chief Grimm highlighted the success of recent city events, noting strong community participation and excellent execution by the Special Events Committee, city staff, and officers. Appreciation was expressed to all who contributed, including those who provided funding and event setup. A dashboard summarizing key public safety and event statistics is being developed, modeled after other municipalities, to provide concise highlights for public communication. The city enters a slower period for special events, with Arbor Day scheduled for Saturday, February 7, as the first major upcoming event. Council was encouraged to inform constituents and anticipate potential traffic impacts.

c. Public Works Report

Phil Price reported a slower period over the holidays, with cold weather affecting grass growth, but maintenance and cleanup efforts continued. Holiday decorations have been removed, and operations have returned to normal. Several city projects are planned for the coming weeks.

10. Mayor's Report

Mayor Carson noted receiving numerous inquiries from residents regarding the lack of Facebook audio during the meeting. He emphasized the importance of keeping citizens informed and suggested expanding the use of YouTube for streaming meetings, noting that even a small number of viewers increases transparency and access to information. He expressed satisfaction with the progress made in city operations, both during his previous tenure as commissioner. He thanked staff and council for their efforts, highlighted the importance of serving the citizens effectively, and wished everyone a safe and Happy New Year.

11. Commissioners' Report

- Comm Lance suggested creating a neighborhood or district competition for holiday decorations, similar to past Halloween and Christmas contests. He noted that in previous years, Conway estates had extensive and beautiful Christmas displays and proposed encouraging friendly competition between districts, possibly incorporating a parade leading into the city's Christmas event.
- Comm Lowell inquired about the February meeting dates, noting they were not on the calendar. She stated that she will be in Missouri but plans to call in for the February meetings. CM Rudometkin noted that members should send a quick email if they need to call in or if any schedule changes.
- Comm Bobrowski noted that the City is always looking for opportunities to issue proclamations. She recognized a few local businesses that have consistently supported the Special Events Committee, not financially but through volunteer efforts, and suggested creating a "Volunteer Month" to provide special recognition to these businesses. The Council indicated general support for issuing proclamations.

12. Adjournment

There being no further business, Mayor Carson called for a motion to adjourn. Motion passed unanimously at 8:09 pm.