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PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Bartow City Commission Passes FY 2025 - 2026 Budget

Budget Includes Employer of Choice Initiative and Police Body Cams

(Bartow, FL - Sept. 24, 2025) The City of Bartow Commission unanimously passed the City's Fiscal Year 2025 - 2026 Budget on Sept. 15. The \$136,438,995 budget will allow a continued commitment to modernizing the organization, strengthening operations, and focusing on key priorities that shape Bartow's future. At that same meeting, the Commission passed a millage rate of 6.1080, which represents no change from the current year. The new fiscal year begins Oct. 1.

Highlights of the 2025 - 2026 City of Bartow Budget include \$2.9 million in funding in support of a new Employer of Choice initiative to benefit current and future City employees and \$2.1 million over the next five years for the purchase of dash and body cameras for the Bartow Police Department. It also supports ongoing efforts to maintain and enhance City infrastructure and facilities.

"We recognize that meaningful growth requires upfront investment in critical areas such as public safety, utility capacity, transportation infrastructure, and quality-of-life amenities," noted City Manager Mike Herr, adding that being able to attract and retain employees who can ensure that the City effectively manages these investments is also critical.

"By investing in people, infrastructure, and community partnerships, we are laying the groundwork for a more resilient, dynamic, and equitable Bartow – for today and generations to come," he added.

Since being hired as City Manager in 2023, Mike Herr had a goal of establishing Bartow as an Employer of Choice, working to ensure that City staff are fairly compensated and receive the support - including mentoring, training and the technology and other tools - they need to succeed at work.

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“I envision the City of Bartow being an Employer of Choice not only for prospective employees but for our existing staff,” says Herr. “I am hopeful that the path of some of our most tenured employees who have worked their way up the career ladder within the City becomes the norm, rather than the exception.”

The City of Bartow Employer of Choice Initiative was built using three pillars: a Position Classification and Career Ladder System; a new Pay Grade Plan, and a completely revamped Human Resources Policies, Procedures and Guidelines Manual.

The initiative establishes minimum pay at \$15 per hour for all positions and provides competitive market pay throughout the system, including the 13 new positions - a City Engineer and additional personnel in solid waste, electric, wastewater and fire service - that are funded in the 2025 - 2026 Budget.

Equipping the Bartow Police Department with dash and body cameras and the accompanying technology had been a goal of the department for several years. A desire for greater transparency and accountability from both City leadership and residents brought the purchase of the equipment to the forefront in this year’s budget.

The Budget also includes a five-year Capital Improvement Plan funded at \$63,457,849. During the upcoming fiscal year, the CIP plan calls for spending \$22,917,849 across all funds. Key priorities include \$1 million for continued road resurfacing projects, continued improvements to City parks, with a focus on Mary Holland and street light improvements. In addition, \$1.5 million has been allocated for a feasibility study for new central fire station and training facility to replace the existing fire station. This is a result of an appropriation just approved in the most recent legislative session. A Request for Proposals for the feasibility study phase will be issued soon.

The Budget document itself incorporates several enhancements to improve the transparency of the City’s financial process. The new Program Budget format includes descriptions of City services and provides easier to understand financial information as well as new, dedicated funds devoted to Impact Fees, Building, Fleet management, Capital Replacement and others. These fund categories within both the revenue and expenditure framework allow for clearer tracking of growth-related revenues and their corresponding investments in capital improvements. The document can be viewed on the City website at cityofbartow.net.

“We recognize that it will take bold thinking, innovation, and resourcefulness to move Bartow forward,” Herr said. “This budget will allow us to follow a path that will benefit citizens, local businesses, our community partners, visitors and city staff both in the coming year and into the future.”

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