



Week in Review

Sept. 15 - 23, 2025

The *Week in Review* is prepared and published by Laurie Hayes, Director of Communications, for the staff and residents of the City of Bartow, 680 E Main St., Bartow, Florida 33830

FY2025 - '26 Budget Passes Unanimously

The City of Bartow Commission unanimously passed the City's Fiscal Year 2025 – 2026 Budget on Sept. 15. The \$135,934,528 budget will allow a continued commitment to modernizing the organization, strengthening operations, and focusing on key priorities that shape Bartow's future. 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 (see article below) 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.

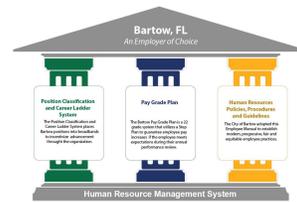
"By investing in people, infrastructure, and community partnerships, we are laying the groundwork for a more resilient, dynamic, and equitable Bartow — for today and generations to come," he added.

The Budget also includes a five-year Capital Improvement Plan funded at \$66,472,849. 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, \$1.35 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.

"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."

Employer of Choice Initiative Included in Budget



Since he was hired as City Manager in 2023, Mike Herr has been 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.

“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.”

More than two years in the making, the Employer of Choice Initiative was built using the following three pillars:

Position Classification and Career Ladder System

After carefully evaluating the current systems in place, changes were put in place that accomplish the following objectives:

- Establish minimum pay at \$15 per hour for all positions and provide competitive market pay throughout the system.
- Develop and implement straightforward policies and practices that can be easily followed, monitored and understood by employees.
- Adopt a modern Human Resources philosophy that harnesses innovation and best practices.
- Create an efficient and effective holistic system that maximizes the use of technology for internal operations.

Pay Grade Plan

The City began its revamp of the pay grade plan by commissioning a Market Rate Study of nearby cities with comparable populations and scopes of services. As a result, Bartow’s comprehensive compensation structure was adjusted so that entry pay at every level is consistent with the market minimum.

The City’s new Step Plan has 22 pay grades, each with 20 steps representing a 51% spread to provide a significant number of years before an employee maxes out of a grade. Looking ahead, if employees meet expectations during their annual performance reviews, they will be eligible for a 2.75% increase in pay per year. (Employees who fail to meet expectations will be coached to improve their performance.) The Pay Plan also will be adjusted with a 2.25% cost of living adjustment every third year.

Human Resources Policies, Procedures and Guidelines

The new City of Bartow Human Resources Policies, Procedures and Guidelines were created using the City’s old manual as a base and then incorporating best practices from a number of other local governments. Where needed, new concepts were added to create a platform for innovative practices to be adopted within the City.

“I am very proud of the new policies, practices, technology and systems that our team has devised to improve and modernize our governmental organization. These not only will improve operational efficiency but will benefit and enhance the performance of our most valuable asset – our employees,” Herr noted.

The City of Bartow Employer of Choice program was rolled out to all staff in late summer. Herr has encouraged City employees at every level to take the time to learn more about the initiative and what it means to them and their colleagues.

The initiative, which cost slightly more than \$2.8 million to implement, was included in the City’s Fiscal Year 2025 – 2026 budget.



CRA / Keep Polk Beautiful Clean Up

Nearly 200 volunteers made a huge IMPACT on our City this past Saturday when they came together for the Bartow Community Redevelopment Agency / Keep Polk County Beautiful IMPACT Clean Up.

The crews collected more than 2600 lbs. of trash, planted nearly 50 trees and shrubs, and revitalized nine homes and one vacant lot. In addition, they cleaned up multiple parks and streets in the area.

The CRA's IMPACT program is designed to inspire meaningful projects and community transformation by empowering groups and organizations to beautify neighborhoods and public spaces through volunteer-led projects.

The in-kind value of this effort - in both time and donated tools and supplies topped \$18,500.



Sponsors for the IMPACT Clean Up included Keep Polk Beautiful, Mt. Gilboa Baptist Church, Dream Center of Lakeland, OD Jones Roofing, Liberty Link, and St. James AME Church.

Many thanks to all who so graciously donated their time, energy and support to the effort!

Rep. Driskell Inspires All at Diversity Luncheon

Last Wednesday, Bartow's Community Relations Committee hosted their annual Diversity Luncheon at the Bartow Civic Center.

The event featured a welcome by Brian Hinton, Bartow Community Healthcare Foundation, remarks by Committee Co-chair Gloria Washington, and a reading of the City's proclamation of Race Equality Month by Mayor Tanya Tucker, as well as a blessing by Rev. Becky Toalster of Holy Trinity Episcopal Church and performance of the National Anthem by Willie Thomas.

The Guest Speaker was **Representative**

Fentrice Driskell, State Representative for Florida and Minority Leader for the Florida House, who has deep roots not only in Polk County, but in Bartow, where she lived as a young child. A graduate of Harvard University and Georgetown University Law School, Rep. Driskell is a staunch advocate for improved health care outcomes for low-income Floridians, investing in teachers and schools, ensuring a healthy environment, and protecting voting rights, among other issues.

She touched on many of these topics in her heartfelt address, which received a standing ovation. She also was recognized by her sorority sisters who were in attendance at the luncheon.

The program also included the presentation of the 2025 C.C. Corbett Diversity Award to Symone Wilson and to the Neighborhood Improvement Corporation of Bartow for their "dedication to enhancing the community's quality of life through a commitment to the understanding and appreciation of diversity and inclusion."

As has become tradition, the luncheon closed with a rousing rendition of "The More We Get Together," led by Commissioner Leo Longworth. The happier we will be indeed.



City Manager Appointed to FLC's FAST

City Manager Mike Herr has been appointed to the Florida League of Cities 2025-2026 FLC Federal Action Strike Team or FAST.

The FAST committee was created in support of the League's strategic plan objective to strengthen its federal relations. Its primary purpose is to establish proactive and reactive communications with Florida's 30-member congressional delegation in support of federal municipal policy.

The committee will take its policy positions and direction from the League's resolutions and the National League of Cities (NLC) policy priorities, as well as from the officers and Florida League of Cities Board.



Indoor Pickleball Options and Expanded Fitness Center Hours

The pickleball craze shows no signs of waning, as more and more enthusiasts of all ages take up the sport. Recognizing this, Parks & Rec is now offering INDOOR pickleball at the Polk Street Community Center on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1 - 4:30pm through Oct. 30. Similar offerings at Carver Recreation Center are coming soon.

Outdoor options for play include Nye Jordan Park from 7am until 10pm. Courts are available on a first come, first-served basis. Construction of additional courts at Richland Manor Park are underway. Stay tuned for their grand opening.



Fitness Center Hours

The Open Weight Room/ Fitness Center at Polk Street Community Center now is open Monday through Friday from 8am – 7pm. Fees for the use of this facility by Bartow residents is \$10 / month. Non-residents can use the equipment for a \$15

monthly fee.

Teens ages 16 and 17 must have an adult signed registration form. To register, go to Bartowrec.recdesk.com or call 863.534.0161 for more information.

CRA Issues Call for Artists

The City of Bartow Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) invites qualified artists to submit proposals for the design and installation of murals on two public restroom exterior walls, as part of the CRA's ongoing efforts to promote public art and strengthen our community identity.



Artists may submit proposals for one or both projects, which will transform two ordinary spaces into vibrant landmarks for the City of Bartow and CRA Distract. Themes should reflect a diverse community, honoring the history and vibrancy of our City.

The project is open to all professional artists (individuals or teams) with a minimum of five years of experience from Polk, Pinellas, Hillsborough, Osceola and Orange Counties. [More information on the projects and how to apply is available here.](#) The deadline for applications is Oct. 31.



Planning & Zoning Meeting on Oct. 27

The Planning & Zoning Commission will hold its next meeting at 5:30pm on Oct. 27 at the Bartow Civic Center, 2250 S Floral Ave.

Among the topics to be discussed and voted upon will be the annexation and rezoning requests in regards to projects known as Emilie East and West.

These items were postponed from the last P&Z Commission meeting in response to requests from both the applicant/developer and the City's Planning Director Bob Wieggers to ensure that both parties are prepared as possible for the review of these projects.

In addition to simply needing more time, there also were issues surrounding a scheduled absence by one of the Planning and Zoning Commission members and a potential conflict of interest that would require a recusal by another, leaving only three of the five members in a position to vote.

In a statement release earlier this week, City Manager Mike Herr said, "The City's goal is to always ensure that every applicant is treated equally and fairly. Because of the importance of these items, we believe that the projects should be heard by more than three members."

Herr noted that the City has and will continue to follow the process set forth by the Florida Statutes and the City's Comprehensive Plan and Land Development regulations when dealing with these and all projects. He encouraged citizens to attend and participate in the upcoming public hearings for Emilie East and West and during any public hearings at future City Commission meetings. Agendas for these meetings will be posted on the City's website at cityofbartow.net.

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