



OBSERVER CORPS REPORT

DeBary City Council

Reported by Val Bruneel

July 1, 2026

Meeting overview:

The DeBary City Council held its regular meeting on July 1, 2026, at 6:30 p.m. in City Council Chambers. Mayor Karen Chasez, Vice Mayor Phyllis Butlien, Council Member William Sell, Council Member Jim Pappalardo and Council Member Patricia Stevenson were present. The minutes from the June 3, 2026, City Council meeting and the June 17, 2026 Special City Council meeting were approved unanimously. No additions, deletions or amendments were made to the agenda.

Public participation:

Doug McDonald, a recent Terra Alta resident, spoke during public participation for items not on the agenda. He described Terra Alta as an older manufactured home community with residents who own their land, but said the neighborhood lacks streetlights, sidewalks and substantial paving. He asked Council to look into the infrastructure needs. Mayor Chasez noted that Terra Alta was developed before DeBary became a city, when the area was under county infrastructure standards.

Presentations:

Legislative update: Shari Grant, Communications, Economic Development and Government Affairs Director, presented a legislative update. She reported that approximately 1,900 bills were introduced in Tallahassee and about 192 passed. She noted that the SB 180 glitch bill did not pass, which means the unintended consequences and overreach of the original hurricane rebuilding law were not corrected this session.

Grant highlighted several state actions affecting local governments. SB 686, Agricultural Enclaves, applies to agricultural properties in unincorporated areas but will be monitored because of concern it could be expanded later. HB 399 was described as a major land use preemption bill that limits local discretion in development review, zoning administration and housing regulation, with more decisions shifted toward administrative approval. Live Local 3.0 was also discussed as another expansion of state-level housing preemption. Grant said these measures continue a trend of moving decision-making from city hall to Tallahassee and reducing public input on certain development matters.

On financial issues, Grant discussed Senate Bill 4F, which changes how local governments calculate the maximum property tax rate they may adopt with a majority vote and eliminates the per capita personal income adjustment. She also discussed HB 1329, the Local Government Financial Transparency and Accountability Act. While DeBary already publishes its budget and financial documents online, the new law requires specific display and charting functions on the city website, requiring the city to purchase specialized software.

Grant also reported positive appropriations news. DeBary submitted three state appropriation requests and all three were included in the Legislature's budget. One was vetoed, but the city will receive \$3 million in state funding, including \$500,000 for Vista stormwater projects and \$2.5 million for Alexander Island. When combined with the \$2.5 million ECHO grant, the city has \$5 million in outside funding for Alexander Island. Grant said the city has secured more than \$23 million in grants and appropriations since 2019, not including FEMA reimbursements or CDBG funding.



Council discussion focused on the value of state and federal advocacy, the return on investment from lobbying support, and concern that state preemption is reducing local control. Council Member Pappalardo asked whether a local land bank would remain a useful tool to protect land from overdevelopment. Staff responded that ownership is one of the strongest ways to prevent unwanted development, citing Alexander Island as an example. Mayor Chasez added that when state law requires staff-level administrative approval, residents may blame city hall for projects that Council and the public had no opportunity to review.

Public hearings:

Ordinance 03-2026, City of DeBary 2045 Comprehensive Plan, second reading: Growth Management requested approval of the second reading of Ordinance 03-2026, replacing the current Comprehensive Plan with the new 2045 Comprehensive Plan. Growth Management Director Steven Bapp explained that the comprehensive plan sets the city's long-term vision, goals, objectives and policies, and that local government actions must relate back to the plan.

The update was prepared through the Evaluation and Appraisal Review process required by Florida law. Staff determined in 2024 that a major update was needed because the plan had not had a substantive overhaul in about 14 years. The plan includes Volume I, Data and Analysis, Volume II, Goals, Objectives and Policies, and appendices including definitions, population projections, maps, the Water Supply Facilities Work Plan and the Comprehensive Vulnerability Assessment.

Bapp said the city conducted public meetings over more than 12 months and transmitted the plan to reviewing agencies after first reading on March 18, 2026. The Volusia Growth Management Commission requested clarification on potable water and sewer level of service, which staff resolved with Volusia County and the City of Deltona. Staff reported no substantive state agency comments. If adopted, the plan would be transmitted to the state for final processing and would take effect after the required review period.

There was no public participation on this item. Council approved Ordinance 03-2026 unanimously.

New business:

Historic live oak removal at 226 Mansion Boulevard: Growth Management requested approval to remove two historic live oak trees from 226 Mansion Boulevard for construction of a single-family residence and proposed pool. Tree #2 is a 30.6-inch DBH live oak located within the footprint of the proposed home. Tree #5 is a 30.5-inch DBH live oak located near the proposed swimming pool area. Staff said the pool permit has not yet been submitted, so removal of Tree #5 would be contingent on approval of the pool permit.

Staff explained that the property is zoned R-4, has required setbacks and contains wetlands with a 25-foot upland buffer, limiting the buildable area. The arborist report found that construction would substantially affect the trees' structural and critical root zones, compromising health and stability. Council confirmed that there are replacement requirements under the Land Development Code and that the pool-related tree could not be removed unless the pool permit moves forward.

Council Member Pappalardo said he did not want to stop a single-family home because of two trees. Mayor Chasez said she understood the code basis for approval, but would have liked to see more effort to preserve mature trees elsewhere on the site because replacement saplings do not provide the same stormwater benefits as mature trees. The request was approved 4-1, with Council Member Sell opposed.



Façade Grant Improvement Program exceptions: Growth Management requested approval of limited exceptions to the Façade Grant Improvement Program. The program was approved on December 3, 2025 and supports improvements to façades, signage, sites and landscaping visible from public rights-of-way. Staff reported five applications so far, with one completed and paid, one approved and preparing for permitting, two under review and one voided.

The request was prompted by an application just outside the Highbanks node, separated from the eligible area by a right-of-way. Staff recommended allowing properties immediately adjacent to or abutting an eligible façade grant parcel, including those separated only by a public right-of-way or alley, to be considered eligible when the project advances continuous street frontage and district design objectives. The exception would be determined by the Growth Management Director and would not expand the program boundary or create standalone eligibility outside the grant area. Council approved the exceptions unanimously.

Long-Term Strategic Plan: City Manager Carmen Rosamonda presented the annual update on DeBary's long-term strategic plan. He described the plan as a multi-year project list and status update used by Council and staff to track progress and determine future priorities. The Mayor asked whether the strategic plan charts could be posted online for residents, and the City Manager said staff could look at creating a strategic planning webpage.

Major updates included the septic-to-sewer program, Alexander Island, signage and wayfinding, stormwater projects, village center redevelopment, 17-92 complete streets improvements, SunRail station discussions, trail connections, business recruitment, holiday events, an indoor gym or fieldhouse concept, animal control and TNR, a pedestrian bridge and the potential relocation of park maintenance operations from the Gateway Park entrance.

For septic-to-sewer, staff said Volusia County has grant funding for Phase 1, Lake Marie Estates, and engineering is underway. The city plans to pursue grants for Phase 1 construction and hookup costs and for Phase 2 and Phase 3 engineering, with the goal of reducing resident out-of-pocket costs and seeking exemptions from nutrient-reducing septic system requirements where appropriate.

For Alexander Island, staff reported that the entrance road opened that day, with a three-way stop in place. The parking lot and underground infrastructure are expected to be completed by November 2026, and bathrooms, an operations center, maintenance barn, fencing and landscaping are on schedule. An exclusion zone ordinance required by the Army Corps of Engineers is expected at the next Council meeting.

On transportation and infrastructure, staff reported the Fort Florida Road reconstruction is complete, including the bridge replacement. The City Manager said the bridge was a \$2 million project funded with \$1 million from the state, \$500,000 from FPL and 25 percent from the city. Benson Junction has a \$4.3 million TPO grant, but construction costs have increased to about \$10 million, so staff may split the project to complete the stormwater portion first. The 17-92 resurfacing is expected to move forward around fall 2026 or early 2027, and the city's long-term goal is a complete streets conversion with 12-foot sidewalks so bikes and, eventually, permitted golf carts can be moved off the roadway.

On stormwater, staff said DeBary's projects are largely engineered and shovel-ready, which has helped the city compete for grants. The West Highbanks Road north and south project received an \$8.5 million county grant with a \$500,000 city match. Smaller projects are permitted and awaiting funding. Council Member Pappalardo asked that a new study for a single stormwater fee be prioritized for next fiscal year.



Growth and development updates included Saxon Pointe, Tailwinds Residential, KBC Mixed Use, DeBary Town Center, Springwalk, The Haven, Rivington, the Duke Energy hydrogen manufacturing plant and Town Park at Main Street. Staff reported that DeBary Town Center and the Publix portion are moving through the Development Review Committee process and may come to Council in early August.

Council guidance included continued focus on septic-to-sewer, gateway and wayfinding signage, the 17-92 bike and sidewalk improvements, SunRail station identity and control, a community garden, holiday decorations and Clayton the dinosaur, an indoor fieldhouse, animal control, Memorial Day and Veterans Day observances, and a right-of-first-refusal policy tied to possible land bank planning. Council members praised the city's progress, grant strategy and debt-free approach to major projects. No formal vote was taken on this item.

Council reports and communications:

Before regular reports, Mayor Chasez requested Council consensus for the City Attorney to review the state homestead exemption ballot language and provide legal guidance before the formal budget process begins. Council agreed by consensus.

Council Member Sell commented on Independence Day and the upcoming 250th anniversary celebration at Gemini Springs. Council Member Pappalardo reported attending chamber events and wished everyone a happy Independence Day. Council Member Stevenson said she looked forward to Freedom Fest. Vice Mayor Butlien reported on her Washington, D.C. trip with the Florida League of Cities, including meetings involving EPA, USDOT and FEMA, and also attended the VCAR real estate values forum, Chamber legislative breakfast and Deltona tiny homes groundbreaking. Mayor Chasez reported attending chamber events and an Eagle Scout pinning for Cheyenne Platt, whose Eagle project improved the butterfly garden and added a lending library at Gateway Park.

The City Manager said staff was prepared for the July 4 event and hoped for good weather. The City Attorney wished everyone a happy Fourth of July.

LWVVC areas of interest:

Local governance and home rule: The legislative update included several state preemption issues affecting public hearings, local land use authority and administrative development approvals.

Growth management and land use: Council adopted the 2045 Comprehensive Plan and discussed development, redevelopment, Main Street, façade grants and major growth projects.

Environment and water: Septic-to-sewer, stormwater, Alexander Island, tree removal, trails, wetlands and mature tree preservation were discussed.

Fiscal responsibility and transparency: Council discussed state appropriations, grants, lobbying return on investment, stormwater fees, property tax impacts and new financial transparency software requirements.

Civic engagement: Public comment was received on Terra Alta infrastructure, and Council requested that strategic plan materials be made available online for residents.