MINUTES

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
SPECIAL MEETING
AUGUST 20, 2026
5:00 p.m.

The City of Madeira Beach Board of Commissioners held a special meeting at 5:00 p.m. on August 20, 2026 in the Patricia Shontz Commission Chambers at City Hall, located at 300 Municipal Drive, Madeira Beach, Florida.

MEMBERS PRESENT:	Anne-Marie Brooks, Mayor Eddie McGeehen, Vice Mayor/Commissioner District 3 David Tagliarini, Commissioner District 1 Charles "Chuck" Dillon, Commissioner District 2 Housh Ghovaee, Commissioner District 4
MEMBERS ABSENT:	None.
CITY STAFF PRESENT:	Mike Helfrich, City Manager Clara VanBlargan, City Clerk Thomas Trask, City Attorney Andrew Laflin, Finance Director Consultant

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Brooks called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

City Clerk Clara VanBlargan called the roll. All were present.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

Ray Kerr, 583 John's Pass Avenue, raised concerns about the current seawall height ordinance, noting that it may hinder rebuilding efforts. Residents are in the process of elevating and rebuilding. The current ordinance ties seawall height to the centerline elevation of the adjacent road. The City should consider establishing a goal elevation, such as the 5-foot elevation target that Treasure Island pursued in its resilience study, with a 7-foot base elevation for garages. New seawalls can be constructed with drainage vents below the cap to prevent water from being trapped between the road and the seawall. He urged the Commission to take up this discussion at a workshop sooner rather than later, given the pace of ongoing reconstruction. The state and county permit such ordinances, provided they are supported by engineering, sediment, and wave analyses assessing the storm impact on neighboring properties.

4. CONTRACTS/AGREEMENTS

A. Real Estate Purchase and Sale Agreement – 545 150th Avenue, Madeira Beach Fl

The City Manager said the purchase and sale agreement for 545 150th Avenue had been distributed to the Commission the prior week or early that week for review. A signed agreement from the seller was not available at the previous meeting but has since been emailed to the Commission. The Commission was invited to raise any questions about the agreement before public comment.

Mayor Brooks opened the floor to public comment.

Ray Kerr, 583 John's Pass Avenue, reviewed the history of prior discussions about the marina and the property at 555 150th Avenue. Parking had been identified as a key concern for expanded marina and charter-fishing activity. He supported acquiring the intervening property but asked the Board not to commit to constructing a restaurant, shop, Public Works facility, municipal building, or any other specific use until a comprehensive plan is developed for the approximately 10-acre waterfront area. He also expressed concerns that some residents may be reluctant to speak publicly and encouraged the City to ensure residents can participate without fear of repercussions.

City Attorney Tom Trask explained the contract's structure in response to a Commissioner's question about whether due diligence would precede or follow execution of the agreement. He stated that the contract itself sets each party's rights and obligations and that the due diligence process referred to in the agreement as the "inspection period" cannot begin until the contract is in place. He directed the Commission's attention to Paragraph 4, which begins at the bottom of page 5 of the agenda packet and continues onto the following page, and which enumerates the scope of the City's due diligence rights.

Attorney Trask expressed personal concern that the current 30-day inspection period was insufficient. He noted that obtaining environmental assessments and independent appraisals within a 30-day window may not be feasible and warned that if the City cannot complete its due diligence within that period, the contract would be terminated by default, potentially resulting in the loss of the acquisition opportunity altogether. He recommended extending the due diligence period to 60 or 90 days to allow the City adequate time to gather the information needed to make an informed decision.

A Commissioner asked whether the purchase agreement preserves the City's right to terminate if the appraisal or environmental findings are unfavorable. Attorney Trask directed the Commission to Paragraph 4(d) at the bottom of page 6 of the agreement, which provides that, in the buyer's sole discretion, the buyer may elect not to purchase the property if the property is unsatisfactory for any reason, or for no reason at all. Attorney Trask confirmed that approving the contract does not legally obligate the City to purchase the property; it only authorizes the City Manager to execute the agreement and initiates the due diligence process.

Attorney Trask further clarified that if the City terminates within the due diligence period, its financial exposure is zero beyond the costs already incurred. If the City fails to act within the due diligence period, however, the $25,000 deposit paid upon signing would be forfeited as liquidated damages, with no additional liability beyond that amount. Attorney Trask reiterated that extending the inspection period to 60 days, or potentially 90, was critical to avoiding a scenario in which the commission is forced to decide before the necessary data is available.

Commissioner Tagliarini led a sustained, multi-part inquiry into the property's strategic significance, methodically questioning the City Manager, City Attorney, Community Development Director, Finance Director, and Marina Manager.

Regarding appraisal versus market value, Andrew Laflin, the Finance Director consultant, clarified that the Pinellas County Property Appraiser had assessed the parcel at approximately $490,000, based on a "storage yard" land-use classification for waterfront marina land. The negotiated contract price is $3,500,000. The Finance Director emphasized that a county property appraiser's valuation is not equivalent to a market appraisal and does not account for the property's strategic potential, particularly its proximity to city-owned marina properties and the possibility of marina expansion. Commissioner Tagliarini pressed further, asking whether it would be reasonable to evaluate the property solely on today's purchase price rather than considering the long-term revenue potential and the increased value it would unlock in the City's existing marina assets. The Finance Director acknowledged that, although a formal market study had not been conducted, there was clearly revenue-generating potential that the county appraisal did not reflect.

Commissioner Tagliarini asked whether the City's marina had demonstrated a successful operating history to support future expansion. The Finance Director affirmed this, noting that operating results had increased substantially over the preceding five to seven years and that the Marina Fund had been profitable for several years.

The Marina Manager, Brian Crabtree, provided detailed observations on the operational and revenue opportunities associated with the 545 150th Avenue property. Six existing slips along the adjacent marina seawall already generate approximately $30,000 per year in slip rental revenue. He described the dock structure on the 545 150th property, approximately 250 feet in length, recently constructed and in good condition, complete with fire suppression systems, as capable of accommodating boats on both sides, yielding an estimated 500 feet of usable dock space. At current rates, he estimated that this dock alone could generate close to $90,000 annually at full capacity.

The Marina Manager further noted that the marina currently maintains a lengthy dry storage waitlist and more than 100 boats on the wet slip waitlist, underscoring unmet demand. He described the potential to install additional slips along the seawall of the acquired property and to reorganize the configuration of existing slips to maximize capacity. He also noted commercial and visitor-oriented opportunities, such as vessel rentals, transient dockage, and fuel sales, and noted that the location would allow visiting boaters to fuel up and easily spin around within the basin.

The Marina Manager described the property's current state as a persistent source of resident concern, noting frequent police and EMS activity, live-aboards, and an overall appearance that creates a negative first impression for those entering or leaving the city. He expressed strong support for the acquisition, stating that combining it with the City's other waterfront holdings would create a clean, attractive public-facing waterfront visible from 150th Avenue.

Community Development Director Marci answered a series of questions from Commissioner Tagliarini regarding the planning implications of the acquisition. She noted that purchasing 545 150th Avenue would make the parcels at 503, 545, and 555 150th Avenue, along with Patriot Park, contiguous. She explained that parcels are considered contiguous when they share a boundary or are directly across a roadway or right-of-way from one another, and that combining them under unity of title may require rezoning to a public, city public, or planned development designation consistent with the community's vision for the combined site.

When asked about planning limitations if the City does not acquire 545, the Director stated that 503 and 555 would not be considered contiguous and that the properties would be planned as separate sites, reducing flexibility for siting structures, landscaping, open space, and parking, and making multimodal connectivity between the sites difficult if a private owner controls the intervening parcel.

Commissioner Tagliarini asked how often a waterfront parcel of this character becomes available adjacent to City-owned property. The Director responded that, in her professional experience, this scenario is very rare and that the property at that location has changed hands only a few times in its history. She characterized the opportunity as exceptional.

The City Manager, whose professional background is in engineering, public works, and construction, offered his assessment of the acquisition's strategic significance. He framed the core advantage as "control and flexibility," explaining that acquiring 545 150th Avenue would allow the City to plan the three waterfront properties as a single integrated site, rather than risk a critical middle parcel being developed independently by a private owner. He emphasized that while zoning and land development regulations can constrain what a private owner may do, ownership is categorically different; it gives the Commission, with community input, the ability to determine actual use.

When asked whether it made sense to purchase the property before a final development plan existed, the City Manager noted that public workshops had already sparked favorable community discussion about the property's potential and that detailed planning can and should proceed through the Commission and the public process. The acquisition creates the canvas; the Commission and the community determine what ultimately goes there. When pressed on whether it is easier and less expensive to acquire key waterfront property when it becomes available rather than after it has been redeveloped by a private owner, the City Manager responded that the property would continue to increase in value. It's an opportunity we will never have again, at least during our time here with the City.

Attorney Trask raised a concern that if the City declines this opportunity, a private investor could purchase the 545 parcel and effectively hold the City hostage to a substantially higher future price, given its position between two city-owned waterfront properties. He characterized this as a scenario he was "very concerned about" and noted that it was not a legal argument but a practical one with significant implications for the City's long-term waterfront development strategy.

Commissioner Ghovaee expressed significant skepticism about the purchase price, offering a calculation showing that, based on the parcel's upland area estimated at approximately 0.12 acres (roughly 60 by 90 feet), the effective cost per acre of upland land was approximately $29,000,000. He acknowledged the concept of contiguous land value but questioned whether it justified the expenditure at this scale, particularly given known soil contamination, a narrow waterway, mangroves that cannot be removed, and limited upland area. He said he was not excited about this purchase. In a way, it is way too expensive. If the property were listed on the open market, a private buyer would be unlikely to pay $3,500,000 for it.

Commissioner Tagliarini clarified for the public record that the $29,000,000 per acre figure applies only to the isolated upland portion of the parcel and is not the asking price. The asking price for the entire parcel, including submerged land, is $3,500,000. He wanted the public who is listening to understand that they are not considering $29,000,000.

Mayor Brooks acknowledged that she had initially shared the concern about the price, but after hearing the full discussion, including the waitlist data, the dock's revenue potential, and the strategic planning implications, she had come to view the property differently. She emphasized that much of the property's value lies in the water and dock access, and noted that she has personally navigated the basin without difficulty turning around.

The Finance Director reported that the City currently holds approximately $22,000,000 in combined cash and short-term liquid investments (about $10,000,000 in cash on hand and about $12,000,000 in the Florida FLCLASS local government investment pool). The City previously held nearly $40,000,000 before the $18,000,000 acquisition of the 555 property and ongoing stormwater project expenditures. He confirmed that the City has sufficient liquidity to fund the $3,500,000 purchase price if the acquisition proceeds, but expressed concern about long-term capital needs for stormwater and drainage infrastructure, indicating that long-term borrowing may be necessary.

The City Manager noted that a prior supplemental site assessment identified soil contamination on the property but confirmed there are no groundwater or water pollution issues. If the existing building is demolished and construction is undertaken, the contaminated soil, limited to the top two feet, would be eligible for removal at state expense under an existing Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) grant program. Commissioner Tagliarini confirmed for the record that no groundwater impacts exist, only surface soil contamination, and that the state is positioned to fund remediation if and when the site is disturbed.

Community Development Director Marci Forbes added that a Phase 2 environmental assessment, if triggered, involves laboratory testing with timelines that can span several days to a week or more, reinforcing the need for an extended due diligence period.

One Commissioner asked about liens on the property. Attorney Trask confirmed that two code enforcement liens exist: one totaling $55,914 and another totaling $44,042 as of the meeting date. The seller will be required to provide marketable title and address any encumbrances, with the lien amounts to be deducted from the purchase price.

A Commissioner also raised the need for an ALTA survey with a title search as part of due diligence to identify any easements or other encumbrances. Attorney Trask confirmed that the survey would be at the City's expense and an appropriate component of the due diligence process. The City Manager confirmed that, under the purchase agreement, the seller would remove items of value from the property before closing, with the City responsible for removing any remaining derelict vessels. The Marina Manager estimated that approximately four to five boats of no value would likely remain, with removal costs of approximately $6,000 to $10,000 per vessel, depending on fuel and other contents, suggesting a worst-case total of $30,000 to $50,000 for vessel removal. One Commissioner noted that the property's submerged land extends into the basin and may overlap with the City's existing marina operations, including boats currently docked on what may be the seller's submerged land. The Marina Manager clarified that the submerged land associated with the 545 property runs along the full length of the basin and, upon acquisition, would give the City full rights over that submerged area, enabling expanded slip configurations and potentially eliminating any existing encroachments on the seller's submerged land. A Commissioner said that a portion of the waterway's submerged land is already City-owned and that the 545 parcel's submerged land does not extend to the full width of the basin. This was noted for further clarification through the ALTA survey process.

Mayor Brooks recalled that community feedback after the purchase of the 555 property was loud and clear: residents wanted the City to find a way to acquire this parcel as well. The City does not yet have a final plan for the properties, and that is precisely appropriate. Coming up with a plan without community input would have been horrible. Being a good servant to the community means understanding what you are doing for the community and what it desires. They have that input. Purchasing the property gives them a solid 10 acres. With that understanding, they can develop a vision and come up with a plan for the entire property as one. They could build something on all the properties over the next 20 years using that vision. The acquisition is the entryway to the island; they can clean it up, make it look nice, and make it a place the community can come out and enjoy, with the ability to walk from one to the other. The newly constructed dock on the 545 property is an immediately rentable asset that could generate revenue in the near term.

Commissioner Tagliarini moved to authorize the City Manager to enter into the Real Estate Purchase and Sale Agreement for 545 150th Avenue, amended to extend the due diligence inspection period from 30 days to 60 days, and further to authorize the City Manager to spend up to $15,000 to obtain two independent real estate appraisals and a Phase 1 environmental site assessment, and to take all administrative actions necessary to complete due diligence. Vice Mayor McGeehen seconded the motion.

ROLL CALL:

Commissioner Tagliarini	"YES"
Vice Mayor McGeehen	"YES"
Commissioner Ghovaee	"NO"
Commissioner Dillon	"YES"
Mayor Brooks	"YES"

The motion carried 4-1.

5. RESPOND TO PUBLIC COMMENTS/QUESTIONS

Mayor Brooks addressed the public comment made earlier in the meeting regarding the seawall height ordinance, confirming that the matter would be taken up at a future commission meeting. She noted that City staff had already begun internal meetings on the subject and that progress was underway.

Mayor Brooks also directly addressed the comment regarding residents feeling afraid to speak before the Commission or to City staff. She stated emphatically, for the public record, that no resident should ever feel afraid to approach a Commissioner or the City Manager. She acknowledged that such concerns may stem from experiences under prior leadership or past Commissions, but stated clearly that this is not the character of the current Commission or its staff. She invited any resident who believes they have been subject to retribution for speaking up to bring that concern directly to her so that it can be investigated and addressed. She expressed that open dialogue with the community is essential to good governance and encouraged all residents to participate freely and without fear.

6. ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Brooks adjourned the meeting at 5:59 p.m.

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Anne-Marie Brooks, Mayor

ATTEST:

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Clara VanBlargan, MMC, MSM, FCMC, FPRM, City Clerk