

SOLID WASTE COLLECTION FEE

Unfortunately, the values of Belle Isle property owned by our citizens has been reduced due to the economy, which then severely impacts the City's ad valorem revenues, as has happened to every other city in Florida. Compounding the problem, the City of Belle Isle's revenues from the State of Florida have decreased significantly due to the state legislature's continued infringement on local home rule and unfunded state mandates with more of their "one size fits all" legislation that is harming our quality of life.

But in spite of these circumstances that Belle Isle has no control over, the city's fiscal management has allowed us to remain the city with the lowest overall taxes and fees in Orange County.

However, the fact is that the economy has caused our costs to operate to increase. During the Fiscal Year 2009-2010 budget process this past summer it became apparent that the trend in ever decreasing revenues was going to continue, yet our residents' expect the quality municipal services to continue as they should.

As the Council examined the proposed annual budget, the Commissioners asked that we find ways to reduce the operating costs of the city to ensure that an increase in the city's ad valorem (property tax) rate would not be necessary. In order to avoid having to increase property taxes, staff presented a second proposed balanced budget to the Council in August which included the elimination of three full-time city staff positions and proposed privatizing of much of our maintenance services.

Prior to 1974, Belle Isle citizens had to make their own arrangements for garbage removal. In 1974, the city began providing garbage collection service for residential properties, and has paid for this service from our general revenue funds since. Unfortunately, it is now not feasible to continue to subsidize this service due to three successive years of reduced revenues. Now, like most cities and counties in Florida which charge their residents for solid waste services, Belle Isle has determined it is necessary to charge residential property owners a non-ad valorem assessment for solid waste and recycling collection services. In Fiscal Year 2010-2011 beginning October 1, 2010, Belle Isle will have the solid waste collection fee billed on your property tax bill as do other cities and counties. Due to the schedule requirements of the Orange County Property Appraiser's office and the budget process, this year, it was not possible to place the assessment on the current Property Tax Bill. Thus, for this year's fee only, the City of Belle Isle is billing the property owners through direct mail from the city.

When you do the math for this assessment, it is really quite an efficient service for the price. In Belle Isle, we provide one yard waste pick up per week, one recycling pick up per week, and two household garbage pick ups per week. That is four pick ups per week, or 208 pick ups at your curb side per year. For the fee of \$200 for this annual service, that is less than \$1 per pick up, a very reasonable cost. Our citizens should also know that this fee is slightly less than our actual contracted cost for the service, so the city is not profiting in any way from this fee.

The public notice of this assessment to our residents' was provided through an article in the Conway News, two Belle Isle newsletters and in the public notices of the budget hearings where the budget items, including this fee, were discussed and the public was invited to comment and make inquiries was issued on the Notice of Proposed Taxes issued by the Orange County Property Appraiser's office. The Council deliberated with great concern for keeping our taxes and fees low and remained committed to still providing the essential public services in a quality manner which our residents deserve and expect.

The initial mail out of invoices has been sent and our staff is prepared to answer any questions regarding this matter. A second mailing will be sent in March to all property owners who have not yet received their invoice or whom have not yet responded to the first notice they received. Ultimately, as this is considered an essential public service to ensuring the health, safety and welfare of our city residents, and to protecting our quality of life, the fee is mandatory. Failure to pay, like any other municipal fee or tax, may result in a lien being filed against non compliant properties. The city staff is prepared to work with any resident enduring a financial hardship that may need assistance through a payment plan over time.