



**CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE
City Commission Agenda Memo
REGULAR MEETING**

#25-1098

TO: Honorable Mayor & Members of the
Fort Lauderdale City Commission

FROM: Rickelle Williams, City Manager

DATE: November 4, 2025

TITLE: Second Reading - Ordinance Amending Chapter 25 of the City of Fort Lauderdale Code of Ordinances, Sections 25-129.4, 25-129.17 and 25-130 – Streets and Sidewalks, Undergrounding of Utility Facilities – Special Assessment Program – **(Commission Districts 1, 2, 3 and 4)**

Recommendation

Staff recommends the City Commission approve an Ordinance amending Chapter 25 of the City of Fort Lauderdale Code of Ordinances (Code) titled Streets and Sidewalks. Specifically, Sections 25-129.4, 25-129.17 and 25-130 to address the undergrounding of overhead utilities by implementing a two (2)-phase design process, additional upfront fees, additional balloting process, delegation of staff authority, repeal of conflicting ordinance provisions, and correction of scrivener's errors.

Background

On May 18, 2010, the City Commission adopted Ordinance No. C-10-12 which established a process for neighborhood associations to follow for the undergrounding of overhead utilities (power, telephone, cable, etc.) and created a mechanism for the benefited neighborhood to pay the cost of undergrounding services through a special assessment.

On November 6, 2012, the City Commission approved amendments to the special assessment program for the undergrounding of overhead utilities (CAM #12-2384). Section 25-129 of the Code requires approval from at least seventy percent (70%) of signed and timely returned ballots from property owners in the assessment area and requires City Commission approval before a special assessment can be levied upon real properties benefiting from the undergrounding of utilities.

After completion of the first project (Las Olas Isles) in 2024, the City Manager's Office, City Attorney's Office, Public Works Department, and Office of Management and Budget met to review lessons learned and challenges encountered throughout the project's lifecycle.

The major challenges included:

- A lengthy approval process;
- Limited neighborhood engagement;
- Difficulties with easement acquisition;
- Issues related to assessing and recouping upfront costs;
- The need for consulting services to assist the City with design development and coordination among utility companies; and
- The high cost of associated with ninety percent (90%) design development compared to the available budget.

These challenges collectively impacted the project timeline, scope, and coordination efforts which limited the City's ability to advance utility undergrounding projects in multiple neighborhoods simultaneously. To improve planning and delivery of these neighborhood infrastructure projects, City staff recommend:

- Initiating early coordination with regulatory agencies and utility companies to streamline approvals and design reviews;
- Enhancing community outreach and engagement during the initial planning stages to build stakeholder support and address concerns proactively;
- Conducting comprehensive cost analyses earlier in the design process to better align project scope with available funding;
- Utilizing consultants to provide specialized design and coordination support between the utility companies; and
- Implementing a phased approach to allow steady progress across multiple neighborhoods while maintaining fiscal responsibility.

The proposed Code amendments include:

Section 25-129.4 – Initiation of Process

- Clarifies the step-by-step process for initiating underground utility projects;
- Specifies that projects begin with a petition from property owners requesting undergrounding;
- Establishes clearer roles for the City, consultants, and utility companies during project development and coordination;

- Defines the sequence of actions required before an assessment is imposed, including preliminary design, cost estimation, and notice to affected property owners;
- Improves transparency by requiring coordination among all utilities to avoid duplication and ensure consistency in design;
- Authorizes the City Manager (or designee) to engage professional consultants to assist with design, coordination, and cost estimating;
- Clarifies that consultant costs shall either be reimbursed through special assessments or paid from funds provided by petitioning property owners;
- Strengthens language on coordination between the City and utility providers, ensuring that undergrounding projects align with utility providers' schedules and standards; and
- Provides flexibility for the City to manage multiple undergrounding efforts simultaneously and streamline communications with affected stakeholders.

Section 25-129.17 – Revisions to underground utility line assessments

- Strengthens assessment language between the City and the property owners.

Section 25-130 – Bonds

- Provides a technical clarification that proceeds pledged to the payment of bonds may exceed the amount of bonds issued

On October 23, 2025, the City Commission approved the First Reading of the proposed ordinance amendments as a walk-on agenda item (CAM #25-0980). If approved on Second Reading, next steps include:

- A resolution establishing the application fee on November 18, 2025; and
- Neighborhood outreach, starting with pending applications, to discuss the undergrounding ordinance modifications and the anticipated next steps and timelines (including the submission of new applications)

Resource Impact

There is no fiscal impact associated with this action.

Strategic Connections

This item is a *FY 2026* Commission Priority, advancing the Infrastructure and Resilience Initiative.

This item supports the *Press Play Fort Lauderdale 2029 Strategic Plan*, specifically advancing:

- The Infrastructure and Resilience Focus Area, Goal 3: Be a sustainable and resilient community.

This item advances the *Fast Forward Fort Lauderdale Vision Plan 2035: We Are Ready*.

This item supports the Advance Fort Lauderdale 2040 Comprehensive Plan specifically advancing:

- The Neighborhood Enhancement Area
 - The Urban Design Element
- Goal 2: Encourage urban design which responds to the climate and character of Fort Lauderdale, is pedestrian friendly, human-scaled and contains the infrastructure and amenities to create a vibrant public realm

Attachment

Exhibit 1 – Ordinance

Prepared by: Wilfredo Negron, PE, Senior Project Manager, Public Works
Ivey Kearson III, Project Manager II, Public Works
Jill Prizlee, PE, Chief Engineer, Public Works

Department Director: Brad Kaine, Public Works