



CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE
City Commission Agenda Memo
CONFERENCE MEETING

#25-0702

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

FROM: Rickelle Williams, City Manager

DATE: January 6, 2026

TITLE: Fireworks and Drone Show Options Presentation - **(Commission Districts 1, 2, 3 and 4)**

At the October 23, 2025, City Commission Conference meeting, the use of fireworks at City-produced events and the potential use of drone shows as an alternative, or supplement to, was discussed during City Commissioners' reports. The City Commission requested additional information regarding historical practices, costs, operational considerations, and potential alternatives.

This presentation details the options for fireworks, drone shows, or a combination of both and focuses specifically on city-produced events that traditionally include fireworks. The Fourth of July Spectacular and New Year's Eve Downtown Countdown are two (2) of the City's most iconic, well-attended signature events. The Fourth of July Spectacular features live bands, a kids' zone, beach games, family activities, national entertainment, and a traditional fireworks display. Downtown Countdown, the City's New Year's Eve celebration includes family activities, live entertainment, and a midnight fireworks show. Both events have featured traditional fireworks displays for more than two (2) decades and have become longstanding community traditions.

With the cost of fireworks continuing to rise and increasing emphasis on safety and environmental stewardship, City staff are evaluating alternative or supplemental approaches for both events. Drone light shows have become an increasingly viable enhancement. They can enhance the overall experience when paired with fireworks, or they can serve as a stand-alone feature if the City chooses to transition away from pyrotechnics. Drone shows were first introduced into City produced events in July 2025 and have since been used at select events to evaluate feasibility and audience response.

Fireworks displays require logistical coordination such as fire watch staffing by the Fire Rescue Department. The Fourth of July Spectacular fireworks display also requires marine operations, including barge and tug services and marine safety coordination, which contributes to overall costs. The Downtown Countdown fireworks display is land-based and does not require marine operations; however, it still requires fire watch coverage and regulatory compliance. Drone shows require FAA coordination and site-

specific safety planning, but generally present a reduced operational footprint compared to fireworks displays. The table below summarizes recent/upcoming costs associated with fireworks and drone shows for City-produced events. Each event/show type reflects a different scale or level of magnitude.

Event	Show Type	Duration	Cost
Fourth of July Spectacular (2025)	Fireworks	22 minutes	\$145,000
Downtown Countdown (2025)	Fireworks	4 minutes	\$6,000
Downtown Countdown (2025)	Drone Show	15 minutes	\$40,000
Starlight Musicals (2025)	Drone Show	15 minutes	\$20,000

At the December 3, 2025, Parks, Recreation and Beaches Board (PRBAB) meeting, this item was presented as part of the Parks and Recreation Department update. The consensus of the PRBAB was to continue fireworks for the Fourth of July Spectacular, either exclusively or in combination with a drone show. The PRBAB also expressed support for considering a drone-only display for Downtown Countdown as a potential pilot. A formal vote was not taken on this matter.

Commission direction is needed to determine whether staff should proceed with procurement for fireworks, drone shows, or a combination of both for the upcoming 2026 events.

Strategic Connections

This item supports the 2029 Strategic Plan, specifically advancing:

- The Public Places Focus Area, Goal 5: Build a beautiful and welcoming community.

This item advances the Fast Forward Fort Lauderdale 2035 Vision Plan: We are Here.

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

- The Public Places Focus Area
- The Parks, Recreation & Open Spaces Area
- Goal 2: Be a community with high quality parks and recreational facilities that highlight the character of our city.

Attachment

Exhibit 1 – Presentation

Prepared by: Carolyn Bean, Assistant to the Director, Parks and Recreation

Department Director: Carl Williams, Parks and Recreation