Marco Island Bond Referendum

By Sandy Parker | Sparker's Soapbox | Published 2026-07-25

Marco Island voters will decide on Aug. 18, 2026, whether the City may issue up to $23 million in General Obligation Bonds to pay for transportation infrastructure, specifically bridge replacements and roadway improvements. All qualified electors of the City of Marco Island are eligible to vote on this referendum. A simple majority of votes cast is required for it to pass.

Research for this post was compiled with assistance from Claude (Anthropic AI), drawing on internet-accessible public sources. All information was reviewed and verified by the author.

The Referendum

Below is the Referendum question as it will appear on the ballot:

> ***CITY OF MARCO ISLAND GENERAL OBLIGATION BOND REFERENDUM FOR TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS***
>
> Shall City of Marco Island issue General Obligation Bonds, in one or more series, not exceeding $23,000,000, bearing interest not exceeding maximum legal rates, maturing not more than 20 years from the issuance date of each series, pledging the City's full faith, credit and unlimited ad valorem taxing power, to finance the acquisition, construction and equipping of transportation improvements including but not limited to bridge replacements and roadway improvements?
>
> ( ) Yes, For Bonds
>
> ( ) No, Against Bonds

Background: How This Got on the Ballot

At a Jan. 2026 goal-setting workshop, the City Council identified finding new revenue sources and pursuing an infrastructure bond referendum among its top priorities for the year. Early discussions considered funding for parks, water quality, and general infrastructure alongside transportation. ([Naples Daily News])

City staff identified roughly $57 million in transportation capital needs (not including debt service and interest), and some councilors argued the City's full infrastructure need over the next 20 years is closer to $100 million. Council debated asking voters to approve as much as $34 million, which would have additionally funded shared-use paths, bicycle lanes and a larger paving catch-up, but a motion for that amount died for lack of a second. At its May 4, 2026 meeting, Council members voted unanimously to adopt Resolution 26-21, setting the bond amount at $23 million and placing the referendum on the Aug. 18, 2026, ballot. Councilors who favored the smaller figure said it had a better chance of voter approval than a larger ask. (Naples Daily News, 1/27/26; Naples Daily News, 5/5/26)

Under the Florida Constitution, general obligation bonds backed by a city's full faith, credit, and ad valorem (property) taxing power, and maturing more than 12 months from issuance, require voter approval before they can be issued. That constitutional requirement is why this bond needs a referendum. The item appears on the August primary ballot, rather than the November general election ballot, because of scheduling set by the Collier County Supervisor of Elections. (Art. VII, § 12, Fla. Const.; Coastal Breeze News)

What This Would Do

If approved, the $23 million bond would fund a ten-year transportation infrastructure plan, according to the City's own project breakdown (City of Marco Island: 2026 General Obligation Bond):

- **Replacing the Caxambas Bridge**: Currently the lowest-rated of Collier County's 370 bridges by sufficiency score, with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) rating its deck and superstructure "serious." The City spent $265,371 in 2024 and $161,351 in 2025 to design a new bridge and relocate the water and sewer mains beneath it. Total replacement cost is $12 million, offset by two FDOT grants of $3.75 million each, leaving a City obligation of $4.5 million. Scheduled for 2027.
- **Replacing the Goldenrod Bridge**: Rated "scour critical" by FDOT and among the county's lowest-rated bridges. Replacement costs $10 million, offset by a $3.75 million FDOT grant, leaving a City obligation of $6.25 million. Scheduled for 2029.
- **Repairing three bridges** (Blackmore, Sandhill, and South Seas): Total repair cost of $1.5 million ($500,000 per bridge). Scheduled for 2028.
- **Roadway paving**: Marco Island's roads are on a ten-year paving cycle, but 36 lane miles have gone unpaved for more than ten years at a cost of $200,000 per lane mile. The bond would dedicate $7.2 million to catching up this backlog, plus $500,000 per year for seven years ($3.5 million total) to keep future paving on schedule.

Approval of the bond does not authorize automatic spending. Every expenditure tied to these projects still requires separate, formal City Council approval at a public meeting each year. (Coastal Breeze News)

Estimated cost per homeowner

According to the City of Marco Island website, the bond is estimated to cost the average homeowner an additional $4 to $8 per month, depending on the assessed value of their property. General obligation bonds are repaid through property taxes, so this cost would be reflected as an increase in the City's portion of the property tax bill, not as a separate line-item fee. (City of Marco Island: 2026 General Obligation Bond)

Arguments in Favor

The City's explanatory materials, including an article by City Manager Casey Lucius published in Coastal Breeze News, lay out the primary case for the bond: much of Marco Island's infrastructure, including its bridges, was built in the 1970s with an expected lifespan of 50 years, and the City has reached the point where replacing aging bridges and maintaining essential roadways is "no longer optional." The article argues that these projects are costly and that delaying them further only increases the eventual expense, and frames infrastructure investment as a core responsibility of local government tied to public safety, resilience, and the long-term vitality of the community. (Coastal Breeze News)

Two of the bridges included in the plan, Caxambas and Goldenrod, already carry the lowest sufficiency and structural ratings among Collier County's 370 bridges, which proponents point to as a safety rationale. The City has also secured $7.5 million in FDOT matching grants toward the two bridge replacements, which proponents note reduces the net cost to local taxpayers for those projects. (City of Marco Island: 2026 General Obligation Bond)

During council deliberations in Jan. 2026, some councilors argued for addressing the City's infrastructure needs comprehensively rather than through a series of smaller bonds. Councilor Rene Champagne said that a smaller bond now would mean repeated borrowing and insurance costs later, while construction costs continue to rise and infrastructure continues to deteriorate. Councilor Deb Henry called full replacement of the bridges "kind of a no brainer." (Naples Daily News)

Arguments Against

No organized political committee or "vote no" campaign specific to this referendum has been identified as of this writing.

During the same Jan. 2026 council deliberations, Vice Chairman Steven Gray said he opposed a bond sale because of the financing costs, quoting Benjamin Franklin: "I'd rather go to bed hungry than wake up in debt." Gray argued the Council hadn't yet had a full conversation about "optimal capital structure, debt capacity," and pointed to smaller, incremental property tax rate increases as an alternative way to fund capital projects on a pay-as-you-go basis rather than through borrowing. Despite this stated opposition during earlier deliberations over larger bond amounts, the Council's final May 4, 2026 vote to place the $23 million bond on the ballot was unanimous. (Naples Daily News, 1/27/26; Naples Daily News, 5/5/26)

What a “Yes” Vote Means / What a “No” Vote Means

A “yes” vote authorizes the City of Marco Island to issue up to $23 million in General Obligation Bonds, to be repaid over up to 20 years through the City’s property tax revenue, to fund the bridge and roadway projects described above.

A “no” vote would not authorize the bonds. The bridge replacements, bridge repairs, and roadway paving described above would need to be funded some other way, such as through the City’s existing budget or a future tax increase, or would go unfunded or delayed.

Learn More

- City of Marco Island: 2026 Ballot Referendum (official notice)
- City of Marco Island: 2026 General Obligation Bond (project breakdown and cost estimate)
- City fo Marco Island Resolution 26-21
- “Marco needs money for capital improvements, council eyes bond referendum,” Naples Daily News, 1/27/26
- “Marco Island to ask voters to approve bond sale. Find out when, how much,” Naples Daily News, 5/5/26
- “August Transportation Bond for Marco Island Voters,” by City Manager Casey Lucius via Coastal Breeze News, 7/16/26
- Florida Constitution, Article VII, Section 12 (bond referendum requirement)

Summary

All qualified electors of the City of Marco Island are eligible to vote on this referendum on Aug. 18, 2026. A simple majority of votes cast is required for it to pass.