City of Valdosta

2014 Annual Report

From the City Manager

It is my pleasure to present the 2014 City of Valdosta Annual Report, our 19th consecutive report, designed to inform our citizens, elected officials and other interested individuals of our city's activities, progress, challenges and accomplishments last year.

The city continued to operate in a fiscally-challenged economy, and our employees continued to make the necessary adjustments to accommodate economic conditions while maintaining quality services for our citizens.

Through the dedicated work of the Finance Department staff, the city was awarded the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting for the 28th consecutive year by the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada for the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report. The city also received the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award for the 18th consecutive year--the highest form of recognition in governmental budgeting.

However, the rising costs of fuel, equipment, vehicles, insurance, chemicals, and supplies that city departments must have to perform their duties, coupled with the decline in major revenue sources, are some of hard facts that Mayor and Council considered in June before approving a millage rate increase for the first time in 22 years.

Although property taxes have been reduced 11 times in the past 19 years, the costs of providing services has more than doubled over that same time period. In fact, the last millage rate increase was in 1992 when the city's millage was raised to 6.25 mills. Even with the increase from 4.102 to 6.102 mills, Valdosta—Georgia's 14th largest city—will continue to have among the lowest millage rate among a group of peer cities in the state and its millage rate remains lower than it was in 1992.

Throughout 2014, city employees continued to provide top-notch municipal government, public safety and quality of life services to our citizens and visitors through our customer-centered departments.

Our Police Department outperformed state and national solvability rates for the most serious crimes and was reacredited through the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agency (CALEA) while serving our community with impeccable investigative, crime-solving capabilities and an unyielding public presence. Our Fire Department maintained its ISO rating of 2—one of the highest ratings in the state—and continued to serve as the Georgia Search and Rescue Team, Task Force 2, serving all of Southwest Georgia. Both departments were resourceful with grant funding to maintain the best public safety services for citizens.

The Public Works Department remained committed to protecting our citizens and environment through comprehensive recycling and e-recycling programs, mosquito control program, neighborhood clean-ups and a commitment to public education.

The Utilities Department broke ground on a significant amount of capital investments in 2014, such as the $32 million Force Main Project and the $23 million Wastewater Treatment Plant Relocation Project, as well as the continuation of other sanitary sewer collection system capital projects, which was the city's highest priority this year. The Water Treatment Plant, operated under the Utilities Department, delivered over 3.2 billions gallons of top-quality drinking water to our customers.

The Engineering Department remained integrally involved in transportation projects to alleviate congestion along east-west roads—including the DOT U.S. 84/West Hill Avenue railroad overpass—which was completed in October 2014. The city also moved closer to understanding and providing more accurate information during heavy rain events through a Flood Risk Management Study, made possible by a $150,000 partnership with the USACE, that was completed in 2014.

"The City Without Limits" continues to be a great place for business. Valdosta was ranked 135 by Forbes Magazine as one of the nation's "Best Small Places for Business and Careers," in a study that rated 200 of the largest metro areas on a dozen factors related to jobs, costs (business and living), income growth, quality of life and education of the labor force. In 2014, the city maintained this pro-business attitude by offering an efficient permitting process, opportunities for area businesses through the Valdosta Small Emerging Business Program, and incentives and state job tax credits for qualifying businesses.

The city continued to provide citizens with information on demand through our website, quality programming on Metro Valdosta Channel 17, timely newsletters, E-News blasts and other citizen programs and events. An increased effort was made in 2014 to communicate more effectively with all citizens via social media tools such as YouTube and Twitter. In addition, the city continued to host three public education programs—Valdosta Government 101, Police Citizens Academy and Fire Citizens Fire Academy—all designed to give citizens a closer look at their local government and the services it provides.

Thank you for taking the time to review the work of your local government throughout the pages of this report. I'd like to make special mention of the 589 dedicated city employees for the tremendous service each provides to the citizens of Valdosta, to our elected officials who provide us with leadership and direction, and to the citizens of the Valdosta community to whom we are privileged to serve. I invite you to take a closer look at our organization by reviewing this report and by visiting us at www.valdostacity.com.

Sincerely,

Larry H. Hanson, City Manager
hanson@valdostacity.com

VALDOSTA

A City Without Limits

Mission

To be known by our customers and others for high quality municipal services.

Purpose

To provide public services that meet or exceed the expectations of citizens.

To improve the quality of life in the community by a sincere commitment to the ideals of public service.

To be creative and innovative in our approach to the needs of citizens, recognizing the trust and confidence that our citizens place in us as caretakers of governmental services.

To be efficient and effective and use wisely the public resources we are entrusted to manage.

Quality Service by Quality People

www.valdostacity.com

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Valdosta Mayor & City Council

Mayor John Gayle
jgayle@valdostacity.com

Councilman James R. Wright
District 1
jwright@valdostacity.com

Councilwoman Sandra Tooley
District 2
stooley@valdostacity.com

Councilman Joseph Vickers
District 3
jvickers@valdostacity.com

Mayor Pro-Tem Alvin Payton, Jr.
Councilman District 4
apayton@valdostacity.com

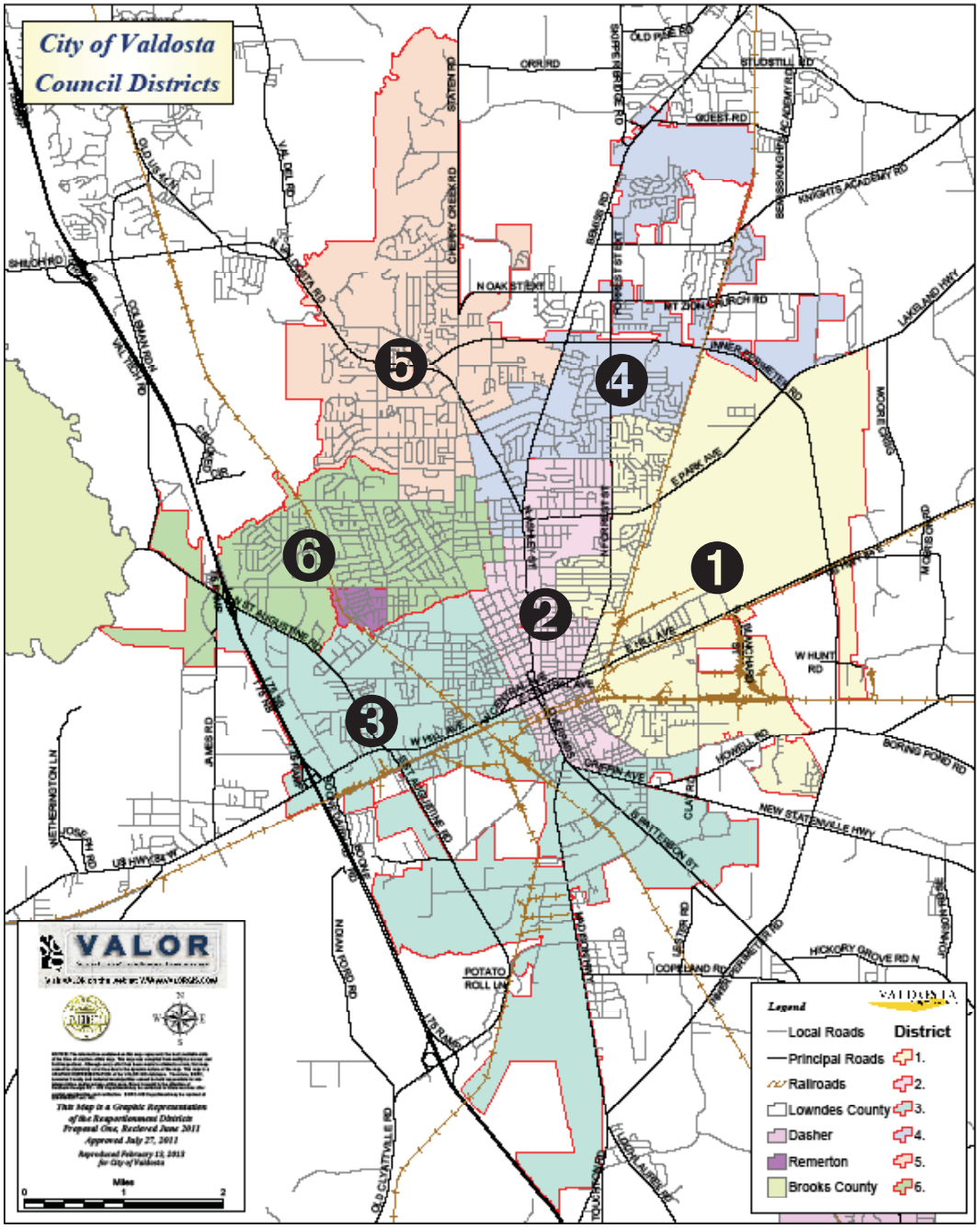
Councilman Tim Carroll
District 5
tcarroll@valdostacity.com

Councilman Robert Yost
District 6
ryost@valdostacity.com

Councilman Ben Norton
At-Large
bnorton@valdostacity.com

The Mayor and members of the City Council invite and encourage the citizens of the City of Valdosta to attend City Council meetings whenever possible, because good government depends on the interest and involvement of citizens. City Council meetings are held on the first and third Thursday following the first Sunday of each month, at 5:30 p.m., although changes may be necessary to avoid conflicts with holidays. City Council Work Sessions are held on the Tuesday before the first City Council meeting of each month. Meetings are held on the second floor of City Hall, located at 216 East Central Avenue, in beautiful Downtown Valdosta.

Citizens are also encouraged to visit the City of Valdosta website at **www.valdostacity.com** for agendas, minutes and other valuable information about our city government and services.



City Leadership

L-R: Councilman Joseph "Sonny" Vickers, Councilwoman Sandra Tooley, Mayor John Gayle, Mayor Pro Tem Alvin Payton, Councilman James Wright, Councilman Ben Norton and Councilman Tim Carroll. Not pictured: Councilman Robert Yost.

Opportunities for Public Service

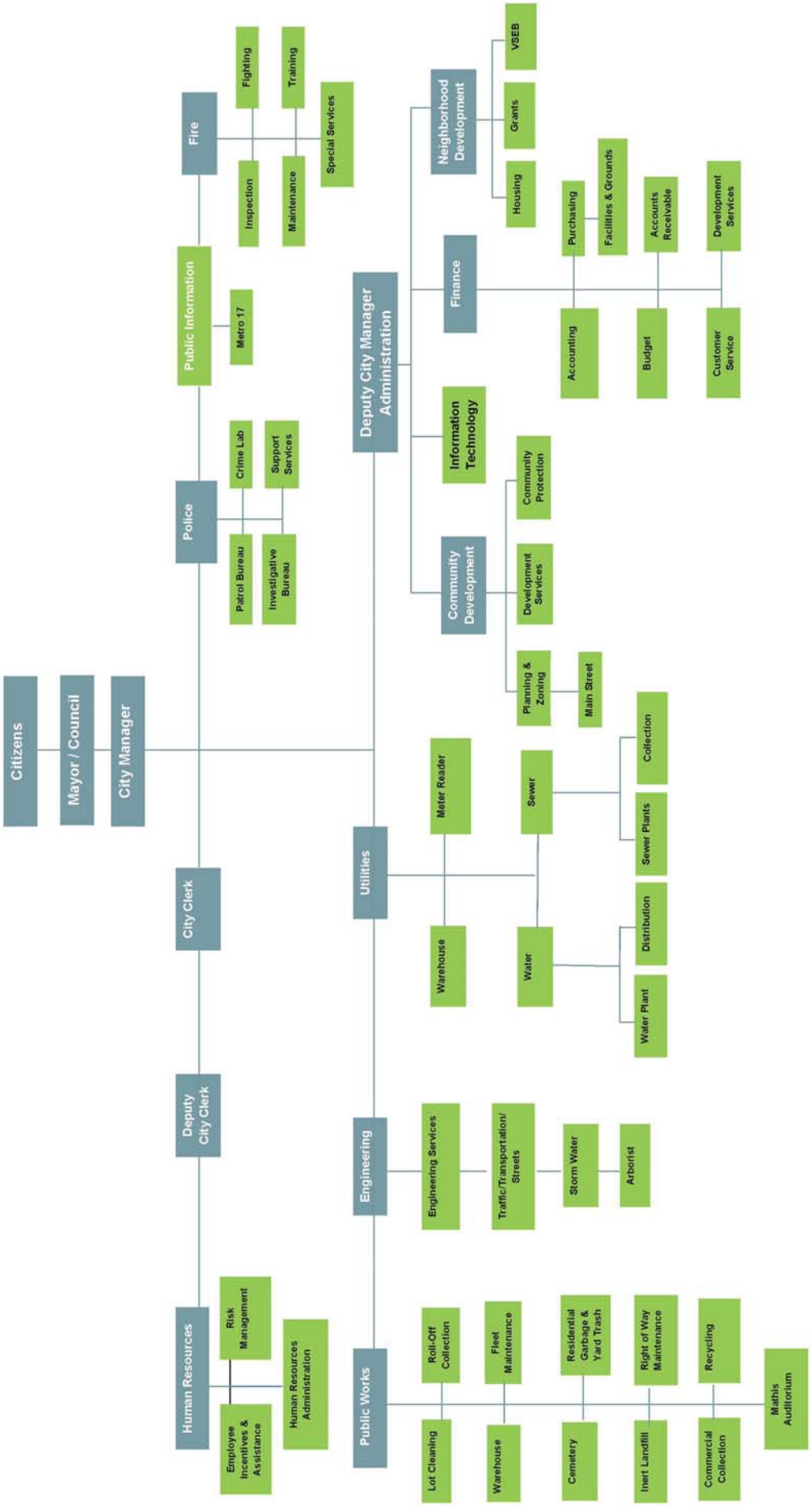
Valdosta citizens may participate in accomplishing the business of the city by serving on a variety of boards, commissions, authorities and advisory committees. Interested applicants must review the Membership Requirements and Code of Ethics Booklet, complete a General Board Application, and sign a Code of Ethics form. The Mayor and City Council evaluate the applications and appoint individuals to the vacancies during a City Council meeting, at least four times a year.

For information or to get a copy of these documents, contact the City Clerk at Valdosta City Hall at (229) 259-3500. All documents are also available at www.valdostacity.com.

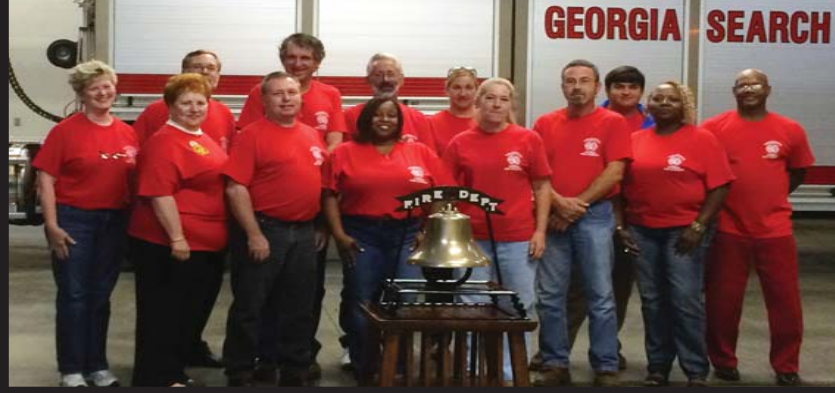
VALDOSTA
A City Without Limits

www.valdostacity.com

City of Valdosta Organization



CITY OF VALDOSTA ORGANIZATION CHART



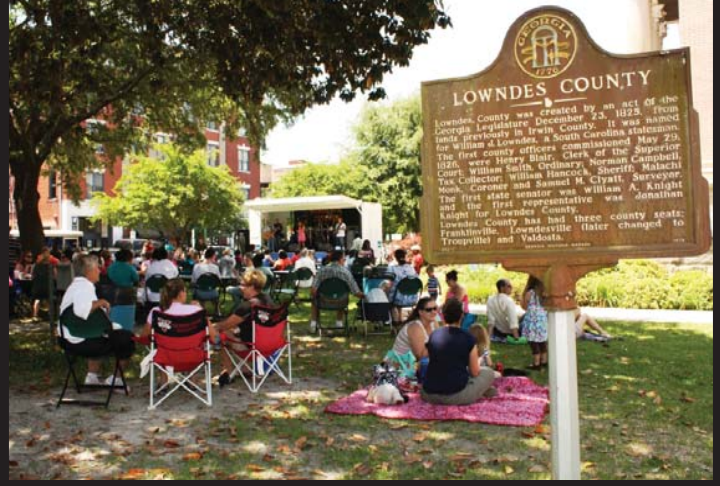
The City of Valdosta operates under a Council-Manager form of government. The elected officials are the policy makers who establish a vision for our city, and together they hire the manager to carry out policy and ensure that all citizens are equitably served.

The city manager coordinates the work of the department heads and other employees, who help ensure the smooth and efficient delivery of services. The city manager also has the responsibility of preparing the budget, directing day-to-day operations, managing personnel and serving as the council's chief policy advisor.

In 2014, the city also hosted the 5th annual Valdosta City Government 101 Citizens Orientation, an initiative of the Mayor and City Council that gives Valdosta-Lowndes County residents an inside look at how their city operates. The program takes 25 citizens annually and puts them face-to-face with city leadership for the exchange of important information and to interact on issues of citizens concern. Valdosta 101 has been extremely successful, and recently began accepting area high school seniors into the program to introduce them to local government and to inspire them to consider public service as an intrigal and meaningful part of their adult lives. Valdosta 101 is one of three public education programs hosted by the city—Police Citizens Academy and Fire Citizens Fire Academy are the other two—all designed to give citizens a closer look at their local government and the services it provides.

An increased effort was made in 2014 to share information with citizens via social media tools, such as YouTube and Twitter. Citizens may also visit **www.valdostacity.com** and tune into Metro Valdosta Channel 17 on Mediacom for additional information about city government and opportunities to serve the community.

Department Leadership
Pictured above, from left to right, are: Public Works Director Richard Hardy, Chief of Police Brian Childress, Human Resources Director Renassa Small, Utilities Director Henry Hicks, City Manager Larry Hanson, City Engineer Pat Collins and Fire Chief Freddie Broome. Not pictured is Deputy City Manager for Administration Mark Barber, Community Development Director Mike Martin and Municipal Court Judge Vernita Bender.



Community Development Department

Comprehensive Development Services

In 2014, the Community Development Department—comprised of the Community Protection Division, Development Services Division and the Planning and Zoning Division, which includes Valdosta Main Street—provided the coordination of all development services for the Valdosta-Lowndes County development community.

The Community Protection Division consists of five city marshals and one landscape technician, who support a comprehensive "property line-to-property line" enforcement concept that encompasses all code enforcement responsibilities in the city. All department marshals have obtained the highest Level 11 certification. Last year, the division was responsible for processing over 3,022 community protection cases, coordinating the Great American Clean Up and Make a Difference Day city neighborhood beautification events, and are credited as helping the city create and maintain a positive image.

The Development Services Division continued to provide building, plumbing, mechanical and electrical code enforcement, plan review and permitting services—providing the coordination and collaboration of all development services for the development community. The division remains a joint city-county service provider and serves the cities of Hahira and Lake Park, as well. There are five certified and cross-certified field inspectors who make up this division.

The department acknowledges the patience and cooperation of its customers while it continued to transition into the new software system in 2014. However, as in all improvement and growth opportunities, the process has not been without some challenges. Department staff and IT professionals have identified and are working through these hiccups to provide better communication and overall project success in the coming year for all its customers.

The Planning and Zoning Division ensures quality growth and development consistent with the Greater Lowndes 2030 Comprehensive Plan. In 2014, the division efficiently processed land use cases, 379 business licenses, development plans, 2 subdivision plats, 100 sign permits, and 14 other zoning matters for current and projected developments. The division continued to update the Land Development Regulations, while educating the public on general land planning and development principles. In 2014, staff created a new Historic District overlay that allows flexibility with land uses within the district to encourage the protection and reuse of historic buildings and processed 86 HPC and administrative applications. The division hosted a Section 106 training which drew over 100 participants from our area, region, and state. To welcome new returning visitors to our city, a $19,490 GATEway Grant received in 2014 will allow staff to begin one of 10 new gateway project at the city's entrances. Staff also began planning the N. Patterson Street Streetscape Proj-

Quick Stats

670	Building Inspections
641	Electrical Inspections
420	Plumbing Inspections
428	Mechanical Inspections
1,153	Building Permits
2,228	Electrical Permits
845	Plumbing Permits
1,526	Mechanical Permits
3,022	Community Protection Cases

"The Community Development Department staff pledges to continue to look for ways to improve our services, during and in spite of these trying times. Our staff is dedicated to providing our construction and development community with quality customer service to insure the safety of our citizens, as well as the investment in the future of our community." — Mike Martin, Community Development Department Director

ect in collaboration with other departments. The Planning and Zoning Division's four-person staff processed 98 percent of all business tax applications within three day, all building plans within four days, and all sign applications within five days—demonstrating a remarkable commitment to excellence.

The Valdosta Main Street program, which operates within the Planning and Zoning Division, monitors and manages the growth of Valdosta's historic downtown area. In partnership with our local downtown merchants, Valdosta's Main Street district saw a net increase of seven new businesses and 53 employees. More than 70 event days were hosted downtown, attracting over 100,000 visitors to the heart of our city. In its fourth season, the successful Downtown Valdosta Farm Days has grown in popularity and saw a dramatic increase in the use of electronic benefits transfer (EBT) cards--making fresh and affordable foods available to all citizens. Two large-scaled historic preservation projects were completed in 2014, as both the Ashley House and the Historic Cranford building underwent significant renovations and injected nearly $14 million of combined private funding into the Downtown District. The Main Street Program was nationally accredited for the 19th consecutive year for meeting commercial district revitalization standards set by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Valdosta is in its second year of being a GEMS (Georgia's Exceptional Main Streets) Program, one of only five in the state, which includes a three-year cycle of work between the local Main Street Program, local government and the Georgia Department of Community Affairs Office of Downtown Development.

The Community Development Department staff continued to be involved in community events in 2014 and continued to seek innovative ways to service the public more efficiently. The department as a whole continues to make advancements toward positive changes through advanced technology and maintains strong relationships with local, state and national organizations within the construction industry.

Mission
The mission of the Community Development Department is to be known by our customers, citizens, and others for high quality service, to protect the safety and well being of citizens, and to ensure the quality, integrity, and code compliance of the built environment in all of Lowndes County.

Quick Stats

Drinking Water Treated	3.2 Billion Gallons
Wastewater Treated	2.9 Billion Gallons
Water Customers Billed	20,586 Customers/Month
Sewer Customers Billed	20,602 Customers/Month

Utilities Department

Mission
The mission of the Utilities Department is to be known by our customers for delivery of the highest quality municipal utility services possible through continuous improvement.

In 2014, the department's highest priority continued to be the ongoing rehabilitation and replacement of seriously deteriorated sewer infrastructure throughout the sewer collection and treatment systems, as well as the implementation of water quality improvement projects to ensure a long-term, sustainable and safe water supply for the future.

Wastewater
In 2014, $2.6 million in major repair work was completed at the existing Withlacoochee Water Pollution Control Plant (WPCP) to ensure regulatory compliance until the new treatment facility is completed in early 2016. Construction also began on two major projects—the Force Main Project which includes a new 6.2-mile force main, four new pump stations, a new headworks structure and a six- million gallon flow equalization basin, which began in June, and the relocation of the Withlacoochee WPCP, which began in August. Both projects are significantly ahead of schedule.

The continued execution of the sewer collection rehabilitation action plan, implemented in 2010, incorporates the initial phase for remote monitoring of all sewage pump stations through use of a supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) system for annual replacement or rehabilitation of outdated sewage pump stations.

The ongoing smoke testing program is on track to complete the remaining 180 miles of the city's sewer collection system over the next two years. To date, approximately 120 miles of the city's 300 miles of lines have been evaluated through smoke testing and CCTV work, and 254 defects have been identified for repairs. Over 5,720 of the city's 6,473 manholes have been mapped and approximately 3,000 inspected. Over 110 seriously deteriorated sewer manholes have been replaced or rehabilitated since 2012, and an additional 30 to 60 manhole repairs will be made each year through 2018. This work will significantly reduce sewer spills, inflow and/or infiltration (I&I) of ground and surface water into the sewer system, as well as develop a prioritized long-term sewer collection system rehabilitation plan.

In 2014, the first of three portable emergency generators was purchased, along with electrical wiring and controls at every lift station, for quick connection in the event of a localized power outage. The sewer lift station rehabilitation program is in its third year, and 10 of the 20 stations identified for upgrades and improvements have been completed. Improvements to an additional three lift stations are currently under contract, and four more are in the design phase.

The computerized maintenance management system implemented in 2013 has significantly improved preventive/predictive maintenance on all mechanical and electrical systems, eliminating equipment failures, as well as tracking and maintaining historical documentation for all work performed within the department. The software program may also be utilized by other city departments.

In December, the City Council approved an EPD Supplemental Environmental Project to update the Withlacoochee sewer collection system model, which will aid the department in further identifying potential sewage overflow locations and areas with high inflow and infiltration probability, and will be included into rehabilitation plans.

Water System
In 2014, the department continued to plan for the upgrade of its critical water facilities and infrastructure by implementing specific strategies to rehabilitate its existing water distribution system, wells system and treatment systems. A second new raw water test well #10 was completed and will be connected to the existing wellfield, along with water test well #9, as part of a 2015 construction project. Upon completion, these two new production wells will increase available capacity for the next five years. In addition, the design of a new chlorine booster pump station was completed . This booster station, to be complete in 2015, should significantly reduce the need for most fire hydrant flushing and will improve the water quality in the southern areas of Valdosta water distribution system.

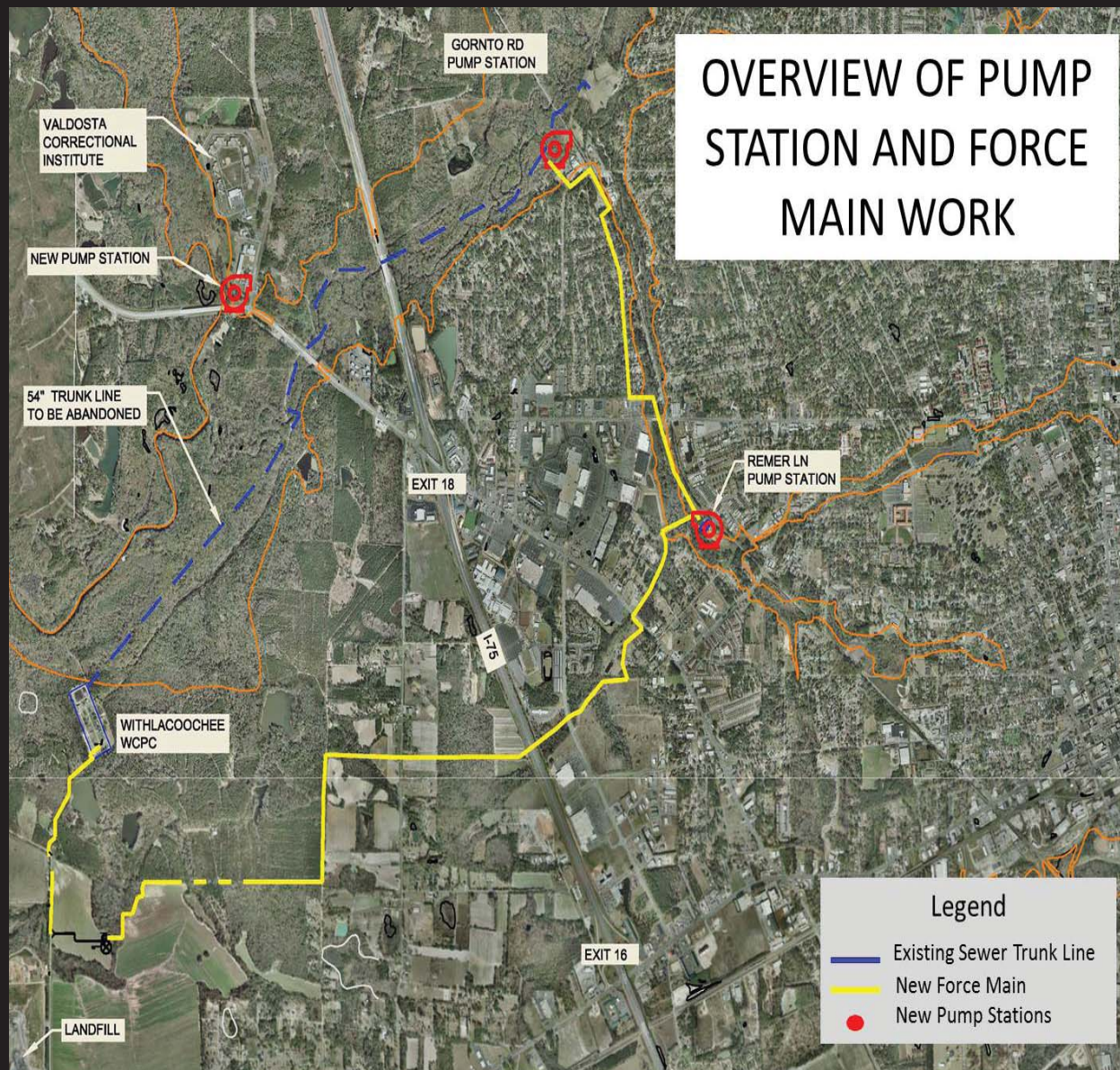
With the completion of the new 2-million gallon elevated storage tank on Fry Street in 2013, the over 50-year-old Briggs Street elevated storage tank was taken out of service in 2014, due to its age and limited capacity. A contract was awarded in December 2014, and the demolition is expected to take place in early 2015. Also, the Valdosta High School elevated storage tank was thoroughly cleaned and repainted, in 2014, as part of the routine maintenance program for all water storage tanks.

The ongoing maintenance program for all major pumping systems at the water treatment plant allowed for both low-service water pumps to be rehabilitated, in 2014, to ensure reliability on these key systems.

Water and sewer construction was completed on additional annexed islands, in 2014, and will continue annually through 2018 until all the remaining annexed islands are served.

"The Utilities Department continues to make significant progress in the implementation of its short and long term capital improvement plans. Through numerous ongoing projects and programs, a solid foundation has been laid to meet the expectations and challenges of the future. As we move forward, we will ensure that our natural environment is protected while meeting the growth needs of our community and delivering the level of services expected by our customers. By remaining focused on these plans, Valdosta will be well prepared to meet our immediate and future needs.

— Henry Hicks, Utilities Department Director



Fire Department

Staying Diligent

After a thorough nationwide search, in March 2014 Freddie Broome was named the Fire Chief of the Valdosta Fire Department (VFD), where he led the department in providing excellence fire protection services for our citizens. The VFD continued to be rated one of the best fire protection and service providers in the State of Georgia, according to the Insurance Services Organization (ISO) who evaluates and measures the services each fire department can deliver to their community by national standards. In fact, the department has maintained an ISO Class 2 Rating for over a decade, resulting in very low property insurance premiums for city residents. Of the nearly 700 cities and counties in Georgia, only one of them has an ISO rating better than Valdosta, and only nine other communities share the same ISO Class 2 rating.

The VFD provides full-time, professional fire protection and educational services for the City of Valdosta, which include Fire Suppression, Fire Safety Education and Prevention, Code Enforcement, Hazardous Materials Mitigation, Confined Space Rescue and First Responders. The department has 96 nationally- and state-certified (NPQ) Level 1 firefighters, and all certified members are trained to the highest level of hazardous material response and handling offered by the State Fire Academy. The department's response area covers approximately 71,000 citizens and as many as 500,000 residents of South Georgia and North Florida who utilize Valdosta at various times of the day and week as a hub for business, culture, education, leisure and retail. The VFD is also the proud home to one of four regional Georgia Search and Rescue teams designated by the State of Georgia Governor's Office for the Southwest Georgia area.

The department operates seven fire stations equipped with a total of 16 fire trucks, nine pumper trucks, three ladder trucks, one air/light truck, one airport crash/rescue truck, one urban/search and rescue truck, and one 2,000-gallon tanker truck. Two 1,000-gallon fire trucks were purchased with SPLOST VI funds to serve VFD Stations #1 and #5 to meet the fire protection needs of the city and to help the city attain a Class 1 ISO rating. In 2014, the construction on the new Valdosta Airport Fire Station #7 was completed, and a new airport fire truck was purchased.

In 2014, the VFD responded to approximately 3,308 calls for fire service with an average response time of 4:16 minutes—nearly two minutes quicker than the national average. Staff received 4,242 training hours to maintain the excellent customer service to both our new and existing customers. Highly-skilled firefighters, combined with the quick arrival on the scene, saved property owners $9,866,605 of the $13,585,303 total property values involved in 193 fires last year.

The VFD applied for and received the 2014 Chesney Fallen Firefighters Memorial Grant for $2,620 for the purchase of smoke alarms, a smoke generator for the fire safety house, fire prevention videos for kids and senior citizens in our area, and a video projector for educational and training purposes. The department also received a FEMA/DHS grant to purchase personal protective equipment, a GEMA grant to build capabilities that enhance homeland security, and an additional GEMA grant to acquire or sustain equipment for hazardous material programs—collectively over $200,000 in grant funds were awarded to the VFD to serve the fire protection needs of the Valdosta community.

In 2014, VFD personnel continued to excel—both on and off duty—

"Our mission of responding in a safe manner to all reported emergencies, to protect lives and property through our efforts in fire prevention and public education, and to mitigate those emergencies and/or disasters—whether natural or man-made—is what sets us apart from other fire protection providers in this state." —Fire Chief Freddie Broome

and celebrated several significant achievements. The annual "Give Burns the Boot" drive in May brought in nearly $9,000 in donations to benefit the Georgia Firefighters Burn Foundation, and the MDA "Fill the Boot" Drive in September raised over $10,000 for children and adults affected by muscle disease. The first annual Battle of the Badges "Guns & Hoses" (VFD vs VPD) Blood Drive held in July brought in 91 units of blood to help the American Red Cross in their life-saving efforts. In addition to these, staff coordinated and participated in the Heroes for Tots Softball Tournament, the Shop with a Firefighter program, the Mayor's Holiday Gift Drive and the VFD Give a Child a Bike Program.

The department initiated three new programs in 2014: an eight-week Citizens Fire Academy, a mentoring program with Behavioral Health Services of South Georgia Child & Adolescent Clinic, and a Fire Officer I Training with the Georgia Fire Academy at the Valdosta Regional Training Center.

Furthermore, in 2014, the VFD hosted its first annual VFD Career Expo. The department also participated in the International Fire/EMS Safety and Health Week to increase public awareness on the importance of firefighter safety and health and to emphasize how VFD training is a critical component of firefighter and emergency medical responder safety.

Quick Stats

- Responded to 3,308 fire alarms last year, which includes 321 fires, 949 rescue and emergency medical services, 439 hazardous conditions, 17 severe weather calls, 32 special incident, and others.
- Average response time was 4 minutes, 16 seconds--nearly two minutes quicker than the national average of 6 minutes
- Investigated 50 fires and 12 arson cases.
- Conducted 278 preplan fire inspections of buildings and facilities.
- Tested, serviced and inspected 5,374 city fire hydrants in preparation for the 2014 ISO evaluation.
- Taught 49 fire safety classes and 70 public education programs.
- Raised nearly $20,000 for the Georgia Firefighter Burn Foundation and the Muscular Dystrophy Association through the annual "Give Burns the Boot" and "Fill the Boot" drives.
- Received 4,242 hours of training
- Maintained a positive presence in community through over 100 hours in the Community Partners in Education program, interacting with students through mentoring, special classes and other Fire Prevention and Safety opportunities.

Mission
The mission of the City of Valdosta Fire Department is to respond in a safe manner to all reported emergencies of our customers, to protect their lives and property through fire prevention, public education, and the mitigation of emergencies and disasters, whether natural or man-made.

Engineering Department

Paving the Roads for the Future
The Engineering Department operates four divisions:

▶Engineering Services performs project management, inspections, development review and GIS/real property management.

▶Traffic Management and Street Maintenance performs the operations of the Traffic Management Center (TMC), signal, signs, markings, street and sidewalk maintenance.

▶Arbor Division is responsible for planting, maintaining, and protecting trees along city streets and on other property.

▶Stormwater Division performs stormwater maintenance and environmental services.

In 2014, a new Traffic Management Center Technician, Traffic Manager, and Assistant Director were hired to help the department continue to provide professional civil engineering and surveying services for all types of municipal public works projects. In addition, department staff continued to manage Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) projects, review private development plans to ensure compliance with various city ordinances, and inspect construction.

To address regional flooding, the department partnered with the U.S. Geological Survey to complete the Withlacoochee River and Little River Flood Tracking chart and partnered with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to complete the Withlacoochee River and Sugar Creek Flooding Analysis. Both of these documents are available on the city's Regional Flooding page at www.valdostacity.com/stormwater. Staff also assisted with securing $259,000 for a single LIDAR flight for Lowndes, Cook and Tift Counties to be completed in 2015.

The fundamental objective of the Engineering Department is to provide the community with quality service at the lowest cost to its taxpayers.

2014 Engineering Projects

Drainage Projects
Millpond Concrete Ditch Repair

Ditch Piping Projects
Lakeland Avenue

Land Acquisitions
Parcels for Future Lakeland Avenue Pond
Easement for MLK, Jr. Corridor-Phase 1
Easement for Island 69A

Road Projects
LMIG 2014
St. Andrews Circle Paving
Eager & Jerry Jones Resurfacing
Road Restriping in 58 city locations

Sidewalk Projects Completed
Gornto Road Sidewalk Repairs
Lamar Street Sidewalk
Lee Street/Vallotton Sidewalk
North Oak Street Sidewalk
River Street Sidewalk

Sidewalk Projects in Progress
Gordon Street Sidewalk
Safe Routes to School – Park Avenue

Traffic Improvements
Floyd Street Railroad Crossing Closure
Holliday Street Railroad Crossing Closure
Patterson at Ulmer Intersection Traffic Light DOT Height Adjustment
Installed video detection cameras at Sustella and Baytree, Country Club at Eager & Jerry Jones split.

Water & Sewer Main Extensions in Progress
Annexed Island 27 Utility Extension
Annexed Island 35B Utility Extension
Annexed Island 77C Utility Extension

Other
Airport Fire & Rescue
Five Points Big Box Demolition
I75 High Mast Lighting
Installed bike racks downtown

"There's a culture within the Engineering Department that questions are answered accurately and completely, and that employees are expected and empowered to solve a customer's problem within the context of city values and outcomes." — Pat Collins, City Engineer, P.E.

Engineering Services Division

Driveways Inspected	75
Land Disturbance Permits Issued	10
Soil Erosion Inspections on Permitted Sites	76
Soil Erosion Inspections on Non-Permitted Sites	28
Corrective Actions Taken on Soil Erosion	7
Pond Inspections Performed	77
Rain Events .5" or Greater	19
Rain Events Less than .5"	2
Rights-of-Way Authorization Numbers Issued	230
Certificates of Occupancy Issued	41
Asbuilts Accepted	36
NPDES, Construction and Site Plans Reviewed	13
Engineering Inspectors-Private Project Inspections	60

Traffic Management & Street Maintenance Division

Signals

Bulbs	34
Emergency Call Out	135
Signal Head's (Installed/Replaced)	32
LED'S (Installed)	32
LED'S (Replaced)	100
Misc Equipment (Installed/Replaced)	112
Cameras (Installed/Replaced)	5
Banners (Installed/Removed)	50
Loops Installed	13

Signs & Markings

Signs (Installed)	438
Traffic Counts	30
Stop Signs (Repaired/Upgraded)	117
Street Signs (Repaired/Upgraded)	305
Trimming of R.O.W.	335
Stop Bars/Arrow (Painted)	65
Painting (Footage)	3,579
Thermo Arrow/Stop Bars	153
Over Head Signs Made	55
Reflectors Installed	40
Barricades Installed	128
Speed Hump Investigations	30
Miscellaneous Signs Upgraded to High Intensity	254
Vandalized Signs Replaced	31

Traffic Center

Signal Timing Evaluations	21
Signal Timing Changes	15
Fiber Repairs (Test/Ends Install in Field)	5
Cameras Installed and Operational	26
TMC Tours	5

Streets & Sidewalks

Potholes Repaired	875
Washouts - linear foot	1,485
Trench Lines - square foot	1,575
Root & Base Cuts	250
Driveways Repaired	25
Edge Washouts	98
Sidewalks - linear foot	225
Base / Root Repair - square foot	55,210
Wheelchair Ramps	3
Locations Saw Cut	535
Storm Drains Cleaned	87
Bollards Placed	38
Trip Hazards - linear foot	25
Asphalt Tons Used	680
Concrete - Cubic Yards Used	90
Millings - Tons Used	85
Fill Dirt - Tons Used	50

Stormwater Division

Storm pipe cleaned (ft)	50,480
Canals cut (ft)	415,857
Catch basins inspected	1,992
Catch basins cleaned	970
Catch basins repaired	91
Beaver dams (hrs)	643
Streets swept (miles)	973
Outfalls inspected	226
Rainfall (10 rain gauges, average in inches)	53
Dig/Grade ditches/swale	105

Arbor Division

Trees Removed	132
Trees Trimmed	640
Trees Planted	19

Mission

The mission of the Engineering Department is to provide the highest quality engineering services for the community that involves transportation, street maintenance and the survey, design, and construction oversight of street, water, drainage and miscellaneous public works improvements.

Public Works Department

Caring for the Environment

The Public Works Department is responsible for the daily operation of sanitation services and repair and maintenance of city vehicles and equipment. The department's primary responsibilities are residential and commercial sanitation and recycling services. In recent years, the department has expanded its services to include: Residential Yard Trash, Right-of-Way Maintenance, Right-of-Way Street Maintenance, Neighborhood Recycling, Mosquito Control Program, Automotive/Fleet Maintenance Center, City Fuel Center, Small Engine Repair, Mathis City Auditorium, Sunset Hill Cemetery, Property Abatements, Special Pick-Ups, Wetherington Lane Landfill Maintenance and the Compost Landfill.

Staff continued to monitor mosquito activity in our area through a joint mosquito surveillance program—partnering with key local and state experts from Lowndes County, the South Health District, and the Valdosta State University. Staff used every resource available to protect its citizens this past year from mosquitoes through a spraying and larvicide program. The department also worked closely with the city's Public Information Officer to produce educational releases and media opportunities to educate the public about personal protection and responsibility.

Environmental awareness and education efforts have resulted in an increase in recycling participation from both residential and commercial customers, as well as the local school systems. The recycling center has stepped up their efforts to reduce the amount of recyclable material going to the landfill and is processing over 95 percent of all recyclable material coming into the recycling center.

Mission

The mission of the Public Works Department is to provide consistent and quality customer service in all aspects of daily operations to our customers and citizens of the City of Valdosta.

Quick Stats

16,963	Residential Sanitation Customers
1,390	Commercial and Small Business Customers
6,013	Number of Special Pick-Ups
1,737	Tons of Recyclable Material Collected
24,501	Tons of Solid Waste Collected
9,074	Tons of Yard Trash Collected/Mulched
40,651	Pounds Collected from E-Recycling Events
5,656	Fleet/Maintenance Work Orders Completed
1,622	Automotive Services Completed
1,242	Street Miles Swept

"The Public Works Department's vision is to provide services efficiently, effectively, and with accountability to the citizens we serve. We will remain committed to excellence by being a leader of innovative, professional and quality public works services without sacrificing quality, and fiscal responsibility.

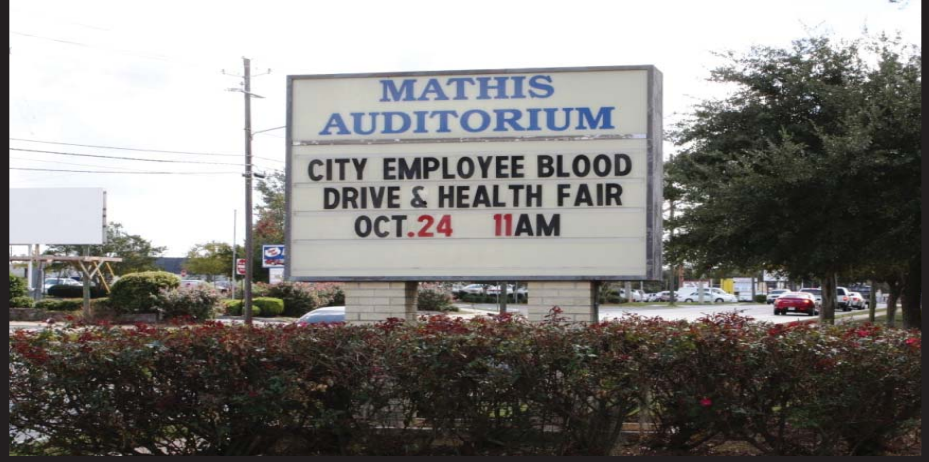
—Richard L. Hardy, Public Works Director

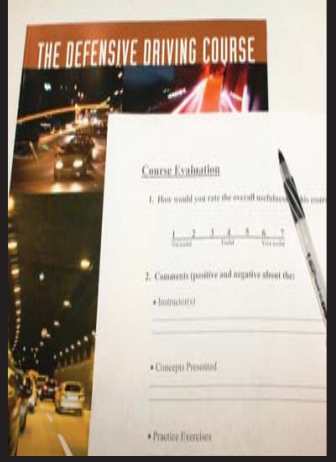
In 2014, the department is also proud of the following accomplishments:

- Appointed new Public Works Director.
- Public Works Department/Recycling Division was nominated in March 2014 for the Chamber Choice Award for their superior customer care and service to the community.
- Hosted two Electronics Recycling events with Atlanta Recycling Solutions and Keep Lowndes-Valdosta Beautiful (KLVB), saving over 30,000 pounds of electronic equipment (E-Waste) from disposal in the landfill. Since the first event that was held in March 2006, over 535,124 pounds--or 267.56 tons.--of electronics have been collected.
- Completed the Automotive Maintenance Center expansion. The Maintenance Center maintained an 899 vehicle/equipment inventory at 98% fleet readiness across all departments for the City of Valdosta.
- Initiated refurbishing project at Mathis Auditorium.
- Provided assistance with the several community service and neighborhood beautification programs, through the Right-of-Way Maintenance/Yard Trash division and a partnership with KLVB, such as:

Great America Clean-Up
Keep America Beautiful/Make a Difference Day Clean-Up
Rivers Alive
Southern Hospitality Work Camp
Bring One For the Chipper
Downtown Valdosta
Greater Valdosta Christmas Parade

The Public Works Department continues to participate in the Government 101 Orientation Program, Georgia Cities Week, and other public information opportunities, while also maintaining important information for customers on Metro Valdosta Channel 17 and the web page located at: www.valdostacity.com/recycle.





CORE VALUES AND BELIEFS

We respect the individual, and believe that individuals who are treated with respect and given responsibility respond by giving their best.

We require complete honesty and integrity in everything we do. We do the right thing.

We make commitments with care, and then live up to them. In all things, we do what we say we are going to do.

Work is an important part of life, and it should be fun and meaningful. Being a good employee does not mean stuffy and boring.

We love to compete and we believe that competition brings out the best in us.

We are frugal. We guard and conserve our resources with at least the same vigilance that we would use to guard and conserve our personal resources.

We insist on giving our best efforts in everything we undertake. Furthermore, we see a huge difference between "good mistakes" (best effort, bad result) and "bad mistakes" (sloppiness or lack of effort).

Clarity in understanding our mission, our goals, and what we expect from each other is critical to our success.

We are believers in the Golden Rule. In all our dealings, we will strive to be friendly and courteous, as well as fair and compassionate.

We feel a sense of urgency on all matters related to our customers. We own problems and we are always responsive. We are customer-driven.

Human Resources Department

The goal of the Human Resources Department is to focus on a comprehensive approach to managing the human capital and associated issues within the City of Valdosta. Our mission is to play a key role in the strategic utilization of employees, recruitment and selection, classification and pay, compensation and benefits, training and development, workers compensation administration, unemployment compensation administration, performance management, organizational development, safety and health, wellness, strategic and succession planning, and employee relations functions of the city.

It is our hope that the contributions and efforts of the department staff, in the above stated areas of expertise, will assist the city in attracting, motivating, and retaining an effective and highly qualified work force. It is our hope that our service continues to play a key role in aiding the city in replicating its exemplary level of customer service to which its employees and citizens have become accustomed.

In 2014, recruitment efforts lead to the receipt and review of approximately 7,875 employment applications which resulted in the on-boarding of 77 newly hired employees. In addition, staff participated in four career fairs to market employment opportunities with the City of Valdosta. The career fairs included the Department of Labor and Moody Air Force Base events that promoted the value of hiring veterans in today's workforce.

The Employee Relations Committee, comprised of representatives appointed from each city department, continued to recognize employees for milestones accomplished in their careers. The committee also recognized employees for performances beyond the normal responsibilities of their positions through the Employee of the Month program. Employees obtaining this status were honored

"Success in Human Resources requires a strategic vision. . . and boundless enthusiasm."
—Renassa Small, Human Resources Department Director

at the first Mayor and City Council meeting of each month with a certificate and a check for $200, and their names were engraved on a plaque that is displayed in City Hall.

In 2014, the Employee Relations Committee also coordinated the annual Employee Thanksgiving Luncheon—which was attended by 289 city employees—as well as two city Blood Drives, and assisted with the Annual Employee Appreciation Luncheon held during Georgia Cities Week Activities in April.

Serving as a primary health care center for a majority of city employees, retirees and their eligible dependents enrolled in the city's health insurance plan, the city's CareHere Clinic continued to flourish during the 2014 plan year. The total number of appointments for the year was 5,697, which is a 5% increase in patients. Utilization at the clinic rose to 96.6%.

In addition to its prevalent role in providing medical care, the CareHere Clinic further provided a variety of services such as lab work, prescription medications, influenza inoculations and physicals at no cost. The CareHere Connect program is an optional program made available to employees that allows a participant to collaborate with a personal healthcare coach who provides education, management and guidance with health related goals and issues such as healthy eating, diabetes, hypertension, exercise and other objectives.

As an event sponsor of the annual Employee Health Fair, held in October 2014 at Mathis Auditorium, CareHere Clinic provided free influenza inoculations at the event that was coordinated by the Human Resources staff. More than 34 vendors participated in this year's fair and approximately 250 employees attended. City retirees and dependents of current and retired employees also participated in the one-day event.

Mission
The mission of the Human Resources Department is to offer quality, efficient and courteous service to all customers.

Police Department

Nationally and Internationally-Accredited Law Enforcement

The Valdosta Police Department (VPD) consists of 149 sworn personnel, 24 non-sworn support personnel and 14 part-time employees 2014, and is comprised of four bureaus: the Bureau of Patrol Services, the Bureau of Investigative Services, the Bureau of Support Services and the Valdosta-Lowndes Regional Crime Laboratory. In 2014, the VPD responded to nearly 80,000 calls for service and continued its goal to provide the best law enforcement service to the citizens of Valdosta and to all who come to our city.

The VPD hosted a well-attended Public Meeting in March 2014, when a team of assessors from the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) were in Valdosta to examine all aspects of the VPD's policies and procedures, management practices, daily operations, and support services as part of a voluntary process to maintain international accreditation. As a result of the assessment, the VPD received re-accreditation under the new Gold Standard—it's the 5th reaccreditation through CALEA received for maintaining compliance with 491 law enforcement related standards for professionalism and service delivery in the field of law enforcement. The VPD was also honored with the "Accreditation with Excellence" and "Meritorious Distinction" awards because the department has been accredited for 15 years. For the last four onsite inspections, the VPD was named a "Flagship Agency" twice and received "Accreditation with Excellence" twice. Assessors called the VPD "one of the best agencies they have ever assessed."

In addition, the department is also assessed every three years by the State of Georgia Law Enforcement Certification Program through the Georgia Association of Chiefs of Police (GACP), which is a separate voluntary program similar to CALEA. In 2014, the VPD again received recertification through the State of Georgia. The department also began seeking Crime Laboratory Accreditation through the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors (ASCLD) and expects the Valdosta/Lowndes Regional Crime Laboratory to be assessed in early 2015. This accreditation would give the department and the crime lab the distinction of being the first crime laboratory ever operated by a local government in the State of Georgia to be accredited by ASCLD.

The FBI publishes national average clearance rates each year, and the VPD uses those rates as benchmarks to reach and exceed. For the sixth consecutive year, the VPD exceeded the national clearance rates for all major Part 1 Crimes (as defined by the FBI), which includes arson, murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, auto theft, robbery and larceny. The department recorded 3,100 overall Part 1 Crimes in 2014, which is a reduction from the 3,240 recorded incidents 2013. The greatest impact was in the area of burglaries, which decreased by 158 incident compared to 2013. The crime rate in Valdosta was actually lower in 2014 compared to 2000, even though the city has grown by over 25% since then. Even though Valdosta is the 14th largest city in the state, the city did not make the top 20 most dangerous cities in the State of Georgia in an article published in 2014.

Protecting our officers and citizens through the use of modern equipment is important. The VPD contracted with a company for the purchase of a new in-car camera system for the patrol bureau, which includes additional cameras installed in each patrol vehicle, body-worn cameras, and the ability to download wireless video with no officer intervention. The system is fully operational and provides valuable video evidence during court proceedings and assists the department with citizen complaints.

The department has also upgraded the existing Automatic Vehicle Locator (AVL) System which improved the refresh rate of the system from 30 seconds to 3 seconds. The upgrade allows 911 Dispatchers to dispatch officers to high-priority calls based on closest GPS location to those calls.

"The Valdosta Police Department strives to provide the community with the best law enforcement services in the country. Our number one goal is to prevent and solve crimes and ensure all citizens receive quality service." — Brian Childress, Valdosta Chief of Police

The VPD and Engineering Department worked together to contract a company to manage the city traffic camera system. All cameras were moved to a Federal Signal, which offers new features such as camera control and access via smart phones, alarm features, and tracking by location. Working with the South Georgia Regional Commission, the VPD has access to real-time crime analysis data such as automated charts, graphs, and modus operandi information, in an effort to help deter and predict crime. This project has been completed and is now fully operational.

Community policing is a concept embraced by the VPD. The department continued this program in 2014 to educate citizens and encourage community involvement in public safety issues. The department also continued its Police Advocacy Program, coordinating with approximately 18 citizens, discussing concerns in the community, sharing ideas on crime prevention and community policing, and providing citizens with a voice directly to the department to include a review of the department's enforcement practices. The department continues to meet quarterly with the NAACP and SCLC, discussing concerns of the minority community, sharing ideas on crime prevention and community policing, reviewing the department's enforcement practices and providing citizens with a voice directly to the department.

The department continued to work with new and established neighborhood watch programs, in an effort to build a police-citizen team to help reduce crime in Valdosta. Furthermore, the VPD teamed with community members and leaders to establish a Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD) program to help address and reduce crimes being committed by juveniles. The program initiated a gang awareness program for Valdosta High School (VHS) seniors and setup a mock fatality accident at VHS, prior to the prom, which brought awareness to alcohol-related teen deaths and reduced incidents of driving under the influence.VPD staff served citizens through numerous other community programs, such as Shop with a Cop, AMVETS Bike Giveaway, Guns and Hoses Blood Drive, Drug Education For Youth (DEFY), Community Partners in Education and Police Santa, to remain actively involved with its citizens.

In summary, the men and women of the VPD have demonstrated significant competence in 2014 by reducing crime, solving crime better than the rest of the country, working with the community, and striving for professional excellence.

Mission
The mission of the Valdosta Police Department is to maintain social order within prescribed ethical and constitutional limits while providing professional law enforcement services to the citizens and visitors of Valdosta.

Finance Department

Efficiency and Accountability

In 2014, the department continued its tradition of excellence in properly managing the city's funds, while providing the highest level of customer service to citizens.

The department was awarded the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting by the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada for the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report for Fiscal Year 2013. This is the 28th consecutive year that the city has received this award.

The department also received the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award for the fiscal year beginning June 30, 2013, for the 18th consecutive year. The award is the highest form of recognition in governmental budgeting. In order to earn this award, a government must publish a budget document which meets program criteria as a policy document, financial plan, operations guide and as a communications device.

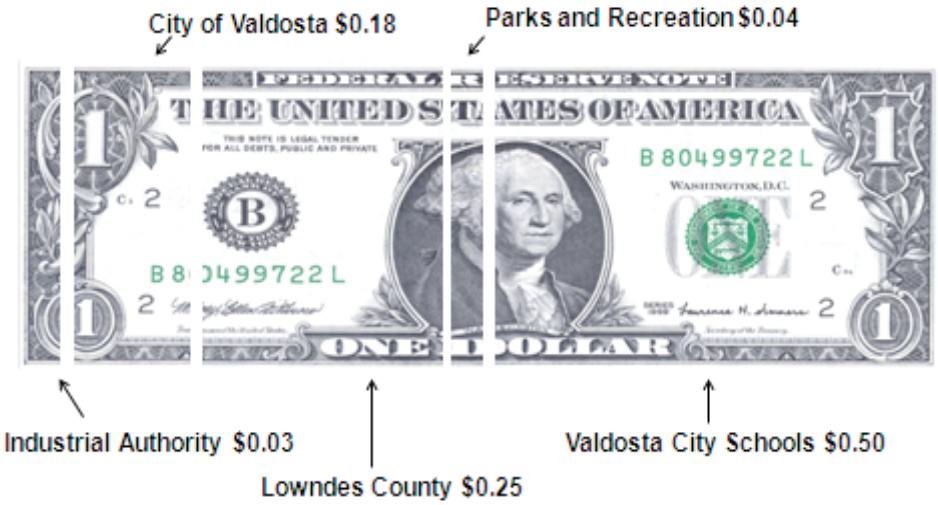
Each year, Georgia requires an annual audit of the books of accounts, financial records, and transactions of all administrative departments of the city by independent certified public accountants selected by the Mayor and City Council. The Finance Department is pleased to report that it has once again successfully completed a financial audit for the fiscal year without outstanding remarks. Furthermore, the city has no general fund debt, a remarkable accomplishment achieved by sound financial management.

"In an increasingly uncertain economy, the City of Valdosta has searched for innovative ways to meet the needs of citizens with the financial resources available to it. This commitment to quality and fiscal conservatism has left the city with a sound financial outlook."

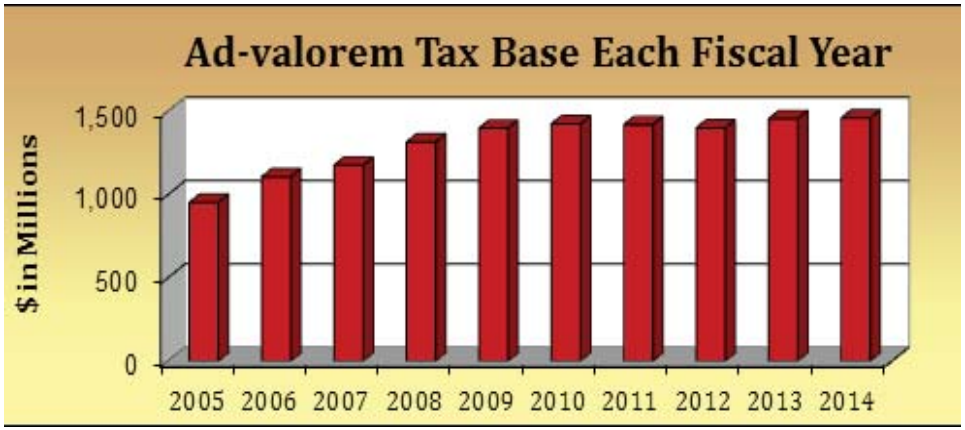
— Mark Barber, Finance Department Director & Deputy City Manager for Administration

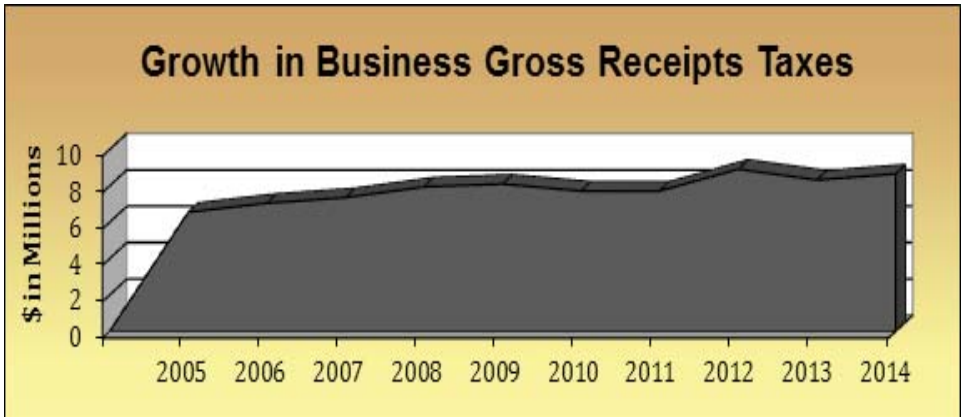
Where Does Each City of Valdosta Resident's Property Tax Dollar Go?

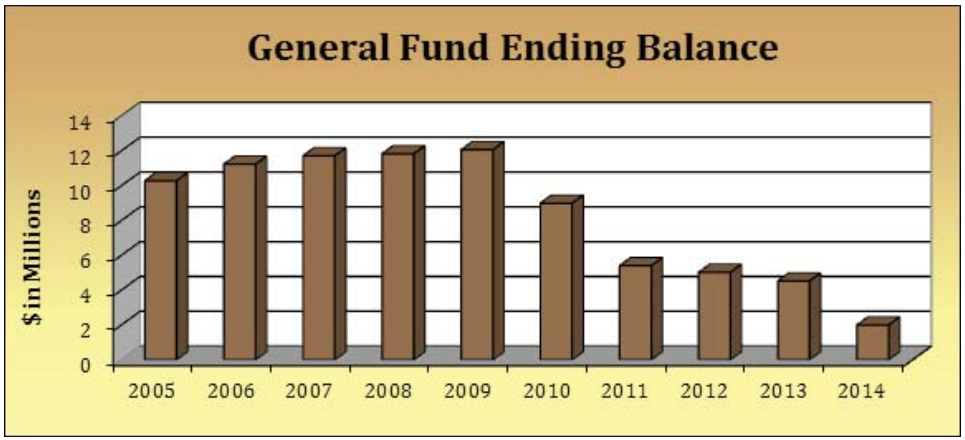
Property taxes make up 7.1% of the funding necessary to operate the city. Although the city's FY 2014 budget was approximately $77.4 million, approximately $5.6 million of this was generated from property taxes. The largest sources of revenue in the city are sales taxes, water and sewer fees, sanitation fees, franchise fees and property taxes.



Mission
The mission of the Finance Department is to provide financial reporting and excellent customer service for all internal and external customers, while developing innovative and cost-effective ways of financing city services and facilities.







Optimistic Financial Outlook

The financial condition and long term outlook for the city are better than most local governments. The sustained growth of three primary economic indicators supports this view. The adjacent graphs evaluate the growth trends of these three factors:

Ad-Valorem Tax Base – Property values represent growth in construction and development.

Business Gross Receipts Taxes – These taxes are based on business gross receipts. As the receipts from the taxes increase, it reflects the health of Valdosta's economy.

General Fund Ending Balance – The General Fund ending balance reflects the city's ability to meet ever-increasing demands for general services while remaining financially sound and fiscally responsible by providing a buffer for short-term fluctuations in the economy.

The City of Valdosta has survived the lingering economic conditions significantly better than surrounding communities, the State of Georgia and the nation as a whole. The city has been able to maintain its workforce as well as provide longevity increases to employees, while other communities have implemented wage freezes, employment reductions and reductions in services for citizens.

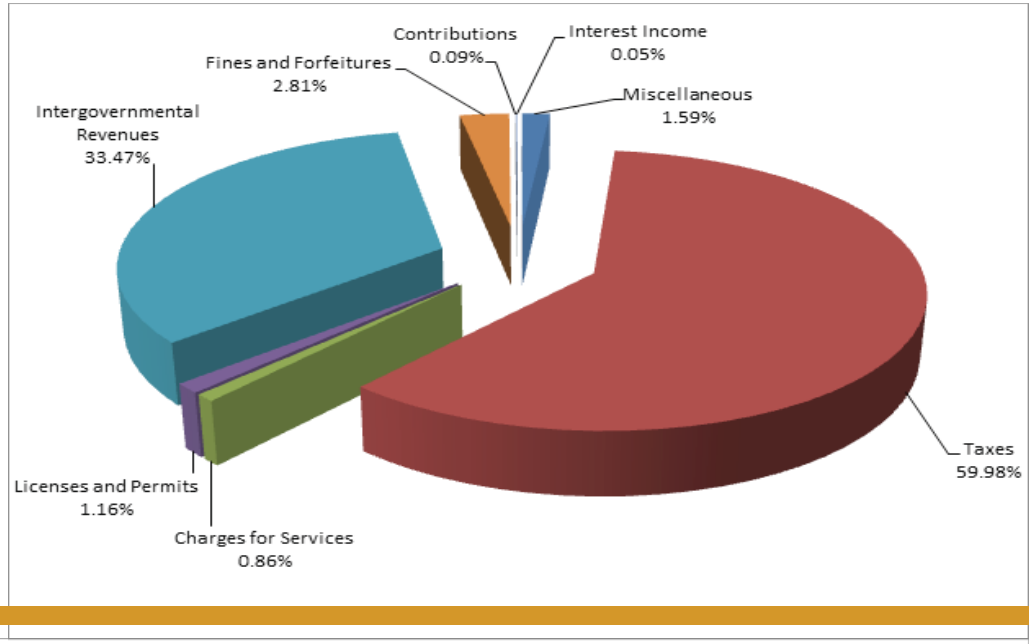
While the city has certainly been affected by the economy, conservative budgetary policies and adherence to sound financial policies and philosophies have provided a hedge against anemic property tax revenues, increased fuel and energy costs and surging healthcare costs.

Note: The graphs and charts on these pages reflect the FY 2014 budget.

General Government Revenues

The majority of General Government Revenues is generated by the collection of sales tax. The amount of this tax collected represents a Local Option Sales Tax (LOST) that funds General Fund operations and a Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) that funds various capital projects for the city. Citizens voted in the November 2013 election to continue the one-cent SPLOST revenue source, which is expected to bring in an estimated $80 million to fund city infrastructure projects over the next six years.

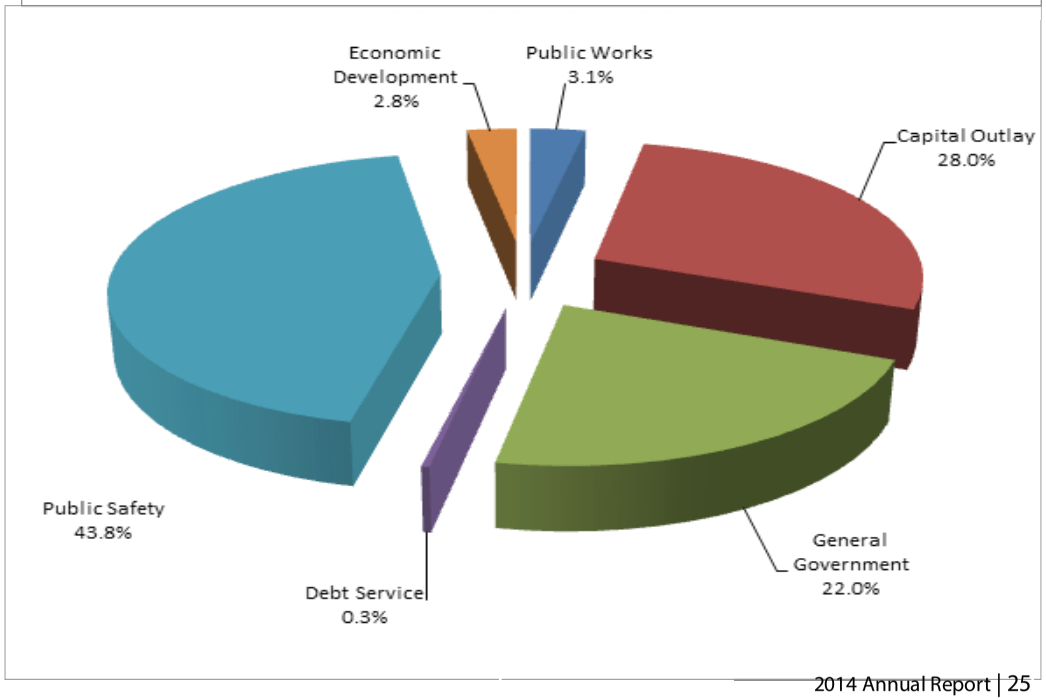
These revenue sources tend to be relatively stable; however, projections of revenue for the upcoming year are extremely conservative. The general outlook for Valdosta has improved steadily over the past 10 years and it is anticipated that growth in real estate, industry, and agricultural development will continue to rebound as Valdosta emerges from the negative effects of the economy.



General Government Expenditures

The General Government Expenditures group is broken down into the following five areas:

Capital Outlay	Costs associated with new infrastructure
Debt Service	Repayment of interest and principal on a debt
Economic Development	Costs associated with the administration of building rehabilitation, ordinance enforcement, grants and public information
General Government	Costs associated with the administration, legislative and financial aspects of city business
Public Safety	Police and fire protection
Public Works	Costs associated with street and road maintenance



Neighborhood Development Division

In 2014, the Neighborhood Development Division--which includes the Valdosta Small Emerging Business (VSEB) Program and the Valdosta/Lowndes County Land Bank--continued to promote reinvestment in the city's neighborhoods. Throughout the year, the division addressed fair housing and neighborhood conditions and economic development in the city through the owner-occupied home reconstruction and rehabilitation projects, small business information workshops and seminars, and the fair housing promotion and awareness programs.

The division completed six reconstruction/rehabilitation projects in 2014, utilizing Community Development Block Grant funding. Through the 2014 Southern Hospitality Workcamp, 125 youth from around the country spent their summer vacations repairing 12 homes for the citizens of Valdosta. This year was the 9th year the city has hosted this event, resulting in a total of 287 homes repairs made at no cost to the elderly or disabled homeowners.

The Fair Housing Committee continued to meet throughout 2014 to seek options to address the impediments to fair housing identified in our 2012 Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Report. In the past year, the committee has completed a survey of neighborhood and housing conditions. In 2015, staff will utilize this information to facilitate a series of citizen focus groups to address the identified issues.

Staff has made changes to the VSEB program to implement it into the economic development plan for the Designated Revitalization Areas. In partnership with the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), the division also sponsored its first well-attended Small Business Resource Fair and presented workshops on the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA).

Municipal Court for the City of Valdosta

The State of Georgia has over 400 municipal courts with the City of Valdosta Municipal Court being one of the largest. Cases handled by the Municipal Court and heard by Judge Vernita Lee Bender include: misdemeanor traffic violations and misdemeanor criminal cases, including possession of less than one ounce of marijuana, shoplifting and city ordinance violations.

The City of Valdosta Municipal Court is housed in the former Fire Station No. 1, located at 100 S. Oak Street, and is the first dedicated court building owned by the City of Valdosta. The Municipal Court houses a large renovated court room, as well as the offices for the Municipal Court Judge, Court Administrator, Clerk of Court and staff.

Payments for traffic citations that do not require mandatory court appearances may be made at the Valdosta Police Department, located at 500 N. Toombs Street. Information regarding the payment process for citations and further contact information may be found on the back of any citation. Arraignment dates to appear in Municipal Court may also be found on the front of the citation near the bottom for individuals who wish to contest a traffic citation.

General operating hours of the Municipal Court are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., and court sessions convene at 9 a.m. each day, Monday through Friday.

In addition to a full court schedule, the Municipal Court staff remains involved with the youth in our community through mock trials, the Drug Education for Youth (DEFY) program, the Lowndes Youth Leadership League, Georgia Special Olympics, Georgia Cities Week Job Shadow Day, Valdosta High School Students Mentorship in Leadership Education (SMILE), local school career days, and a variety of other special events that provide positive role models and encouragement for our next generation of leaders.

Quick Facts

- The City of Valdosta Municipal Court is a full-time court. Court is held an average of four days a week.
- In the State of Georgia, there are over 400 municipal courts with more than 400 judges managing over 800,000 cases per year. Valdosta's Municipal Court is one of the largest.
- Over 11,230 cases were docketed in the court this year.
- Probationers completed approximately 51,830 community service hours at: Habitat for Humanity, recreational facilities, cemeteries, Valdosta School System custodial services, Lowndes County Animal Shelter, and Grassy Pond.
- Probationers donated approximately 4,838 pounds of food to the local food bank.
- Sentinel Offender Services supervised approximately 13,587 cases (active, jail and tolled) for the court.
- The Municipal Court had approximately 93 Work Alternative Program (WAP) participants. Since the WAP implementation in June 2001, approximately 110,784 work hours have been completed on various municipal projects, saving the city $650,943 in jail housing fees.

Accolades

▶Named "Smart Energy Municipality of the Year" by the Technology Association of Georgia (TAG), which recognizes successful individuals, businesses and municipalities who have shown dynamic leadership over the past year in Georgia's large and growing Smart Energy sector. Sixty nominations were received collectively in the three categories. In the municipality category, which includes cities, counties and state government agencies, the City of Valdosta was one of two finalists and the overall recipient of the award— the other finalist was the Georgia Department of Corrections.

▶Ranked 135 by Forbes Magazine as one of the nation's "Best Small Places for Business and Careers." To gauge the best places for business in the U.S., the report rates the 200 largest metro areas on a dozen factors related to jobs, costs (business and living), income growth, quality of life and education of the labor force. Forbes uses data from economic research firm Moody's Analytics, the U.S. Census, and demographer Bert Sperling, who runs Sperling's BestPlaces.

▶Became the first stop of the 2014 Georgia Cities Foundation "Heart & Soul of Georgia" Bus Tour, which brought approximately 50 state and community-building professionals downtown on May 14 to showcase the best practices in downtown development. Sponsored by the Georgia Municipal Association and the Georgia Cities Foundation, the tour educates local government leaders and downtown developers on the importance of successful downtown development and its role economic development. This is the third time Valdosta has been a stop on the bus tour, since the foundation began the tours in 2001.

▶Hosted the 5th annual Valdosta Government 101 Citizens Orientation to provide citizens a closer look at their local government. The city modified the program to include up to five high school seniors who have a parent or legal guardian also enrolled in the program. Twenty-one citizens graduated from the Valdosta Government 101 Citizen Orientation on May 12, including one high school student.

▶Received distinguished service awards (presented to City Manager Larry Hanson and City Planner Matt Martin) from the Valdosta Board of Directors for Easter Seals Southern Georgia for their leadership roles in supporting individuals with disabilities. The City of Valdosta was recognized for its spirit of hospitality and engagement--not only in its support of Easter Seals programs but all programs impacting the quality of life for its citizens with special needs.

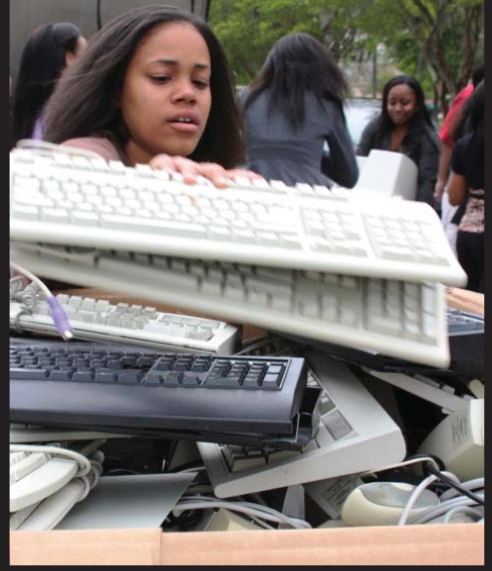
▶Selected as one of five cities in the state to be named a Georgia Exceptional Main Street (GEMS) program by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (GDCA). The program will provide the advanced technical assistance for further downtown development. The other four GEMS selected by the GDCA are Rome, Greensboro, Toccoa and Bainbridge.

▶Hosted 116 youth and adult volunteers from around the country in July 2014 for the Southern Hospitality Workcamp to perform basic home repairs, painting and minor construction on a dozen homes, at no cost to local elderly or disabled homeowners. The event--in its 9th year-- is credited with repairing 282 local homes with deficiencies and yielding a nearly $2 million economic investment in our community through capital improvements to housing stock, the value of volunteer housing, their spending in our community and the value of their labor.

▶Named a Tree City U.S.A. for the 28th consecutive year for the city's commitment to community forestry, the maintenance of trees around our beautiful community, and for accomplishing the four standards of the Arbor Day Foundation and the National Association of State Foresters: designate a Tree Commission, pass a tree care ordinance, establish a comprehensive community forestry program and proclaim and host an Arbor Day celebration.

▶Received a $19,490 GATEway Grant from the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) as part of $1.9 million that was awarded to entities across the state for community landscaping projects on state routes. Eighty-three applications for worthy projects were submitted for this round of grants, and Valdosta was one of 43 communities awarded. In addition, Valdosta was one of only two communities who received the grant in GDOT District 4, which is made up of 36 counties. The funding will allow Valdosta to build the first of 10 gateway projects.

▶The city hosted the Great Promise Partnership (GPP) Work for the Future event, in October 2014, hosted by Mike Beatty, Former Georgia Department of Community Affairs Director and current president and CEO of the GPP. The city is a partner in the program, alongside the Valdosta-Lowndes County Development Authority, Valdosta City Schools, Valdosta State University, Wiregrass Georgia Technical College, and others who understand the importance of providing our youth with practical employment and other fundamentals of success.



▶The city's Public Works Department/Recycling Division was nominated for a 2014 Chamber Choice Award, recognizing their superior customer care and service to the community. It was an honor for the department to be nominated and recognized publicly for the employees' dedication and the services they provide to citizens year around.

▶Hosted nearly 100 city officials from across the state for the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing ("GICH") conference, held at the Rainwater Conference Center in September. GICH offers communities a three-year program of collaboration and technical assistance related to housing and community development to help communities create and launch a locally based plan to meet their housing needs. Valdosta officials presented its best practices at the conference for the attendees to possibly implement in their own communities.

▶Awarded the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting for the 28th consecutive year by the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada for the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report and the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award for the 18th consecutive year--the highest form of recognition in governmental budgeting.

▶Exceeded the national clearance rates, for the sixth consecutive year, for all major Part 1 Crimes as defined by the FBI—which includes arson, murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, auto theft, robbery and larceny. The VPD recorded 3,100 overall Part 1 Crimes in 2014, which is a reduction from the 3,240 recorded incidents 2013. The crime rate in Valdosta was actually lower in 2014 compared to 2000, even though the city has grown by over 25% since then.

▶Received reaccreditation under the new Gold Standard from the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) for the VPD's outstanding policies and procedures, management, daily operations and support services,. This year marks the 5th reaccreditation through CALEA received for maintaining compliance with 482 law enforcement related standards for professionalism and service delivery. The VPD was also honored with the "Accreditation with Excellence" and "Meritorious Distinction" awards for being accredited for 15 years. The department was also assessed by the State of Georgia Law Enforcement Certification through the Georgia Association of Chiefs of Police (GACP), which is a separate but similar program to CALEA. In 2014, the VPD again received notice of a favorable recommendation for recertification.

▶Maintained the Insurance Services Office (ISO) Class 2 rating for the Valdosta Fire Department, one of the highest ISO ratings in the state.

▶Hosted two Electronic Recycling Events this year, in partnership with Keep Lowndes/Valdosta Beautiful (KLVB) and Atlanta Recycling Solutions that helped citizens properly dispose of nearly 30,000 pounds of electronic waste. Since the program's inception in 2006, over 482,000 pounds of electronics have been kept out of the landfill.

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