

**MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL
5:30 P.M., THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2015
COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY HALL**

OPENING CEREMONIES

Mayor John Gayle called the regular meeting of the Valdosta City Council to order at 5:30 p.m. Council members present were: Joseph “Sonny” Vickers, Tim Carroll, Ben Norton, Alvin Payton, Jr., Sandra Tooley, and James Wright. Councilman Robert Yost was absent. The invocation was given by Layman Larry Sayre, Azalea City Church of God, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag led by Boy Scout Troop 415 of Park Avenue United Methodist Church.

AWARDS AND PRESENTATIONS

EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH AWARD

Consideration of the November, 2015 Employee of the Month Award (Detective Kari Bennett, Police Department).

Police Chief Brian Childress stated that Kari Bennett began her employment with the City of Valdosta Police Department in January, 2013 as a Patrol Officer and was promoted in September, 2014 to Detective which is the position she currently holds. Detective Bennett’s day-to-day responsibilities are to investigate property crimes such as theft, damage to property, forgery, and credit card fraud. She continues to hold a first responder title which she received as a Patrol Officer and on a regular basis Det. Bennett responds to calls for service to assist Patrol Officers. On an average basis, the Detectives in the Property Crimes Unit are assigned more cases than those in other units of the Bureau. During August of this year, Det. Bennett received information that a group of four individuals were going to different businesses in Valdosta passing counterfeit checks. This occurred during the weekend when Det. Bennett is not scheduled to work; however, she quickly reported to work to locate the individuals. Det. Bennett traveled around the City and found the vehicle that the subjects were reportedly traveling in, stopped the vehicle, and recovered several counterfeit checks. Through investigation, it was determined that the individuals had planned on cashing more of the checks in Valdosta and then they were going to travel into Florida to cash more. All four of the offenders in this case were arrested and with Det. Bennett’s extra effort, the ring of counterfeit check offenders was stopped before they could victimize more businesses. Detective Kari Bennett is an asset to the Investigations Bureau and the Valdosta Police Department. She is always taking the extra step in her investigations to ensure that victims receive the proper closure that they deserve. For these reasons and many others, the Employee Relations Committee nominated Kari Bennett as Employee of the Month.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the October 22, 2015 Regular Meeting were approved by unanimous consent (6-0) of the Council.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

ORDINANCE NO. 2015-27, AN ORDINANCE FOR A CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT (CUP) FOR AN EVENT CENTER IN A DOWNTOWN-COMMERCIAL (C-D) ZONING DISTRICT

Consideration of an Ordinance for a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) for an Event Center in a Downtown-Commercial (C-D) Zoning District as requested by Albert Slone (File No. CU-2015-04). The property is located at 101-105 North Patterson Street. The Greater Lowndes Planning Commission reviewed this request at their October Regular Meeting and recommended approval with four conditions (6-0-1 Vote).

Matt Martin, Planning & Zoning Administrator, stated that Mr. Albert Slone (Downtown Dosta Development LLC) is requesting a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) for an Event Center in a Downtown-Commercial (C-D) Zoning District. The property consists of 0.21 acres located at 101-105 North Patterson Street, which is at the northeast corner of North Patterson Street and East Hill Avenue. The property contains a three-story building (23,400 square feet total) which is currently vacant. This building was previously the “City Market” building

which was used as a mixed-use retail center on the 1st floor with rentable special event space on the 2nd floor. Because of the length of vacancy, the event center usage has lost its grandfathered status. The applicant is proposing to re-open the event center and to expand it to a larger facility than before with events to be held on both the 1st and 2nd floors (18,000 square feet total floor area). The applicant is proposing to operate the event center primarily during the weekends and weekday evenings while many of the Downtown businesses and offices are closed, and to utilize valet parking to better-accommodate large events. The applicant is proposing a catering kitchen as part of the facility, and any alcoholic beverages being served on the premises will only be from a licensed alcoholic beverage caterer for individually approved events. The property is located within a Downtown Activity Center (DAC) Character Area on the Future Development Map of the Comprehensive Plan. It is also located within the local Historic District and the Downtown Commercial National Register District, as well as the Central Valdosta Development Authority (CVDA) District. This is a historic building in the core area of the Downtown that was originally the S&H Kress building and used as a Department Store. The first 2 floors are 9,000 square feet each while the 3rd floor is only 5,400 square feet. The first floor has several doors to the outside sidewalk and rear alley areas. The upper floors are accessed by two stairwells and a large (freight) elevator. The applicant is proposing to renovate the 1st and 2nd floors for use as the Event Center with the possibility of other uses permitted in C-D Zoning for a potentially mixed-use building. There are currently no plans for renovation of the 3rd floor, but uses of this floor in the future might be offices or overnight lodging. Renovations for this building will still need to go through the permitting review process. The building is large and sturdy and has the potential to hold large numbers of people. Due to relatively limited access, the 2nd floor's maximum occupancy is believed to be about 350 persons with a higher occupancy being allocated to the 1st floor. The only foreseeable impacts on adjacent properties would be from possible excessive noise at night, but this will be alleviated by compliance with the City's Noise Ordinance and properly limiting the hours of operation. The only other concerns for a large event would be lack of parking, but this will be alleviated by the applicant's use of valet parking. With the right conditions of approval, the proposed use would be a very strong asset to the mixed-use environment of the commercial Downtown, and should be deemed compatible and appropriate for this location. Staff found the request consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the Conditional Use Review Criteria, and recommended approval with the following conditions: (1) Conditional Use approval shall be granted for an Event Center in C-D Zoning on the 1st and 2nd floors only. Other uses permitted in C-D Zoning will still be allowed for a potentially mixed-use building. (2) The property shall be excluded from its own alcoholic beverage consumption license. There shall be no brownbagging on the premises, and any alcoholic beverages served at events shall be from a licensed Alcoholic Beverages Caterer. (3) All events shall conclude by no later than 1:00 a.m. Daytime events beginning before 5:00 p.m. Monday-Friday (excluding State holidays) shall be limited to a maximum building occupancy of 350 persons, and such events which are greater than 200 persons shall have valet parking available. Events during weekday evenings (after 5:00 p.m.), holidays, and weekends, shall be limited by approved maximum building occupancy as determined by the Fire Marshal, and such events that are greater than 400 persons shall have valet parking available. Valet parking drop-off and pick-up shall utilize Central Alley and the on-street parking spaces along East Hill Avenue immediately adjacent to the subject property, and permission is hereby granted by City Council for using such public right-of-way space for this purpose. (4) Conditional Use approval shall expire after five years from the date of approval if no business license for the Event Center is requested and approved by that time. The Planning Commission reviewed this at their October 26, 2015 meeting, found it consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the Conditional Use Review Criteria, and recommended approval subject to the following conditions (6-0-1 vote): (1) Conditional Use approval shall be granted for an Event Center in C-D zoning on the 1st and 2nd floors only. Other uses permitted in C-D Zoning will still be allowed for a potentially mixed-use building. (2) The property shall be excluded from its own alcoholic beverage consumption license. There shall be no brownbagging on the premises, and any alcoholic beverages served at events shall be from a licensed Alcoholic Beverages Caterer. (3) All events shall conclude by no later than 1:00 a.m. Daytime events beginning before 5:00 p.m. Monday-Friday (excluding State holidays) shall be limited to a maximum building occupancy of 350 persons, and such events which are greater than 200 persons shall have valet parking available. Events during weekday evenings (after 5:00 p.m.), holidays, and weekends, shall be limited by approved maximum building occupancy as determined by the Fire Marshal. (4) Conditional Use approval shall expire after five years from the date of approval if no business license for the Event Center is requested and approved by that time.

Renee Parker spoke in favor of the request. Ms. Parker stated that she is a long-time citizen of Valdosta and has thought about uses for the Downtown area. As long as that building has been sitting there vacant, they have all wondered what could be done with such a huge building. Her partner, Greg Moore, came to her with an idea and they took a long, hard look at bringing an event space Downtown. They had questions about how the

parking would be handled and bringing in a large number of people into the Downtown area. The Patterson will open up a new event space in Downtown Valdosta and will be privately run. This will reach a niche that Valdosta currently does not have. We could bring in groups of up to 350 people to hold three and four-day conferences. There is an economic wing to this that we need to take advantage of. SAFT and John Deere hold events but they do not do it here. There are many business events that we are losing to other event spaces in the region. When we bring in those people to the Downtown area they will also frequent the shops of the merchants. There will be a lot of people carpooling but they will also have valet parking as well as some other parking options. Ms. Parker asked for Council's consideration in approving the request.

Greg Moore, 507 Georgia Avenue, spoke in favor of the request. They have taken a long look at this project and want to call it The Patterson. The Kress Building is one of over 200 Kress stores on the National Historic Register. As they were starting this endeavor, Ellen Hill, Main Street Manager, stated that they needed to look at a Kress Building that was turned into an event space in LaGrange, Georgia. Ms. Parker toured the building and they spoke with their Manager. It has been open for four years and is doing very well. They have approximately 200 events a year and 40-50 of those are during the week. The rest of the events are on the weekends and that is what they will be targeting in Valdosta. They will be using the event space for corporate events, private parties such as family reunions, birthday parties, and civic organizations. There is also a large wedding niche that we are losing here in Valdosta and Lowndes County. There are event spaces in Tifton, Moultrie, and Thomasville that people are utilizing for weddings. Lowndes County does have a couple of spaces for weddings but they are booked up over a year out and have a waiting list. There is a demand for it and they will be providing a different type of scene with the Kress Building. They will have hardwood floors and columns as well as nice lighting. They also spoke with several wedding dress shop owners and planners in Valdosta and they are very excited about the business. They have three caterers in the Downtown area who are also excited to have somewhere to recommend and to provide their services. This will be great compliment to the Downtown area.

No one spoke in opposition to the request.

A MOTION by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Norton, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to enact Ordinance No. 2015-27, an Ordinance for a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) for an Event Center in a Downtown-Commercial (C-D) Zoning District as requested by Albert Slone with the four conditions recommended by Staff, the complete text of which will be found in Ordinance Book XIII.

ORDINANCE NO. 2015-28, AN ORDINANCE TO ADOPT THE 2016 TAX MILLAGE RATE FOR THE CITY OF VALDOSTA

Consideration of an Ordinance to adopt the 2016 Tax Millage Rate for the City of Valdosta

Mark Barber, Assistant City Manager, stated that the millage rate for the City Valdosta had not been increased from 1992 until 2014, and in the majority of those years experienced reductions in the millage. The millage rate is currently 6.102, which is less than what the millage rate was in 1995. In order for the City of Valdosta to maintain the current millage rate of 6.102, Staff advertised a property tax increase, and Council conducted three public hearings giving citizens the opportunity to speak. The first public hearing was held on October 29, 2015 at 6:00 p.m., and the second and third public hearings were held on November 5, 2015 at 12:00 noon and 5:00 p.m., respectively. All public hearings were conducted at Valdosta City Hall Council Chambers. Real and personal property experienced an increase of 11.54% from last year. Reassessment growth accounted for 81.22% of the change. Motor vehicle values declined by \$32,992,960 or 35.83%. The decline in motor vehicles is the result of prior legislation whereby new vehicles are taxed on their fair market value at time of purchase instead on an annual depreciated basis. Exemptions available to taxpayers increased by 10.97%, resulting in an accumulated increase of 3.80% to the net digest. Maintaining a 6.102 millage rate will represent an estimated \$307,176 favorable variance for the Ad Valorem line item of the fiscal year 2016 budget, and the assumption that we collect 100% of the estimated tax levy. In the fiscal year 2016 budget, Ad Valorem taxes are budgeted at \$8,420,000, which represents approximately 30% of total tax category for General Fund revenue, and approximately 25% of total General Fund revenue. By reducing the mill to the reassessment rollback rate of 5.749, an unfavorable variance of \$226,578 in the Ad Valorem line item will be created. Based upon the net digest of \$1,512,049,439, the monetary difference in the current millage rate of 6.102 and the reassessment rollback rate of 5.749 is approximately \$533,753. The 6.102 millage rate will generate approximately \$9,226,928, which is a \$338,236 or 3.81% increase from the tax generated last year. The 5.749 millage rate will generate approximately \$8,692,772, which is a \$195,764 or 2.20% decrease from the tax generated last year. At 6.102 mills, a \$150,000

valued parcel will pay the City of Valdosta \$330 in ad valorem tax, while at a rate of 5.749, the same valued property would pay \$310. For those that did not experience reassessment growth would not see a change from last year if the 6.102 rate is adopted. According to the Tax Assessors Office, of the 17,567 residential parcels located in Valdosta, only 3,695 (21%) received a reassessment increase. The majority of reassessment growth was in the commercial area. Mark Barber, Assistant City Manager, recommended that Council adopt the Valdosta City School Board millage rate of 16.98 mills, the City's current millage rate of 6.102, and 5 mills for operation of the Central Valdosta Development Authority (CVDA).

A MOTION was made by Councilman Payton to adopt the 2016 Tax Millage Rate which includes the Valdosta City School Board millage rate of 16.98 mills, the City's current millage rate of 6.102, and 5 mills for operation of the Central Valdosta Development Authority (CVDA). Councilman Vickers seconded the motion. The motion was adopted (4-2) with Councilman Norton and Councilman Carroll voting in opposition to enact Ordinance No. 2015-28, the complete text of which will be found in Ordinance Book XIII.

BOARDS, COMMISSIONS, AUTHORITIES, AND ADVISORY COMMITTEES

Consideration of appointments to the Central Valdosta Development Authority/Downtown Development Authority.

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that the Central Valdosta Development Authority/Downtown Development Authority has three members, Michael Cooper (Owner, ASA Engineering & Surveying, Inc.), Rhett Holmes (Owner, IDP Housing), and Mikki Hudson (Restaurant Owner, Jessie's Eats and Treats), whose terms will expire on December 31, 2015. All three members have expressed an interest in being reappointed and they were the only applicants to apply. These appointments were advertised according to the Boards, Commissions, Authorities, and Advisory Committees Policy that was adopted by Mayor and Council.

A MOTION by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Wright, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve the reappointments of Michael Cooper (Owner, ASA Engineering & Surveying, Inc.), Rhett Holmes (Owner, IDP Housing), and Mikki Hudson (Restaurant Owner, Jessie's Eats and Treats) to the Central Valdosta Development Authority/Downtown Development Authority for a term of two years.

Consideration of an appointment to the Valdosta Housing Authority.

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that the Valdosta Housing Authority has a member, Judy Hinton, whose term will expire on December 31, 2015. Ms. Hinton has expressed an interest in being reappointed. This appointment was advertised according to the Boards, Commissions, Authorities, and Advisory Committees Policy that was adopted by Mayor and Council. The only applicant applying for the position was Ms. Hinton. Mayor John Gayle reappointed Judy Hinton to the Valdosta Housing Authority for a term of five years.

Consideration of an appointment to the Valdosta Tree Commission.

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that the Valdosta Tree Commission had a member, Kevin Conrad, who resigned in July, 2015 due to personal reasons. Mr. Conrad's term will expire on September 6, 2018. This appointment was advertised according to the Boards, Commissions, Authorities, and Advisory Committees Policy that was adopted by Mayor and Council. The only applicant applying for the position was Stacey Griffin, self employed as a Horticulturalist/Arborist.

Mayor Gayle entertained a motion to appoint Stacey Griffin. The motion was unanimous (6-0) to appoint Stacey Griffin to fill the unexpired term of Kevin Conrad on the Valdosta Tree Commission.

Consideration of an appointment to the Valdosta-Lowndes Co. Construction Board of Adjustments and Appeals.

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that the Valdosta-Lowndes County Construction Board of Adjustments and Appeals has a member, Ronald Cowart, whose term expired on June 30, 2015. Mr. Cowart did not express an interest in being reappointed. This appointment is for the Electrician's slot and was advertised according to the

Boards, Commissions, Authorities, and Advisory Committees Policy that was adopted by Mayor and Council. The only applicant applying for the position was Keith Scarborough, Vice President/Manager with Cowart Electric & Industrial Contractors, Inc.

Mayor Gayle entertained a motion to appoint Keith Scarborough. The motion was unanimous (6-0) to appoint Keith Scarborough to Valdosta-Lowndes Co. Construction Board of Adjustments and Appeals for a term of three years.

Consideration of an appointment to the Valdosta-Lowndes County Development Authority.

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that the Valdosta-Lowndes County Development Authority has a member, Tom Call, whose term will expire on January 1, 2016. Mr. Call is the current Chairman of the Development Authority and he has expressed an interest in being reappointed. This appointment was advertised according to the Boards, Commissions, Authorities, and Advisory Committees Policy that was adopted by Mayor and Council. The only applicant applying for the position was Mr. Call.

Mayor Gayle entertained a motion to reappoint Tom Call. The motion was unanimous (6-0) to reappoint Tom Call to Valdosta-Lowndes County Development Authority for a term of five years.

CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that we have had two recent CDBG Ribbon Cutting events and four CDBG projects completed in our efforts to continue to improve housing in the City.

There will be an unveiling of two additional pieces of public art in the Downtown area on Friday, November 6, 2015 at 5:00 p.m. They will start on the Patterson Street side of Benny's alley and then move over to Ashley Street.

Moody Air Force Base will be holding an Air Show and Open House this weekend which will include the Thunderbirds on Saturday and Sunday.

The Fire Department is starting a new Explorer Program to encourage young people to become more involved and learn about careers in fire and emergency services. There will be a meeting on Monday, November 9, 2015 at 6:00 p.m. at Fire Station #1.

The City of Remerton recently received their ISO rating and they had a significant reduction which is very good for the residents and businesses of that community. Their ISO rating went down from six to three. The Remerton City Manager sent a very kind E-mail thanking the City of Valdosta for the fire truck that we donated several years ago. Getting their ISO rating cut in half would not have been possible had the City of Valdosta not given them the second pumper. They had a total of 70.55 points and 70 is the threshold for a rating of three. They received nearly four points alone for having the engine the City of Valdosta gave them. This will give the businesses and homeowners of Remerton a well needed break on their insurance. This makes a statement as to how the City of Valdosta works together with other governments. Larry Hanson thanked the Remerton City Manager because Remerton assisted us on obtaining an easement for the Force Main Project. This shows that governments can work together and meet the needs of the community and serve the citizens.

Trash Amnesty Day was a great success. There were four drop off locations and the City collected 10.41 tons of garbage at no cost to the citizens of Valdosta. That is 20,820 lbs of garbage removed from the City and properly disposed of.

The Engineering Department applied for the Georgia Relief Grant, which is being named Project Pay It Forward, and they will be planting trees to benefit the military veterans on Saturday, November 7, 2015 from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. at the American Legion Post 13 located at 1301 Williams Street. Council is encouraged to attend.

The Fire Department had the Citizens Fire Academy Graduation this week. Twenty citizens went through the Program and they had a very positive learning experience. Likewise, the Citizens Police Academy has two weeks left and they will be traveling to the Regional Police Academy tomorrow afternoon to participate in the firearms simulator so they can see first-hand how difficult it is and the split second decisions that an Officer has to make in the field about using a service revolver. These are both great Programs and they give our citizens an opportunity to participate and learn more about local government.

Things are progressing on the Force Main Project and the new Wastewater Treatment Plant Project. They are 5 months ahead of schedule on the Force Main Project and 16 months ahead of schedule on the new Wastewater Treatment Plant. They are now getting ready to submit to the Environmental Protection Division (EPD) to begin the testing of the Plant. In late January as the Force Main Project is being concluded, they will begin the wet testing of the Plant and the structure. In early February, they will begin the biological process testing and then three weeks later they will start the biosolids process and testing. Once those are completed they will start the 30-day period where Parsons will actually be operating the Plant and testing it before it is turned over to the City.

The new City Beat is out with a lot of good information about things going in the City.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilman Wright inquired as to whether the participants in the Police simulator get to shoot live rounds. Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that they do not shoot live rounds.

CITIZENS TO BE HEARD

There were no citizens to be heard.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Gayle entertained a motion to adjourn the regular Council meeting and enter into Executive Session for the purpose of discussing real estate.

A MOTION by Councilman Vickers, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to adjourn the November 5, 2015 meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:02 p.m. and enter into Executive Session for the purpose of discussing real estate.

Mayor Gayle reconvened the regular City Council meeting at 6:17 p.m. and stated that there was discussion of real estate in the Executive Session and no action was taken.

Mayor Gayle entertained a motion for adjournment.

A MOTION by Councilman Vickers, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to adjourn the November 5, 2015 Meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:17 p.m. to meet again in Regular Session on Thursday, November 19, 2015.

City Clerk, City of Valdosta

Mayor, City of Valdosta