

**MINUTES**  
**REGULAR MEETING OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL**  
**5:30 P.M., THURSDAY, APRIL 24, 2008**  
**COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY HALL**

**OPENING CEREMONIES**

Mayor John Fretti called the regular meeting of the Valdosta City Council to order at 5:30 p.m. Council members present were: Sonny Vickers, Tim Carroll, Alvin Payton, Jr., Willie Head, Jr., and Robert Yost. Councilman John Eunice and Councilman James Wright were absent. The invocation was given by Mayor Fretti, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

**AWARDS AND PRESENTATIONS**

Special Presentation for the winners of the Georgia Municipal Association's "If I Were Mayor" Essay Contest.

Mayor Fretti stated that cities from all over the State of Georgia were celebrating the Georgia Municipal Association's Georgia Cities Week April 20-26, 2008. The City of Valdosta held numerous events this week which included a Job Shadowing Day with middle school students, an Employee Appreciation Luncheon, and the "If I Were Mayor" Essay Contest which is held Statewide. The local winners, all students at Valdosta Middle School, were as follows: First Place – Aaron Camon, Second Place - Kweisi Harrison, and Third Place – Calvonta Williams. Mayor Fretti thanked the students and Valdosta Middle School for their participation in the event and presented each student with a certificate.

Special Presentation by Mayor John J. Fretti.

Mayor Fretti asked for a point of personal privilege and thanked Council for their acceptance in his travels to China. The trip was paid for by the Chinese National Government and Mayor Fretti chose Brad Lofton, Executive Director of the Industrial Authority, to accompany him. It is very important for Valdosta to look at the world as more flat and reach out into the global economy. Approximately 35 years ago, Valdosta had a French company, Saft Batteries, come into the community which expanded us in a cultural way. Perhaps we could do that again with another country and expand our cultural and economic horizons. Mayor Fretti stated that there were three things that he brought back from his trip that he wanted to share with Council. First, he wanted to continue the academic exchange. Valdosta State University already has two professor teaching exchanges in China and we should continue this exchange of excellence and teaching. Second, we joined Sister Cities International and every Mayor of the 222 cities that were there on the trip were members of Sister Cities which encourages goodwill and culture among the cities. Finally, the Industrial Authority and Conference Center should do some very limited but narrow target marketing on a global scale in order to increase tourism and economic development through connections in Washington, D.C. and the consulates and foreign trade commissioners that are based in Georgia. Mayor Fretti thanked Mayor Pro Tem Head for representing him at several events during his absence and presented him with a Chinese candleholder on behalf of the Chinese National Government.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The minutes of the April 10, 2008 Regular Meeting was approved by unanimous consent (5-0) of the Council.

**CITIZENS TO BE HEARD**

Robert Young, 601 River Street, stated that in the United States, the average meal travels 13,000 miles before it is consumed. This causes vast amounts of fuel to be consumed and vast amounts of carbon dioxide to be emitted which harms the environment and causes waste through associated industries such as middlemen and transport. This also strengthens our dependence on foreign oil. Many people who produce the food that is consumed in the U. S. and the world live on less than \$2.00 a day. They have been subjected to forced labor

through immoral multi-national corporations and they take advantage of fixed commodity rates and unfair supply side driven subsidies that the European Union and the U. S. have imposed upon the world through the WTO. In these governments, they buy commodities directly from producers and stockpile them and when these fruits and vegetables cannot be sold they are thrown away. Sometimes the government will supplement farmers' income directly to insure profits in export markets. These have driven world food costs up dramatically. There are many people in the world who go to bed hungry and 16,000 people die of hunger and malnutrition every day. In contrast, there is a lot of food not being sold and discarded in dumpsters due to the high price of produce and greed. In times of such economic instability and crises such as WWII, societies turned toward planting urban gardens as a method to remedy the crises and in turn foster a sense of cohesion and interdependence. Most of the food that is produced in the U. S. is genetically modified without any relevant evidence or studies proving that they are safe for human consumption. Terminator genes which Monsanto includes in two of their seeds have forced the farmer to buy their insecticides and herbicides or they could lose their crops. We can do better as a people, a community, and a society. As long as our leaders continue to provide failed solutions to the root causes of people's problems and suffering, it must be the moral duty of the community to come together and create practices that are sustainable and reasonable. Community gardens emphasize the actions of thinking globally and acting locally. They create a forum where people otherwise would not have contact with each other. For example, in Cuba, urban agriculture is the most market-oriented sector of the economic system and this could also be applicable here in Valdosta. The City could provide land and take current open spaces and provide for what is put into the garden as start up costs. There would also be communal tools that people can use and pass along to others to use in the communal plot. In Cuba, when it is time to harvest, there is a certain quota that the government asks for which is one-fifth and then they give it to public institutions, charities, and feed the country as a whole. Farmers are allowed to sell the rest of it to the market and Cuban agriculture has increased production dramatically with minimal waste. The average minimum wage in Cuba is \$10 per month and farmers are earning as much as \$500 a year from their share. In the United States, Burlington, Vermont, which is comparable to Valdosta in size of the City and land area, invests \$40,000 per year into their community garden project and they engage schools and other entities in ownership of the production of their own food. They actually receive a \$1,700 return upon the City's investment and allow groups or citizens to rent out certain portions of their land in the garden. They can either feed their family or sell it at market price. This is a very feasible idea and here in Valdosta the size of the plots could be increased so that the low-income citizens could get a plot at a cheaper rate. This would be a great project for Valdosta and with money from SPLOST V and VI, this would be an appropriate expenditure for the community. This could fall under the auspices of the Parks and Recreation Department and could be promoted through various organizations. SAVE is not a big organization and they have limited contacts so they would be willing to work with the Mayor and Council and others in the community on this project which would help contribute to environmental sustainability, economic viability, and social and labor considerations for the new Azalea Society. Mr. Young thanked Mayor and Council for their time and consideration.

Jacquelyn Murray, 601 River Street, stated that it was important for the City to think global and act local. It is important to encourage cultivation of local businesses so that our people can be employed in venues where their interests are being met instead of working for a battery factory or doing something they do not enjoy doing just to feed your family. It is very important to cultivate the interests of the community and to help grow businesses that people would be passionate about.

## **ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS**

### **RESOLUTION NO. 2008-8, A RESOLUTION FOR THE DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT REVOLVING LOAN FUND (DDRLF) FOR 106-108 WEST HILL AVENUE**

Consideration of a request to approve a resolution for the Downtown Development Revolving Loan Fund (DDRLF) for 106-108 West Hill Avenue.

Jan Harris, Main Street Director, stated that the purpose of the DDRLF is to assist cities and counties in implementing quality downtown development projects. The Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) administers the fund and makes loans to eligible applicants who may, with DCA approval, loan DDRLF funds to Downtown Development Authorities which in turn may loan the funds to for-profit developers. The DDRLF carries below market interest rates and is currently at 2.5%. This current project involves the rehabilitation of the

existing structure at 106-108 West Hill Avenue. A resolution authorizing the Mayor to execute a Downtown Development Revolving Loan Fund application on behalf of the City of Valdosta would need to be approved. If the application is approved by DCA, an Intergovernmental Agreement between the City, the Central Valdosta Development Authority, and DCA would need to be executed by the Mayor authorizing the Central Valdosta Development Authority to borrow funds from DCA and to lend them to the Roberts Building LLC for the rehabilitation of the property. This property was constructed between 1880 and 1895, has 14,130 square feet, and contributes to the Historic District. The members of the Roberts Building LLC are Richard Barnett, Martha Barnett, Fred McCord, and Celine Gladwin. The first floor will be three tenant spaces and one has already been leased to Barnett Fronczak Barlowe Architects. The upper two floors will include residential units with four units on each floor. The estimated cost is \$1,955,300 and the owners of the Roberts Building LLC will contribute \$700,000, the mortgage lender will contribute \$755,300, and they are seeking a Georgia Cities Revolving Loan Fund in the amount of \$250,000 and a loan from DCA in the amount of \$250,000. Mayor Fretti inquired as to whether the owners had alternate plans if the Georgia Cities Foundation loan was not approved. Jan Harris stated that the owners would come up with funding if the loan was not approved. Councilman Payton inquired as to what would make up the difference if the loans were not approved. Jan Harris stated that the owners currently have construction loans in place and these loans would help them with permanent financing at a lower interest rate. They are also pursuing tax credits through the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Historic Preservation. Jan Harris recommended that Council approve the Resolution in support of the DDRLF application for the Roberts Building LLC.

A **MOTION** by Councilman Payton, seconded by Councilman Head, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to enact Resolution No. 2008-8, a Resolution for the Downtown Development Revolving Loan Fund (DDRLF) for 106-108 West Hill Avenue, the complete text which can be found in Resolution Book IV.

### **LOCAL FUNDING AND REQUESTS**

Consideration of a request to apply for grant funds for the U. S. Department of Justice Bulletproof Vest Partnership Program.

Police Chief Frank Simons stated that the Bulletproof Vest Partnership (BVP) was created by the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Act of 1998 and is a unique U. S. Department of Justice initiative designed to provide a critical resources to State and local law enforcement. The City has received funding from this program over the past six years to help purchase vests for the Police Department and it allows the City to receive partial reimbursements for eligible vest purchases. Funding amounts are determined by the Department of Justice in order to meet increasing demands and to allow as many jurisdictions the opportunity to participate in the program. The Department of Justice has determined that the City's regular fund application maximum is \$9,800 for 2008. This is a reimbursement grant and the City would be eligible for a maximum reimbursement of \$4,900. Funds can be used only for vests purchased on or after April 1, 2008. The application had to be submitted online by April 23, 2008. Chief Simons recommended that Council approve the request to apply for grant funds for the U. S. Department of Justice Bulletproof Vest Partnership Program.

A **MOTION** by Councilman Head, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to apply for grant funds for the U. S. Department of Justice Bulletproof Vest Partnership Program.

Consideration of a request to apply for grant funds for the Governor's Office of Highway Safety H.E.A.T. Program.

Police Chief Frank Simons stated that the Governor's Office of Highway Safety has a funding initiative to help improve the safety of Georgia roads by reducing crashes, injuries, and fatalities. Under the 2009 program cycle, there is a general application that allows for several different types of programs and the H.E.A.T. grant falls under this category. The City was awarded funding under the 2007 grant cycle to establish a H.E.A.T. Unit and continuation funding under the 2008 grant cycle. The City is requesting funding from the Governor's Office of Highway Safety to continue in this three-year program. The funding for the first year was 100%, the second year was \$78,200, and the third year will include funding for two Officers at 60% and is based on the guidelines

established by the initial funding application. The estimated amount of funds that the Police Department would be eligible for is approximately \$50,000 to \$60,000. This year would mark the final year of funding and the required match would come from the Police Department's budget. At the conclusion of the three-year grant period, the City and the Police Department agreed to retain the grant-funded Officers as part of the City's Police force. Chief Simons recommended that Council approve the request to apply for the final year's grant funds and provide the required match which will come from the Police Department's budget. Councilman Yost inquired as to when the funding would be available if approved. Chief Simons stated that these are not highly competitive grants and funds should be available within 90 days.

**A MOTION** by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Payton, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to approve the request to apply for the final year of grant funds for the Governor's Office of Highway Safety H.E.A.T. Program and that the required match will come from the Police Department's budget.

**CITY MANAGER'S REPORT**

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that there have been a lot of activities during Georgia Cities Week and one of the first activities was a Cleanup held on Saturday. The volunteers collected 600 pounds of yard waste, 7,680 pounds of junk and debris, 4 appliances, and 19 tires. Another activity was the Job Shadowing Program which was a mentoring career day for middle school students which provided them with an opportunity to be exposed to City government and future jobs. Larry Hanson thanked Sementha Mathews, Public Information Officer, for her time and effort in organizing activities for Georgia Cities Week, and also thanked the Mayor and Council for their participation in the Employee Luncheon.

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that housing numbers were compiled recently for the past eight years and the City has torn down 382 substandard houses which is an average of 50 per year or 1 per week. During the past six years, the City has been responsible for 301 homes being brought up to Code which is also approximately 50 per year. The City has also assisted 83 first time homeowners with down payment assistance (12 homes in Fellowship Place, 13 homes in Short and Cypress Streets, 50 with the Jimmy Carter Work Project, 8 in Madison Heights, and 11 Community Development Block Grant). The Group Workcamp has also made a tremendous impact and they repaired 51 homes in 2005, 44 homes in 2006, 47 homes in 2007, and they are making plans to repair 45 homes in 2008. This is a total of 967 homes that the City has been able to make a positive impact on through services provided by various Departments within the City.

The Request for Proposal (RFP) will be sent out tomorrow for the Transit Development and Business Plan and engineering proposals will be due by May 23, 2008. The Committee will review the proposals and select an engineer. This will be the beginning of designing the system, selecting the type of equipment, and designing the final routes.

The nominees for the Parks and Recreation Authority will be presented to Council at the next meeting. The last of the applications were submitted Tuesday and that is why this was not on the Agenda for this Council meeting. There will be between 9 and 12 names for consideration.

Also, renovations will begin on Monday, April 28, 2008 at Scott Park and the contractor has 300 days to complete the project.

**COUNCIL COMMENTS**

Councilman Head stated that he would like to see a list of exactly what is going into Scott Park. Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that he would provide Council with a copy of the plan; however, some of the things that are going into the Park include a track similar to the one at Valdosta Middle School with a football field in the middle, new practice fields, and new restrooms. A separate bid will be brought back before Council for two, large picnic pavilions and a new playground area. Councilman Head stated that he had been told that there would be an area for remote car events. Eric Hahn, Interim Director of Parks and Recreation stated that they would have a portable setup for remote car events until a permanent site could be established. Councilman Head inquired about

the status of mosquitoes on Bunche Street. Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that John Whitehead, Deputy City Manager of Operations, and Emily Davenport, Stormwater Superintendent, checked the canal and had some mosquitoes tested and there was nothing out of the ordinary. In fact, the mosquito traps tested this week indicated that the numbers were down. Councilman Payton inquired as to whether the canal could be covered. Larry Hanson stated that it would be impossible to pipe all the canals in the City. They serve a useful purpose and if they were piped then they would have less capacity. The canals serve as a filtering mechanism and help slow the water down and they are a lot less expensive than a pipe. Councilman Head also stated that he had received a phone call and visited a constituent's house to look at some repairs that she had done. He then went to the Inspections Department to see who had pulled the permits for the work. It appears that there is a problem with contractors pulling permits for someone else who is not a bonified contractor. They also sell permits to the person who will be performing the work and sometimes that person is a shyster who does substandard work. Councilman Head stated that the person who did the work on the house did some of it under the permit but there was additional work that was not covered. There was electrical and plumbing work done and the house could potentially catch on fire because of potential shortages. For example, the person who did the work put in baseboard-mounted heaters and the front of the heater was open. When the electricity was turned on, only two of the five heaters worked and you could literally look and see the outdoors because the hole in the floor was much larger than the size of the heater. In the bathroom, you could take one hand and shake the entire commode. The two permits pulled on the property were to upgrade the electrical meter box outside and the other was for exterior siding on the house. The City is losing money when contractors do work over and above the permit and it presents a problem for the homeowner because they do not know in many cases. This needs to be addressed and if a contractor pulls a permit and we find out that it was pulled for someone else and the work is substandard then they should both be fined. Councilman Head stated that this was the worse case he had ever seen and the innocent homeowner did not have a clue. Contractors can sub out to others but things need to be tightened up so that others will not be taken advantage of by contractors. The Inspections Department has no clue that they are pulling a permit for someone else and it is only when you visit the job site that you realize it is someone else other than the person who pulled the permit who is doing the work.

Councilman Payton stated that he recently attended the Georgia Municipal Association's Leadership Institute and it was a great experience and he encouraged other Council members to attend the Institute in the future. Councilman Payton stated that the Engineering report noted projects to be bid in future months and inquired as to what was meant by the Park Avenue sidewalk and quantities. Larry Hanson stated that the Engineering Department would be measuring to determine amount of concrete or how many linear feet. These quantities are then included in the specifications and placed in the bid. Von Shipman stated the specifications had changed due to the new handicap laws so they had to redesign some things but this project is very close to being sent out for bid. Councilman Payton inquired about the criteria for repairing driveways. Von Shipman stated that when problems with driveways are brought to their attention they work with Charlie Felts through the Human Resources Risk Assessment Program. They try to identify any failed or problematic driveways and place them on a schedule for repair. Larry Hanson stated that they only repair the portion of the driveway that is on the City's right-of-way. Von Shipman stated that there are some driveways that are not paved and they try to go in and pave a five-foot apron to correct any problems that may have occurred. Councilman Payton inquired about the status of the driveway that they viewed during recent elected officials' tour of the City. Larry Hanson stated that he thought that was beyond the right-of-way and they were waiting on the resident to respond as to whether she would pay the appropriate share. Councilman Payton stated that he noticed they had started work on Perimeter Road and Forrest Street and inquired about the status of that project. Von Shipman stated that they have worked with the Georgia Department of Transportation and they have put in some asphalt aprons where the pedestals will be installed at the first of the week for the crosswalks.

Councilman Head inquired about the status of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Corridor Project. Von Shipman stated that the consultant has submitted a variance request to the Georgia Department of Transportation (DOT) and the District Engineer is very intent on helping us to get the variance approved. Once the variance is issued then the consultant can complete his plans. Larry Hanson stated that the DOT has approved it at one level and they are waiting on the State Engineer to approve it. This is a very narrow street and they have concerns about trees and sidewalks being a certain distance from the right-of-way. Pictures of the Downtown area have been sent to the DOT to show them what they have already approved. The District Engineer stated that he had no problem with it and a decision should be made in the very near future.

Councilman Yost inquired as to whether the Mayor or any other members of Council received a letter from Mediacom this week regarding a rate increase in May and November. Larry Hanson stated that he would send a copy of the correspondence that he sent to Mediacom and has asked that they send a new letter out to the customers. The letter that Mediacom sent out was misleading and incorrect; however, they may be able to raise rates. The agreement that the City has with Mediacom states that they could not charge more in Valdosta than what they are charging in any other communities they serve and particularly those that have competition such as Tifton and Thomasville. At the time the agreement was reached in 2004, the City of Valdosta's rates were much higher; however, now they are much lower than in all the other communities so Mediacom is raising rates to the level they are in the other communities because the agreement only requires that our customers be charged no more than the customers in the other communities. Mediacom has provided the rate cards of all the other communities and they are going to be able to raise rates. When the networks increase the price they charge Mediacom to carry the channels then they have no choice but to pass those costs along to the customers. Councilman Yost stated that the problem he has is that they lied in the letter because Mediacom stated that they were undercharging their customers. Larry Hanson stated that Mediacom made it appear that certain customers in Valdosta were getting a rate that they were not entitled to and that is incorrect. Councilman Yost stated that he would like for the City to look at another possible carrier because he did not want Mediacom as his Council cable for Internet service. Larry Hanson stated that Council has approved a franchise agreement for AT&T to offer cable services in the City of Valdosta so they could start in that business tomorrow if they so choose. Competition is the best measure for improving service and keeping prices competitive. Mayor Fretti stated that Larry Hanson will also be requesting an audit of our local cable provider by the Georgia Municipal Association.

Mayor Fretti stated that he had a complaint from Robert Hatton who lives on River Street in the Fairview District and he had his water turned off because it was confused with another address on River Street Lane. There are many others who have confused the street name in the past. Mayor Fretti asked that Von Shipman conduct a survey of the homeowners on River Street Lane to see if they would be in agreement to changing the street name. This has been a continual problem. Larry Hanson stated that they have looked at this before and neither group was willing to agree to a name change.

Councilman Head inquired about an assessment conducted by the Carl Vinson Institute of Government in the Fire Department. Larry Hanson stated that approximately a year ago the City brought in Gordon Manor who conducted a retreat for the Fire Department and helped them to develop some plans as to what they wanted to do. Both the employees and Chief Rice wanted to go to a Job Assessment Center which is used for promotions. This is very common in Fire Departments across the State and Chief Rice also serves on Assessment Centers in other communities. The assessments are scheduled to begin next month. Councilman Head stated that he had been told that they tested quite some time ago and they were aware the City was working on some type of assessment but a year has gone by and nothing has been done. Larry Hanson stated that the assessments were scheduled for next week and Chief Rice asked for a 30-day delay because this is such a major change and he wanted all of the Fire Department employees to have a chance to make improvements and prepare themselves for these promotional exams. There are a number of slots open and this is very important to their career. The assessments will now be conducted the third week of May. They rewrite the job descriptions and prepare a job assessment of each job to make sure that they understand every duty and responsibility of every job in the Fire Department. The employees will then be tested and scored and an assessment team comes in which are all outside individuals and they perform the promotional interviews to determine who will be promoted into these positions. Councilman Head inquired as to whether this is done in other departments. Larry Hanson stated that the Police Department has something that is similar but it is not through the University of Georgia; however, the University of Georgia is widely recognized in doing these assessments and they have a division that does this for a number of cities.

## ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Fretti entertained a motion to adjourn the Council meeting and enter into an Executive Session for the purpose of discussing personnel, pending litigation, and real estate.

A **MOTION** by Councilman Payton, seconded by Councilman Head, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to adjourn the April 24, 2008 meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:53 p.m. and enter into Executive Session.

Mayor Fretti reconvened the regular City Council meeting at 8:03 p.m. and stated that there was discussion of personnel, pending litigation, and real estate only in the Executive Session and no vote was taken.

Mayor Fretti entertained a motion for adjournment.

A **MOTION** by Councilman Vickers, seconded by Councilman Head, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to adjourn the April 24, 2008 meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 8:04 p.m. to meet again in regular session on Thursday, May 8, 2008.

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City Clerk, City of Valdosta

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Mayor, City of Valdosta