

MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL
5:30 P.M., THURSDAY, AUGUST 20, 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 Pastor Scottie Williams, New Covenant Church, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

Mayor Gayle recognized members of the 2015 Leadership Lowndes class who were in attendance.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

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

BIDS, CONTRACTS, AGREEMENTS, AND EXPENDITURES

Consideration of bids to pave the parking lot at Five Points Shopping Center (Big Lots area).

Councilman Carroll stated that even though he did not technically have a conflict of interest it could be perceived as such since his store is located at Five Points and for that reason he would abstain from participation in this case and from voting.

Mark Barber, Assistant City Manager, stated that the Five Points property, which measures 22.15 acres in area, was purchased by the City in June, 2010. Big Lots has been operating at the Five Points location (3103 North Ashley Street) since 1993. At the Mayor/Council Retreat in January, they discussed the need to spruce up the Five Points area. They discussed semi-truck parking issues and that has been taken care of with some signage. They have also completed the painting of the Speedy Lube building and the tenants have bought their own awnings and signage which looks much better. It is time now to look at repairs to the parking lot itself. City personnel visited the parking lot to look at the traffic flow patterns and where the majority of the potholes were located. The City bid out two roads and one of those roads is located at the bottom of the lot. Citizens who turn in from the North Oak Street Extension side by Wendy's take that route which is where the worst potholes are located. A few years ago, the City resurfaced the area near the Ashley Street side and will now finish that as well as create another road that will run up through the parking lot to Big Lots. The original bid was based on the usage and commercial standards and it was determined that the business requires 135 parking spaces. Milling the existing asphalt surface, patching existing holes with large stone asphalt, and resurfacing the parking lot and access road from Oak Street Extension was released to contractors to bid by the Engineering Department. Three local contractors capable of performing the work submitted proposals on August 12, 2015. The lowest responsible bidder was Reames & Sons Construction Company in the amount of \$124,547.50 and the Engineering Department estimate was \$119,683. Due to the availability of funds to complete the Project, the Assistant City Manager directed the Engineering Department to reduce the scope of work from 135 parking spaces to 50 parking spaces (63% of the parking spaces). The original square footage of the total Project was 93,247 square feet. The revised square footage is now 66,050 square feet. Approximately 27,000 square feet of the total project was cut out with these 85 parking spaces (29% of the cost of the Project). The unit price remains the same at \$1.34 per square foot. The low bidder was contacted and asked to submit a new bid for the change in the scope of the Project. Reames & Sons Construction Company submitted a revised bid in the amount of \$88,417.50. The work will be done in a manner which accommodates Big Lots commercial hours as best as possible. The funding will come from the rental revenue that the City receives from its tenants. Mark Barber recommended that Council approve the revised low bid submitted by Reames & Sons Construction Company in the amount of \$88,417.50 plus a 10% contingency of \$8,841.75 to handle any unforeseen circumstances for a total of \$97,259.25. Councilman Vickers inquired as to whether all the holes would be patched outside of the designated area. Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that the City would patch the majority of them using a combination of City and community service workers. Councilwoman Tooley inquired about the access road and whether they would have a round-about in that area. Larry Hanson stated that there

would not be a round-about in the parking lot area. Mayor Gayle stated that the access road is not North Oak Street Extension and the round-about is a Georgia Department of Transportation Project that is in the works for the future. The round-about would be where the five streets come together in that area. Larry Hanson stated that the access road coming in from Oak Street Extension near Wendy's is not City-owned and is owned by the Setzers (LRS Realty). The only entrance that we are improving is the entrance that we own up to Big Lots and then a north and south road across the parking lot to connect to the end of the property that we own up to Wendy's. Councilman Norton inquired as to whether the area that is not being repaved would be restriped for parking. Mark Barber stated that the area would be left as it currently exists.

A MOTION was made by Councilman Norton to approve the revised low bid submitted by Reames & Sons Construction Company in the amount of \$88,417.50 plus a 10% contingency of \$8,841.75 to handle any unforeseen circumstances for a total of \$97,259.25 to pave the parking lot at Five Points Shopping Center (Big Lots area). Councilman Payton seconded the motion. The motion was adopted 5-0-1 with Councilman Carroll abstaining.

CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that the Gornto Road portion of the Force Main Project is underway and one lane will be closed from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. from August 17-28, 2015; however, they should be finished by August 25, 2015 if the weather cooperates.

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that we are asking citizens to provide input on the new Valdosta website. There is a survey on-line for citizens to complete or hard copies can be obtained at City Hall, the City Hall Annex Building, or Customer Service. The survey will be available until August 21, 2015. The new website will be user-focused and will roll out on January 1, 2015. The City Government 101 graduates will be used to test the new website.

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that Georgia Power has started the new LED Street Light Project in our City. They started this on Monday, August 17, 2015 and in one three-day stretch, a two-man crew can replace approximately 90 LED bulbs. These new bulbs will make a significant difference in the lighting in our City.

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that the deadline to apply for the Citizens Fire Academy will be August 31, 2015; however, the class is now full and there is a waiting list. This has been a popular Program that Fire Chief Freddie Broome initiated last year and it has been very well received. Also, the Police Department has two Citizens Academies each year and the second one for 2015 will begin in September. Applications are still being taken for this class and one of the new things that has been added is a session on judgmental shooting. Police Chief Brian Childress has recently taken some groups to the Police Academy so they could experience the decisions that an Officer has to make at the spur of the moment.

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that we are getting economic development interest in our City and the Economic Development Authority is working on a number of prospects. The City is also working with one prospect who is interested in making a substantial investment in the Downtown area.

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated the issue with the tax digest and the millage rate is still on-going and unresolved. We do not know when we will have a tax digest so that we can have a Council Meeting to set the new millage rate. There are some additional errors that have been discovered and 2,400 tax bills will have to be sent out again. There will then be 45 days that the citizens will have to contest those evaluations. That could have an effect on the City because property tax funds are one of our largest sources of revenue. The revenue typically starts coming in October and November with the remainder in December. The fact that there is not a digest, the millage has not been set, tax bills have not been mailed out, and citizens have not had their 90 days to pay means that it will be next year before we receive one of our largest sources of revenue. This could have an impact on all of the governments in Lowndes County. It may be that we will have to do a TAN (Tax Anticipatory Note) which is what school systems do very often. This is basically a mechanism for a short term loan and the City would pledge future tax proceeds which are retired as soon as it is received. This would be a safety net so that we could continue to operate. We are in uncharted waters with the tax digest issue.

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that Ms. Ruth Council has written a note to the Mayor and Council thanking them for changing the name of the street in her honor as well as participating in the event.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilman Vickers inquired as to whether the sewer line that we were having an issue with on Meadowbrook Drive has been moved. We have not had any spills in that area in quite a while. Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that we would not be moving that line because it is a 54 inch line, it is 20-30 feet deep in some places, and the cost to remove it would be substantial. There are portions of it that will be abandoned and filled in but the line itself will not be removed. The new Projects will not come on-line until early next year. We have made a lot of other significant investments in the system over the past two years from manhole rehabilitation to slip lining several miles of sewer lines to smoke testing. We are now seeing the return on that investment and that is why the spills have not been an issue. The Force Main Project is 5 months ahead of schedule and the relocation of the Treatment Plant is 16 months ahead of schedule. Councilman Vickers also stated that Ms. Minnie Martin passed away and her funeral will be held this Sunday, August 23, 2015 at 2:00 p.m. at Mathis Auditorium.

Councilman Carroll stated that they had discussed doing a site tour of both the Force Main Project and the new Treatment Plant at the Mayor and Council Retreat and inquired as to the status of the tour. Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that this was a goal for the current fiscal year and it would be a good time to plan the tour so that the Mayor and Council would be able to see the substantial progress of both Projects.

Councilwoman Tooley stated that citizens are still asking questions about the Citizens to be Heard portion on the Agenda and they feel that it needs to be placed ahead of the Agenda Items. They do not feel there is a need to come to the City Council Meeting because decisions have already been made. Councilwoman Tooley asked Council's consideration in changing that since it has come up quite a bit. Mayor Gayle stated that anything that comes up during the Citizens to be Heard portion of the Council Meeting would first be checked out and information disseminated to the Council. This portion of the Meeting was once at the beginning of the Council Meetings but it was changed so that the Council could take care of the business that was before them to start with. Then if there was a situation that came up at the Citizens to be Heard portion, they would look into it at their earliest convenience and bring it up at a later date.

Councilman Wright stated that at one time they were having two or three hours of citizens wishing to be heard and then they would go into the business of the City. The primary reason that it was changed was to finish the business of the City and then listen to the concerns and complaints that the citizens may have. The way it is structured now is good because it allows the Mayor and Council to finish the business of the City first and he would not be in favor of changing it.

CITIZENS TO BE HEARD

Vincent Brown stated that he would like to create a Racial Equity and Social Justice Committee for the City of Valdosta so that when there are issues everything would not have to come up during the Citizens to be Heard portion of the Agenda. He has been to several Council Meetings and he has heard a lot of the issues that have come up. Sometimes it is presented in a format where it is the citizens' issues against the City. He has heard citizens voice their concerns and complaints about things that are going on in the City. Even with South Georgia Pride group wanting a proclamation and the Kendrick Johnson case, a lot of the citizens want to see if Valdosta really cares. We have other organizations that handle different things in the City but it would be great if we had a Committee that was set up to handle these types of things. It would show a form of empathy that the City is concerned and that we have an organized Committee to handle these issues. He has done some research of other cities that have some similar Committees which consist of approximately 15 members. One of the cities that has this type of Committee is Madison, Wisconsin. He has also approached several people locally who are interested in this Committee. Mayor Gayle stated that he would contact Mr. Brown so that they could discuss this topic at length.

Mayor Gayle entertained a motion for adjournment.

A **MOTION** by Councilman Vickers, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to adjourn the August 20, 2015 Meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:03 p.m. to meet again in Regular Session on Thursday, September 10, 2015.

City Clerk, City of Valdosta

Mayor, City of Valdosta