

MINUTES
REGULAR MEETINGS OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL
5:30 PM, THURSDAY, APRIL 7, 2016
COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY HALL

OPENING CEREMONIES:

Mayor John Gayle called the regular meeting of the Valdosta City Council to order at 5:31 p.m. Council members present were: Joseph “Sonny” Vickers, Tim Carroll, Robert Yost, Sandra Tooley, Vivian Miller-Cody, and Councilman Alvin Payton. Councilman Ben Norton was absent. The invocation was given by Pastor Curtis Jenkins of New Life Bible Church and immediately followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

AWARDS AND PRESENTATIONS

Consideration of a Special Presentation for the City of Valdosta Budget Department.

Mark Barber, Assistant City Manager stated that on March 9, 2016, Mr. Stephen J. Gauthier, Director of the Technical Services Center for the Government Finance Officers Association, notified staff that the City of Valdosta had received the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award for the current budget year for the 20th consecutive year. This award is the highest form of recognition in governmental budgeting and represents a significant achievement by the City of Valdosta’s Budget Department.

Mr. Barber further stated that he was very proud to make Council aware that not only did the Budget Department receive Distinguished Budget Presentation Award but they are also receiving special recognition for the CAP Project area of the budget. This is an awesome recognition and I cannot say enough about our budget department and their professional excellence. I would like to ask Ms. Carolyn Burgess and Ms. Amy Hall to come forth. These two young ladies are exceptional workers and represent the City well.

Consideration of April 2016, Employee of the Month Award (Roger Dale Weaver, Engineering Department).

Mr. Roger Weaver began his employment with the Engineering Department in May 2014, as a Heavy Equipment Operator. Within 18 months of his initial employment, he was recommended for and promoted to the position of Signal Technician. As a Signal Technician, Mr. Weaver is responsible for installing and maintaining traffic signals to include control boxes, signal lights, pedestrian walk signals, and traffic detection devices. He regularly inspects traffic signal equipment for wear and damage and synchronizes signals to provide progressive traffic movement.

Mr. Weaver is an exemplary employee and always goes above and beyond the call of duty both on and off the job. Below is just one recent example:

On a Sunday morning, Ms. Shirley Britt, a City of Valdosta employee, was on her way to church traveling on a dirt road alongside Hwy 84 when her vehicle slid into a ditch. Mr. Weaver was the first person she encountered and he immediately got out of his truck to both check on her and assist; however, he did not have a chain with him to pull out her vehicle. So Mr. Weaver left, and shortly later, Mr. Ferguson, a citizen that owned a wrecker service stopped to assist Ms. Britt. Within minutes of Mr. Ferguson’s arrival, Mr. Weaver was back on the scene with a chain he had retrieved from home. With the assistance of both Mr. Weaver and Mr. Ferguson, Ms. Britt’s vehicle was pulled out of the ditch. Mr. Weaver then checked the vehicle for damage and ensured it was safe to drive.

During this event, Ms. Britt did not know Roger was in fact a co-worker of hers, nor did Mr. Weaver know her. In the nomination for this award, Ms. Britt noted that she felt honored and blessed to have been the recipient of Mr. Weaver’s kindness. She noted that the City of Valdosta has some exceptional employees and that she certainly thinks by his actions that Mr. Weaver falls into this category, both on and off the job.

His work ethic and can-do attitude are touted by his supervisors. They are also highly valued by the Engineering Department. For these reasons and many others, the Employee Relations Committee nominates Mr. Roger Weaver as the April 2016 Employee of the Month.

Mayor Gayle gave special recognition to members of the Lowndes Youth Leadership League who were attendance at the council meeting.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the March 24, 2016, Regular Meeting were approved by unanimous consent (6-0) of the Council.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

ORDINANCE 2016-8, AN ORDINANCE TO REZONE A SINGLE FAMILY-RESIDENTIAL (R-6) TO HIGHWAY-COMMERCIAL (C-H)

Consideration of an ordinance to rezone 0.29 acres from Single-Family Residential (R-6) to Highway-Commercial (C-H) as requested by Robert and Carolyn Dinkins (File No. VA-2016-06). The property is located at 2901 Bemiss Road. The Greater Lowndes Planning Commission reviewed this request at their March Regular Meeting and recommended approval (6-0 vote).

Matt Martin, Planning and Zoning Administrator, stated that Robert and Carolyn Dinkins are requesting to rezone 0.29 acres of a 0.68 acre parcel from Single-Family Residential (R-6) to Highway-Commercial (C-H). The subject property is currently split-zoned C-H and R-6. It was annexed into the city as an unincorporated island and was formerly split-zoned C-H and R-6 in the County. With an existing commercial building already located on the property, the applicant is proposing to construct a commercial building for storage in his rear yard. The Planning Commission reviewed this at their March 28, 2016, meeting, found it consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the Standards for the Exercise of Zoning Power (SFEZP) and recommended approval (6-0 vote).

No one spoke in favor of or against the request.

A MOTION by Councilman Payton, seconded by Councilman Carroll was unanimously adopted (6-0) to grant the request as presented and enact Ordinance 2016-8, an ordinance to rezone 0.29 acres from Single-Family Residential (R-6) to Highway-Commercial (C-H) as requested by Robert and Carolyn Dinkins, the complete text of which shall be found in Ordinance Book XIII.

ORDINANCE 2016-9, AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND THE LAND DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS

Consideration of an ordinance to amend the City of Valdosta's Land Development Regulations (LDR) as it pertains to Chapter 328 – Landscape, Buffers, and Screening (File No. 2016-07). The Greater Lowndes Planning Commission reviewed this request at their March Regular Meeting and recommended approval of Option #1 (4-2 vote).

Matt Martin, Planning and Zoning Administrator, stated that as explained at the work session on Tuesday, the City is requesting to amend the Land Development Regulations (LDR) as it relates to Chapter 328 – Landscape, Buffers, and Screening. Mr. Martin presented Mayor and Council with two options. Option 1 references the topping of trees and the amendments proposed are to clarify and strengthen the language prohibiting the topping of trees, as well as relax the penalties for doing this by eliminating the possible jail time provision and institute a warning provision for first-time offenders regarding crepe myrtles. The proposed amendments in Option 2 are exactly the same as Option 1 except that crepe myrtles are exempted from the tree topping prohibition and are deleted from the City's list of small trees as it pertains to Appendix A. Both options have been carefully reviewed by staff with input from the Tree Commission and the City Attorney's Office. Staff feels that Crepe Myrtles should be recognized as trees and protected in the same manner as other trees and is therefore recommending Option 1. This option is also supported by the Chamber of Commerce SORT Committee, the Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors and Keep Lowndes Valdosta Beautiful.

Councilman Yost asked for clarification of fees that would be charged. Mr. Martin reviewed the fee schedule and stated that citizens would receive warnings first but repeat offenders could incur fines. City Attorney Tim Tanner stated that the maximum allowed fine is \$1,000 per violation but the definition is for interpretation. Councilman Vickers asked Mr. Martin to review the educational component. Mr. Martin stated that information was being disseminated to lawn and landscaping businesses in the community. The City will host training seminars to provide assistance and companies will be required to sign forms acknowledging that they are aware of and understand the new ordinance.

Mayor Gayle asked if any citizen would like to speak in favor of the request.

Michael Lee, representing the Valdosta-Lowndes County of Commerce spoke in favor of Option 1 stating that Option 1 is the best option because it eliminates jail time and encourages education. Option 2 is less friendly and eliminates crepe myrtles as an option for landscaping and increases the cost of development. Option 1 shows the City's willingness to work with businesses in the city.

Mr. Allan Dear also representing the Chamber of Commerce stated that he is just looking at beautification of the city and feels that Option 1 would prevent the City from getting into confrontational situations.

No one spoke in opposition of the request.

A MOTION by Councilman Tim Carroll, seconded by Councilman Robert Yost, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve Option 1 as presented and enact Ordinance 2016-9, an ordinance to amend the City of Valdosta's Land Development Regulations (LDR) as it pertains to Chapter 328 – Landscape, Buffers, and Screening, the complete text of which will be found in Ordinance Book XIII.

ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS

Consideration of an ordinance to amend the Ordinance to Establish Hiring Procedures for Employment with the Valdosta Fire Department.

Assistant Fire Chief Brian Boutwell stated that they are requesting to amend the Ordinance to Establish Hiring Procedures for Employment with the Valdosta Fire Department. The department is recommending changing the residential policy from within 20 miles of City Hall to within a 60 mile range of Fire Station 1 located at 106 South Oak Street in an effort to enhance recruiting and retention programs. Additional changes include changing the location of NFST (National Fire Select Test) and several terminology changes.

Councilwoman Tooley asked if the distance change would hinder the fire department and prevent a timely response. Larry Hanson, City Manager and Chief Boutwell explained that this requirement is to allow individuals who currently reside in other counties an opportunity to apply for employment at the City which will only allow the City to choose from the best applicants. Councilwoman Tooley asked if a Mutual Aid Agreement was in place. Mr. Hanson answered yes and stated that there was a countywide mutual aid agreement. Just recently the Valdosta Fire Department assisted Remerton in an emergency situation. Each entity will assist others as needed when the occasion arises.

Councilwoman Miller-Cody asked if Tift County paid higher salaries and if the City was losing fire personnel. Chief Boutwell and City Manager Hanson both acknowledged that this is a true statement.

A MOTION by Councilman Payton, seconded by Councilman Carroll was unanimously adopted (6-0) to enact Ordinance 2016-10, an ordinance amending the Ordinance to Establish Hiring Procedures for Employment with the Valdosta Fire Department, the complete text of which will be found in Ordinance Book XIII.

Consideration of an ordinance to amend the Ordinance to Establish Promotional Procedures for the Valdosta Fire Department.

Assistant Fire Chief Brian Boutwell stated that this is a request to amend the City’s promotional procedures for the fire department so that VFD procedures meet current Fire Service Standards for supervisory positions which will ensure that Valdosta Fire Department (VFD) employees and the department has an equitable process. With the new proposed promotional procedures, the VFD is establishing the standards of providing a consistent and equitable process for all positions, providing a succession matrix to help employees with their career aspirations, and ensuring that personnel receive the required training and/or education to make them successful. We are also requesting a change to the residential policy to allow employees to live within a 60 mile radius of Fire Station 1 and employees hired within a classification/position that is assigned a take-home vehicle must establish residency within a 20 mile radius of Fire Station 1 (106 South Oak Street) within one (1) year of the appointment date.

City Manager, Larry Hanson stated that the VFD Promotional Ceremony held earlier this week was extremely rewarding. There was a room full of people and you couldn’t help but to feel proud.

A MOTION by Councilman Yost, seconded by Councilman Payton was unanimously adopted (6-0) to enact Ordinance 2016-11, an ordinance to amend the Ordinance to Establish Promotional Procedures for the Valdosta Fire Department, the complete text of which will be found in Ordinance Book XIII.

BIDS, CONTRACTS, AGREEMENTS, AND EXPENDITURES

Consideration of an Access and Utility Easement Agreement at the new Withlacoochee Wastewater Treatment Plant.

Mr. Henry Hicks, Director of Utilities, stated that Advanced Disposal (ADC) was issued industrial pre-treatment permits from the City’s Utility Department to dispose of leachate at the existing Withlacoochee Wastewater Treatment Plant. However, in order for ADC to continue disposing of leachate at the City’s facility they were informed that they would need to construct a new pressurized force main to the headworks structure at the new treatment plant. This expense will be paid by ADC. A design for construction has been completed and approved by Parsons but before construction can begin, the City will need to grant an access easement across the new Treatment Plant site. This request has been reviewed by staff and the City Attorney and Staff recommends approval of the Access and Utility Easement Agreement.

A MOTION by Councilman Vickers, seconded by Councilwoman Tooley was unanimously approved (6-0) to grant the request of an access and utility easement at the new Withlacoochee Wastewater Treatment Plant.

LOCAL FUNDING AND REQUESTS

Consideration of a request to abandon an easement in Hamilton Point Subdivision.

Pat Collins, City Engineer stated that this request comes from Hutton Real Estate Company. Due to commercial development they are requesting that a portion of the existing drainage easement be abandoned and relocated to become part of the master drainage plan for an Anchor Store. The City Engineer and staff have reviewed the request and recommend approval.

A MOTION by Councilman Payton, seconded by Councilwoman Miller-Cody was unanimously approved to follow the recommendation of staff and grant the request to abandon a portion of the easement.

CITY MANAGER’S REPORT

City Manager Larry Hanson stated that the City Government 101 classes have begun and encouraged all elected officials to come and participate. He also made Council aware that on this Saturday, April 9, the City will again host a

Spring Electronic Recycling Event. This is a very popular event and date we have kept 277 tons of electronics out of the landfill.

Mr. Hanson informed Council that Henry Hicks, Director of Utilities is planning for the dedication of the new Withlacoochee Plant and is preparing a list of people to invite. If there is someone that you would like to receive an invitation, please email Henry their information so they can be placed on the invitation list. Mr. Hanson also informed the Council that he is proud to announce that next Friday we will have a groundbreaking ceremony for the South Troup Street project at Costal Plains.

Mr. Hanson made Council aware that the Valdosta Fire Department will host an Expo next Tuesday and a number of agencies will participate. This is expected to be a great event and will hopefully bring in some good applicants.

Mr. Hanson also noted that Georgia Cities week will be April 17 – 23. As you know each year the City plans a number of informational and educational events and this year will be no exception.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilman Vickers inquired about the sale of city property located on West Hill and Cherry Street stating that there is not a For Sale sign posted on the property. City Manager Hanson stated that the property has been advertised for bids and perhaps posting a For Sale sign would make the property more visible.

Councilman Yost stated that to his knowledge there has been no movement from Hospital Authority members to resign. He stated he has received numerous calls, emails, and letters in support of this request. He plans to bring a Resolution to present to Council asking for the resignations of Hospital Authority members. He has had comments from former and current SGMC employees who said they were forced to sign contracts to resign. Councilman Vickers commented that he respects Councilman Yost's opinion but he has not received any complaints and has no knowledge of any such things going on.

Councilman Yost stated that he appreciated the Councilman's view but some changes have to be made.

Councilman Payton asked if the City had received a good number of applications for the open positions on the Boards and Commissions. City Manager Hanson answered that some applications had been received and that applications would be taken throughout the month of April.

CITIZENS TO BE HEARD

There were no citizens to be heard.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Gayle entertained a motion for adjournment.

A MOTION by Councilman Vickers, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to adjourn the April 7, 2016, Meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:31 p.m. to meet again in Regular Session on Thursday, April 22, 2016.

Associate City Clerk

Mayor, City of Valdosta