

**MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL
5:30 P.M., THURSDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2007
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, Alvin Payton, Jr., Willie Head, Jr., John Eunice, Robert Yost, and James Wright. Councilman David Sumner was absent. The invocation was given by Councilman Head, 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

PRESENTATION OF THE OCTOBER EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH

Mayor Fretti entertained a motion for the October, 2007 Employee of the Month Award.

A **MOTION** by Councilman Eunice, seconded by Councilman Head, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve the October, 2007 Employee of the Month Award.

Mayor Fretti presented the October Employee of the Month Award to Joshua McElyea, Police Department.

Joshua McElyea was employed by the City of Valdosta Police Department in September, 2006 as a Patrol Officer which is the position he currently holds. Prior to his employment with the City, Officer McElyea served in the United States Air Force where he received training in criminal investigations. This training, along with his avid motivation to pursue a career in law enforcement has contributed to his outstanding achievement with the Valdosta Police Department early in his career. Even though Officer McElyea has only been on the force for one year, he has already solved two burglaries which is a feat rarely accomplished by more experienced Officers and a first for a new Officer with the City. In July of this year, Officer McElyea responded to an after-hours alarm at a business on Norman Drive. After checking the scene, he observed the suspect fleeing into a wooded area behind the store. Officer McElyea located the suspect's vehicle and recovered items in the vehicle from another burglary. Using information found in the vehicle, the suspect was arrested and later on confessed to the crimes. Due to Officer McElyea's keen investigative skills, a rash of burglaries was solved in record time. His persistence and "never give up" attitude serves as an example to which all officers can aspire. Thomas Edison once wrote, "The first requisite of success is the ability to apply your physical and mental energies to one problem without growing weary." Officer McElyea is an outstanding example of this principle. For these reasons and many others, the Employee Relations Committee nominated Joshua McElyea as Employee of the Month.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the October 11, 2007 Regular Meeting was approved by unanimous consent (6-0) of the Council.

CITIZENS TO BE HEARD

Ben Pringle, Hunter's Pointe Subdivision, stated that there is a retention pond in the subdivision and the residents would like to verify that it is the right size and that it is working properly so that they do not incur any problems they may not be able to afford before it is turned over to the Homeowner's Association. The residents would also like to verify that whenever the land behind them is developed that part of the design would be for them to take the runoff water and overflow from the retention pond and not allow it back up. Mr. Pringle stated that they would like some expertise and advice as to how to deal with that issue. There have been a couple of dry years and they have been very fortunate but they know that it could happen again like it did in 2005. Mayor Fretti stated that he would like to review the information and have Von Shipman, City Engineer, and Leon Weeks, Director of Utilities, contact Mr. Pringle. Councilman Head stated that he thought the City would become responsible for the

holding ponds. Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that there are certain things that developers and owners can do under the City's policy to take ownership; however, this is on a case-by-case basis because there may be some older retention ponds previously built that the City does not have access to and cannot take them over. The ordinance does offer the methods which can be used for the City to take the holding pond if it meets the City's standards and is designed and built properly. Mr. Pringle inquired as to who would be responsible for the holding pond after the covenants expire in 2016. Larry Hanson stated that it would be dependent upon who the ownership is vested in. If the owner transfers it to the Homeowner's Association then that responsibility would continue if the property is owned by the Homeowner's Association. They would continue some type of annual assessment to have adequate revenue to pay for the maintenance of the holding pond. Larry Hanson stated that Von Shipman, City Engineer, and Leon Weeks, Director of Utilities, will review the information and meet with Mr. Pringle to discuss the situation.

LOCAL FUNDING AND REQUESTS

Consideration of a request to approve Christmas awards for City employees.

Mark Barber, Deputy City Manager of Administration, stated that traditionally the City of Valdosta has awarded a bonus at the end of the calendar year, to be paid prior to the holiday season, for qualified employees. The bonus to each employee is based upon length of service to the City. In order for the employee to receive the full amount of the bonus, the estimated amounts include taxes to be paid on behalf of the employee by the City. To receive a bonus, an employee must meet the following criteria: Career employees must have been employed as of July 1, 2007, and Part-time employees must have completed nine of months of service. Listed below is a total estimated bonus amount for each Fund: Part time - employed less than 10 years - \$80, employed 10 years or more - \$100; Full time employees - employed less than 5 years - \$110, employed 5 years but less than 10 years - \$150, employed 10 years but less than 15 years - \$185, employed 15 years but less than 20 years - \$215, employed 20 years but less than 25 years - \$250, employed 25 years but less than 30 years - \$280, employed 30 years but less than 35 years - \$315, and employed 35 years but less than 40 years - \$345. The estimated cost per fund is as follows: General Fund - \$92,665, HUD - \$332, Parks & Recreation - \$13,632, Sanitation Fund - \$10,056, Water & Sewer Fund - \$25,490, Inspections Fund - \$4,051, Motor Pool Fund - \$3,659, and Mathis Auditorium - \$400 for a total of \$152,397. The bonus checks would be distributed at the annual Thanksgiving luncheon which will be held on November 14. Mark Barber recommended that Council approve Christmas awards for City employees.

A MOTION by Councilman Head, seconded by Councilman Vickers, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve Christmas awards for City employees.

Consideration of a request to approve the City of Valdosta's Sick Leave Buy-Back Program.

Mark Barber, Deputy City Manager of Administration, stated that City of Valdosta employees currently accrue vacation and sick leave at the end of each month. The amount of the accrual increases as the length of service increases at intervals of five years. Once the maximum vacation accrual is reached in an employee account, all of the excess accumulation is "rolled-over" to the employee's sick leave account. When a career employee is separated from service with the City, the employee is paid for all unused vacation leave; however, no payment is made for unused sick leave at the time of separation. Unused sick leave is utilized in the computation of the employee's monthly benefit under the City's retirement plan. The implementation of a Sick Leave Buy-Back Program greatly enhances the current sick leave benefit currently offered by the City, and will offer flexibility by allowing options as to the use of sick leave accruals earned by the employee. Additionally, the reduction of the compensated absence liability on the books of the City will aid in a strengthened asset to liability ratio for the City. Since this program was so successful last year, the City has added another option which will allow an employee with five or more years of service to buy back 80 hours if 120 hours is left in the sick leave bank. The total estimated cost of this program is \$506,977, and the City will be required to match the FICA tax associated with the distribution for each employee. Councilman Yost inquired as to whether the City would be offering the program each year and if so, would it require Council's approval or would it become a policy. Mark Barber stated that he was hopeful that this would become a policy. Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that last year this was a new program and required Council's approval and since there was a change in the program this year, it required Council's approval. Funds have been budgeted for this program and it goes along with the City's goal of

encouraging career service. There should not be any other changes to the program in the foreseeable future. Councilman Head inquired as to whether all City employees participate in this program. Mark Barber stated that there the participation rate last year was approximately 99%. Larry Hanson stated that the program has changed behavior in employees in that those who may have had a tendency to take a day off because they were a little under the weather are now reporting to work in order to accrue sick time. This program provides them with an incentive to be well and accomplishes the City's goal because it costs the City money when employees are absent from work.

A MOTION by Councilman Yost, seconded by Councilman Payton, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve the City of Valdosta's Sick Leave Buy-Back Program.

BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

Consideration of appointments to the Valdosta Tree Commission.

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that there are two positions on the Valdosta Tree Commission held by Kerry Watts and Patsy Giles whose terms expired on September 6, 2007. For Position #1 which was held by Kerry Watts, the following names were submitted for consideration: Brenda Thrasher - Retired Teacher, Jane McLane - Retired Pre-School Teacher, and Bobby Flowers - Horticulturist with Valdosta State University. For Position #2 which was held by Patsy Giles, the following names were submitted for consideration: Patsy Giles, Angela Wall - Environmental Planner with South Georgia Regional Development Center, and Richard Kirby - Environmental Health Specialist with the Lowndes County Health Department. Ms. Giles has agreed to serve again if appointed.

Mayor Fretti asked for nominations. For Position #1, Councilman Eunice placed in consideration the name of Jane McLane. There being no other nominations, Jane McLane was appointed by acclamation to serve a term of four years on the Valdosta Tree Commission.

Mayor Fretti asked for nominations. Councilman Head placed in consideration the name of Patsy Giles. Councilman Yost placed in consideration the name of Brenda Thrasher. There being no other nominations, Mayor Fretti closed nominations. Patsy Giles received three votes and Brenda Thrasher received three votes. Mayor Fretti broke the tie and Patsy Giles was appointed to serve a term of four years on the Valdosta Tree Commission.

Consideration of a request to change the term expiration dates for the Greater Lowndes Planning Commission.

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that there were several City and County appointments on the Greater Lowndes Planning Commission that are due to expire at the end of this month. The Planning Commission has requested that both the City and County extend these terms until December 31, 2007 of this calendar primarily for the purpose of making these and future appointments on a calendar year basis rather than a mid-year basis. The Planning Commission is scheduled to vote on a slate of names at the October 29, 2007 Planning Commission meeting. The County has already appointed a new member to take office January 1, 2008 to replace one of their members; however, the City has not placed this on their Agenda yet and will wait on Council to act on this request. Councilman Yost stated that he did not have a problem with what the Planning Commission would like to do in changing terms but it should go into effect next year so that those members who are supposed to be rotating off would follow that process. They can be appointed by the governing body that they represent at the end of their term to serve but this should not be started in the middle of the process while they are supposed to be rotating. Councilman Yost stated that he would like for this to be started in January for next year so that it does not affect anyone who is currently rotating off and they can be appointed again by their governing body that they currently represent. Councilman Head inquired as to why the Planning Commission is doing this and whether it because the term was ending this month or had already ended. The Planning Commission does not meet in December and will only have a November meeting. Tim Carroll, a County appointee, is the member whose term expires at the end of this month. Larry Hanson Stated that his term expired October 7, 2007 and Gary Moser's term expiration is October 7, 2007. Councilman Head inquired as to why they wanted to do this for one meeting and whether this would be just be for these people this year or the City's one representative. If so, he could possibly go along with the request; however, if he was concerned that there may be some members next year whose term expires in March and by doing this their term would not expire in March but at the end of the year. A member could end up serving

almost another year on the Planning Commission because of what they are proposing. Larry Hanson stated that all of the terms are on staggered years but the terms are the same so that all of the members' terms expire in October of each year. The terms for all future members would be changed to a December 31 date so this is the only group of people that would ever be affected because anyone you appoint now would be serving on a January 1 to December 31 term. The County has already voted to replace Tim Carroll with Billy Slaughter and his term would be effective January 1, 2008. Mayor Fretti stated that he was not aware that October was Planning Commission month so all four of the appointees are due in October. Larry Hanson stated that was correct but not all in the same year. Councilman Eunice stated that according to an article in the Valdosta Daily Times the other two names for Gary Moser's seat have already been published. Larry Hanson stated that was discussed in the Planning Commission Work Session and they will be taking action at the October 29th Planning Commission meeting. Mayor Fretti inquired as to the rationale for changing the terms to January instead of October. Larry Hanson stated that there was no real discussion in the Planning Commission meeting minutes as to the rationale except for having the terms on a calendar year basis. Councilman Vickers stated that they needed to ask the Planning Commission to provide Council with the rationale for the change in the term expiration date. Mayor Fretti stated that Council could deny the request, table the request, or accept it and table it for more information.

A MOTION by Councilman Vickers, seconded by Councilman Head, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to table the request to change the term expiration dates for the Greater Lowndes Planning Commission until the next City Council Meeting.

CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that "Make a Difference Day" will be held on Saturday, October 27, 2007 in the area north of River Street, St. Augustine Road, Hightower Street, and Hyde Park. Volunteers will meet at the St. Augustine Church of God at 8:00 a.m.

The Valdosta Police Department won another national award for technology which is the second time in three years. There were approximately 500 applicants nation-wide vying for this prestigious award, and Chief Frank Simons and Sgt. Earl Durrance traveled to New Orleans, Louisiana, to accept the award and a Laser Speed Device.

The Valdosta Fire Department has been successful in receiving grant funds and was notified this week that they will receive two grants totaling \$114,875 from the U. S. Department of Homeland Security and \$64,875 for Hazmat equipment and training. An additional \$50,000 was awarded for the Georgia Search and Rescue Team which is a 70-member team and one of only four in the State serving Valdosta and all of southwest Georgia.

John Whitehead, Deputy City Manager of Operations, was asked yesterday to attend the Keep America Beautiful State Banquet in Atlanta and Governor Sonny Perdue announced that the City of Valdosta was awarded a \$425,000 recycling grant which was one of only four grants awarded in the State for this new grant program. The City of Valdosta's grant was the second highest rated grant in the State and beat out communities like Athens-Clarke County and Dalton for this program. The grant will be used to expand the City's recycling facility and purchase additional equipment, and the State has asked us to be the regional collection center for recyclable materials in the southern portion of the State. We will serve a minimum of 50-mile radius and possibly as much as a 90-mile radius. Other municipalities will be bringing their recyclable materials to Valdosta for packaging. We would then sell the material to vendors and receive the revenue from it. This is a new initiative of the State and State officials who visited our facility were very impressed and had no idea that there was a government in South Georgia doing all the things that we are doing in the area of recycling.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilman Yost stated that the Open House at the Community Center on Gornto Road was a great success. Citizens were asked to complete a survey and provide information as to what they would like to see done with the Community Center. Councilman Yost thanked those Council members who were in attendance and also thanked Eric Hahn, Interim Parks and Recreation Director and his Staff for their efforts in getting the facility ready for the Open House. Larry Hanson stated that the Community Center has been very well received and will be an asset to that neighborhood and the community.

ADJOURNMENT

10/25/07 CONTINUED

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

A MOTION by Councilman Vickers, seconded by Councilman Head, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to adjourn the October 25, 2007 meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:09 p.m. and enter into Executive Session.

Mayor Pro Tem Head reconvened the regular City Council meeting at 7:17 p.m. and stated there was no action taken in Executive Session.

Mayor Pro Tem Head entertained a motion for adjournment.

A MOTION by Councilman Vickers, seconded by Councilman Eunice, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to adjourn the October 25, 2007 meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 7:17 p.m. to meet again in regular session on Thursday, November 8, 2007.

City Clerk, City of Valdosta

Mayor, City of Valdosta