

MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL
5:30 P.M., THURSDAY, MARCH 25, 2010
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, Deidra White, Robert Yost, and James Wright. Councilman Alvin Payton, Jr. arrived at 5:39 p.m., and Councilmen Tim Carroll and John Eunice were absent. The invocation was given by Councilman James Wright, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag. Mayor Fretti welcomed the Lowndes Youth Leadership League and congratulated them for being in the class and attempting to be the future leaders of our community.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the March 11, 2010 Regular Meeting were approved by unanimous consent (4-0) of the Council.

CITIZENS TO BE HEARD

There were no citizens to be heard.

ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS

ORDINANCE NO. 2010-11, AN ORDINANCE TO REVISE THE RADAR PERMIT AS REQUESTED BY THE GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Consideration of an Ordinance to revise the Radar Permit as requested by the Georgia Department of Transportation.

Von Shipman, City Engineer, stated that the Georgia Department of Public Safety issues radar permits to law enforcement agencies so that speed detection devices can be used to enforce the posted speed limit. The Georgia Department of Transportation (DOT) has recommended two changes from the previous permit. The first is the reduction of the speed limit from 70 mph to 65 mph on I-75 inside the City Limits. The second change relates to the time of school zones on State routes. The morning school zone is to begin 45 minutes prior to and 15 minutes after the start of the school day and the afternoon school zone is to begin 15 minutes prior to and 45 minutes after the end of the school day. The school zones listed as off-system (City controlled streets) will be reviewed by the Engineering Department and Police Department with input from the school systems to reflect the times when the school zone flashers need to be activated. This will require another revision prior to the new school year starting in August. Von Shipman recommended that Council approve the Ordinance to revise the radar permit as requested by the Georgia Department of Transportation. Councilman Yost inquired as to why the Georgia Department of Transportation wanted to reduce the speed limit on I-75. Von Shipman stated that the DOT has indicated that this is a safety issue in all metropolitan areas where the Interstate is within the corporate limits of the city or in the county and there is a high amount of traffic entering and exiting the Interstate. This is State-wide and not just limited to Valdosta. Councilman Yost stated that Council's vote was only a formality because the DOT would proceed with lowering the speed limit anyway. Von Shipman stated that the DOT would like to have Council's support for this and on the State routes where the City has no control; however, on the off-system roads, the City does have a say on the speed limit and can lower or raise it. Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that the State will post the speed limit on the Interstate as to what they want it to be and the only thing that will affect the City is that we will not be able run radar on the Interstate unless Council approves this. The City does not run radar on the Interstate so this is irrelevant but the speed limit will be 65 mph on the Interstate whether Council agrees or not. Mayor Fretti stated that the Lowndes County Sheriff's Department and the Georgia State Patrol handle that portion of the Interstate and the City does not need to put assets there and can concentrate their efforts within the City. Councilman Yost inquired as to when the speed limit change would be implemented. Von Shipman stated that he was not certain as to when the change would occur but would find out. Councilman Vickers stated that he

thought the City gave up the right to patrol the Interstate years ago because they did not want that responsibility. Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that the City made the decision not to patrol it but has the right to do so.

A **MOTION** by Councilman Vickers, seconded by Councilman Wright, was unanimously adopted (4-1) with Councilman Yost voting in opposition to an enact Ordinance No. 2010-11, an Ordinance to revise the radar permit as requested by the Georgia Department of Transportation, the complete text of which will be found in Ordinance Book XI.

BIDS, CONTRACTS, AGREEMENTS, AND EXPENDITURES

Consideration of a Memorandum of Understanding between the City of Valdosta Fire Department and the City of Hahira Fire Department for a Youth Fire Setter Intervention Program.

Fire Chief J. D. Rice stated that over the years Fire Departments have always had problems combating juvenile fire setting behaviors. These fires set by juveniles usually resulted in the adolescent being detained or ordered to a Detention Center. These are not viable options and have proven not to work, especially for first time offenders or small children. The City of Valdosta Fire Department has responded to over 36 fire alarms involving juveniles in the City of Valdosta Public Schools from 2005-2009. They have also responded to at least 6 house fires within the last 12 months involving juvenile fire setters. Sgt. Chris Feuerstein of the Valdosta Fire Department and Lt. Kufrovich from the City of Hahira Fire Department have been nationally certified through the State Fire Academy in a Juvenile Fire Setter Intervention Program. There was at least six alarm calls at Valdosta High School last year and St. Feuerstein recently received a call from S. L. Mason Elementary School about a child pulling the fire alarm. These children need counseling and can be taught about the dangers of what they are doing and the consequences of their actions. The City of Valdosta's Fire Department has partnered with the Department of Juvenile Justice, the Department of Family and Children Services, the Valdosta Police Department, the City of Hahira Police Department, and the City of Hahira Fire Department to help prevent the children from causing some serious problems. Councilman Vickers inquired as to why they were not doing this County-wide. Chief Rice stated that the Lowndes County Fire Department and the Lake Park Fire Department are not included in this MOU because they have not been through the training for juvenile intervention.

Sgt. Chris Feuerstein stated that the purpose of the program is to educate children and not to punish or label them. The children will be screened and the multi-disciplinary team will meet to decide if education is right course or if there are other reasons why the child is engaging in this type of behavior. All of the Departments involved have pledged their services to ensure that the child does not do this again. After the intervention, they will follow up on a periodic basis. Mayor Fretti inquired as to whether there were Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) funds to help with the minor costs of the program. Sgt. Feuerstein stated that they do have a FEMA grant. Mayor Fretti stated that when a fire alarm is pulled as a prank the Fire Department sends a lot of assets to react to that alarm and maybe we can prevent that from happening as well as save lives. Chief Rice stated that to send an apparatus to a fire alarm they typically send three engine trucks, a ladder truck, a Battalion Chief, and a rescue truck so they are rolling approximately \$2-\$3 million in equipment. Sgt. Feuerstein stated that it costs \$270 per hour for them to go to a fire alarm and there are 120 firefighters killed each year in traffic accidents when going to a fire alarm.

Chief Rice stated that as part of a Community Fire Protection and Safety Initiative, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) must be executed between the City of Valdosta and the City of Hahira, Georgia and their respective Fire Departments. The MOU will be presented to both the City of Valdosta and the City of Hahira Mayor and Councils for adoption. The Community Fire Protection and Safety Initiative will be known as the Valdosta/Hahira Youth Fire Setter Intervention Program. The Program will address fires that are set in both schools and the homes involving juveniles. It will also focus on children that activate fire alarms while on school property and those that show a pattern of being disruptive in regards to fire and/or burn prevention. This MOU is considered only as a recommendation of both Fire Departments in an effort to improve their relationship with the children, their parents, and other local officials in the Fire Safety area. Chief Rice recommended that Council approve the Memorandum of Understanding between the City of Valdosta Fire Department and the City of Hahira Fire Department for a Youth Fire Setter Intervention Program.

A **MOTION** by Councilman Wright, seconded by Councilman Payton, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to approve the Memorandum of Understanding between the City of Valdosta Fire Department and the City of Hahira Fire Department for a Youth Fire Setter Intervention Program.

Consideration of a request to approve emergency stream bank repairs on Sugar Creek.

Von Shipman, City Engineer, stated that the City requested emergency funding from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) after the April, 2009 flood to make stream bank repairs on a section of Sugar Creek north of Gornto Road. A grant in the amount of \$600,000 was approved earlier this month to help the City with these repairs as well as stream stabilization work on Brown's Canal between Lamar Street and West Street. The work on Sugar Creek is needed immediately to protect a large sanitary sewer main from becoming exposed and to improve the flow of this major tributary of the Withlacoochee River. Approximately \$100,000 was awarded for this particular repair and \$500,000 was awarded for Brown's Canal project. The City is responsible for a 20% match which will come from SPLOST VI drainage funds. The Engineering Department will be meeting with area contractors on March 23, 2010 in order to receive sealed bids by 5:00 p.m. on March 30, 2010. The lowest responsible contractor will be selected with the stipulation that work must begin on April 5, 2010. Because the work will exceed \$50,000, Council is asked to approve an emergency declaration for this work to proceed without following the normal bidding procedures. There is a time limit of 240 days for this emergency work to be completed. Von Shipman, City Engineer, recommended that Council approve emergency stream bank repairs on Sugar Creek. Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that Council will be pre-authorizing the City Engineer to approve a bid because if it is within what the City Engineer would have recommended they can proceed with the repairs without having to wait until the next Council meeting. Mayor Fretti stated that a lot of this work is due to the flood damage that occurred last April. The City of Valdosta has realized that we are 1% of the drainage basin which is 1,500 square miles and we are all downhill from there. Some of the facilities north of us either were not designed to handle that volume of water or there were not enough facilities. The City of Valdosta is now doing some long range regional planning since we are at the end of the line. Von Shipman stated that our Consultant and City Staff will be traveling to Savannah on April 13, 2010 to meet with the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources to discuss the multiple projects in the Sugar Creek Basin area. They will begin the legwork for permitting so that the design and permitting will go forward together and accelerate some of the water control measures. Councilman Yost stated that the City has been criticized by the Valdosta Daily Times and others about what has not been done since the flooding and asked that the newspaper print some of the before and after pictures of the removal of the sandbars on Sugar Creek to help educate the public about what the City is currently doing and what has been done in the past.

A **MOTION** was made by Councilman Yost to approve emergency stream bank repairs on Sugar Creek. Councilman Wright seconded the motion. Councilman Vickers stated that the Sugar Creek Basin is right at the Withlacoochee River Basin and they are not going to be able to solve the Sugar Creek problems if there is a heavy rain in a short period of time because of the water coming down. It will impossible to solve the problem until they get something done up the road to hold some of this water and slow it down. Mayor Fretti stated that he agreed and the primary repair on this project will be protecting the big sewer pipe going across Sugar Creek and taking out some of the sandy deposits; however, there is no need to expend a lot of money locally if the problem is not fixed regionally. The motion was unanimously adopted (5-0).

LOCAL FUNDING AND REQUESTS

Consideration of a request to approve the FY2010 Annual Action Plan allocating Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds. This request was postponed by Mayor and Council at the March 11, 2010 regular Council Meeting until the March 25, 2010 regular Council Meeting.

Mara Register, Assistant to the City Manager, stated that the City of Valdosta was designated an Entitlement Community in December, 2003 by the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and they require the City to adopt an Annual Action Plan which outlines the City's proposed use of funds allocated under the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. The proposed FY 2010 Annual Action Plan was reviewed by the CDBG Advisory Committee on January 12, 2010 and it was recommended that the bulk of the \$597,475 allocation be put into public housing. The breakdown of those funds is as follows: (1) first time

homebuyer education (single-unit residential rehabilitation) - \$378,980, (2) public facilities (improvements at J. L. Lomax Park) - \$50,000, (3) clearance and demolition of vacant lots and dilapidated buildings - \$50,000, and (4) program administration - \$118,495. A Public Hearing was held on February 17, 2010 to solicit preliminary comments from the community regarding the proposed plan and an additional Public Hearing will be held on March 15, 2010 as required by HUD. Upon approval by the Mayor and City Council, the proposed Plan will then be subject to an additional 30-day public comment period before submission to HUD by May 15, 2010. Mara Register recommended that Council approve the FY2010 Annual Action Plan allocating Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds.

A MOTION by Councilman Vickers, seconded by Councilman Payton, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to approve the FY2010 Annual Action Plan allocating Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds.

CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that the City of Valdosta's Human Resources Department received a grant from the Lowndes County Board of Health for the City's Wellness Program. This is the first grant of its kind to be awarded in the State of Georgia. The Human Resources Department implemented a Walk for Fitness Program for employees to increase nutritional awareness and physical activity. There will both a pre-medical and post health evaluation to measure the results. This is one of the many things the City is doing to help improve wellness and reduce medical expenses.

The Great American Clean-up will be held on Saturday, April 17, 2010 from 8:30 a.m. until 11:30 a.m. There will be several sites within the City that will be targeted for cleaning of litter and debris.

The City's Metro Channel 17 will air the recommendations of the Community Task Force on Violence on Tuesday, March 30, 2010 at 7:00 p.m.

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Observance Program will be held on Saturday, April 3, 2010 at 1:00 p.m. at the new MLK Memorial Park and Council is invited to attend.

The inaugural class of City Government 101 will be held on Monday, April 5, 2010 from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers.

The Georgia Cities Week will be held April 18-24, 2010 and the Georgia Municipal Association will be hosting the Heart and Soul Tour which includes a group of State leaders who will be visiting the City of Valdosta and the Downtown area.

The City of Valdosta will be working with the Valdosta Daily Times to help promote a Teen Work Program through the Georgia Department of Human Resources. This is a great program and local businesses can essentially have free labor paid for with Stimulus Funds. Young people from the ages of 14-18 can sign up, work 35 hours per week, and make \$8.50 and work for the months of June and July.

There will be a Welcome Home Celebration for the Alpha Company, 2nd Battalion, 121st Infantry Brigade on Wednesday, March 31st from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. There will be a parade in their honor and citizens are encouraged to attend to show their support and appreciation of those from our community who have participated in conflicts.

Larry Hanson, City Manager stated that he and Councilman James Wright will be attending the Census Awareness Rural Strategy Program tonight at Scott Park. Citizens will be educated about the importance of completing a Census form and encouraged to fill it out.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilman Vickers stated that he did not take this lightly but in some flood prone areas of our community it might be more economically feasible to give up homes and relocate residents. They lost the opportunity to look

at that during the last storm. Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that according to FEMA and other experts that event was once in 500 years and we hope that is what it will be. Under FEMA regulations they would not consider acquiring property unless it happened on multiple occasions. Given the circumstances, the City has done what was appropriate and assisted the homeowners in getting the maximum amount of funding that was eligible. Though for most it was not all that they needed but it was a tremendous help. We are now doing all that we can to minimize or avoid any future occurrence. The work on Sugar Creek is appropriate and the Mayor spoke at a Regional Water Council Meeting today at Valdosta Technical College about this very issue and they have committed to help begin the process of addressing this regionally. There will have to be a lot of upstream storage capacity built because we are 1% of that watershed and 99% of the water comes from as far away as Ashburn and Tifton and we are left with the consequences.

Councilman Wright stated that Alpha Company has been deployed for approximately two years in Afghanistan and people do not realize that these are everyday citizens who take up arms to defend this country when they are called upon. Within 90 days they will be deactivated and will return back to a normal society; however, the stress and problems that they may have deserves a lot more than what we will be doing. Councilman Wright stated that he would like to work with the Mayor and others to look out for the Veterans who look out for us.

Mayor Fretti stated that security issues were discussed at the Mayor and Council Retreat and because of a shooting two years ago in another city where there were some fatalities at a City Council meeting, Police Chief Frank Simons was asked to provide some recommendations on security for this building. The recommendations and cost estimates that Chief Simons provided were to the highest degree of security. Council wants a Chief that will make recommendations to the highest degree of security and it is then up to Council to decide what they want to do. After much discussion at the Mayor and Council Retreat, it was decided that there really was not a call for any security measures for Council; however, there will be some electronic updates on call buttons and video camera monitoring at the Police Department at a cost of less than \$2,500.

Mayor Fretti asked for one of the participants in the Lowndes Youth Leadership League to speak to Council about what it means to them. Alexis Close stated that this has been an interesting experience and she has met a lot of people from different schools. This has provided them with an opportunity to come together and learn about fields so that they can be successful in the future and take the right path. Mayor thanked Ms. Close for her comments.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Fretti entertained a motion for adjournment.

A **MOTION** by Councilman Yost, seconded by Councilman Wright, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to adjourn the March 25, 2010 meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:15 p.m. to meet again in regular session on Thursday, April 8, 2010.

City Clerk, City of Valdosta

Mayor, City of Valdosta