

MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL
5:30 P.M., THURSDAY, APRIL 21, 2011
COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY HALL

OPENING CEREMONIES

Mayor Pro Tem Payton called the regular meeting of the Valdosta City Council to order at 5:30 p.m. Council members present were: Sonny Vickers, Tim Carroll, Jr., Ben Norton, Deidra White, and James Wright. The invocation was given by Mayor Pro Tem Payton, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag. Councilman Robert Yost arrived late at 5:35 p.m. and Mayor John Fretti was absent.

AWARDS AND PRESENTATIONS

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

Mayor Pro Tem Payton stated that cities across our State celebrate Georgia Cities Week during the third week of April each year with activities that highlight the programs and services that enhance the quality of life for our citizens. In Valdosta, we participate in several activities such as the Great American Clean Up, Customer Service Day, the Employee Blood Drive, Job Shadow Day for Valdosta High School students, and the Employee Appreciation Luncheon. One of the favorite activities during Georgia Cities Week is the "*If I Were Mayor*" sixth grade essay contest. This contest challenges sixth grade students in our community to use their grade level writing skills and civic knowledge to express in 350 words or less what they would do if they had the Mayor's job. In recent years, there have seen some incredible and thought provoking work by our local students and this year's winners are no exception. It is with great pleasure that we have invited the following winners of this year's contest to be present at the Council Meeting: (1) Third Place - Allie Smotherman (Valdosta Middle School), (2) Second Place - Thomas Eager (Valdosta Middle School), and (3) First Place - Maggie Mizell (Valdosta Middle School). There were more than 6,000 essays were submitted from cities across the state of Georgia, and 653 from our Congressional District 11. These were judged for an additional Statewide competition. It is with great pleasure to announce that Maggie Mizell's essay, though it did not win first place for our district, was a close finalist for the Divisions best essays received which is very commendable. This contest would not be possible without the commitment and support of Dr. David Cole, Principal at Valdosta Middle School, and Mr. Chris Bittinger, these students' teacher. This is a wonderful event and all of these students are to be commended. They are wonderful representatives of our City and we are very proud of each of you.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the April 7, 2011 Regular Meeting were approved by unanimous consent (6-0) of the Council.

CITIZENS TO BE HEARD

J. Holder Smith, Jr., 1019 Cherrywood Circle, stated that he is an attorney and represents Roy Taylor. Mr. Smith stated that he wanted to address the issue of the Mayor's expense reimbursement for attendance at Board Meetings of the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) in Atlanta. Earlier today, Council members were provided with a packet of information which pertains to this issue and has been in the press this week as well. Mr. Smith stated that he had three requests on behalf of Mr. Taylor for Council's consideration. The first request is for the City Council to instruct the City Attorney, George Talley, to write a letter to the Department of Community Affairs asking the DCA to reimburse the City for certain mileage expenses that Mayor Fretti repaid to the DCA in September, 2010. Everyone is aware that the Mayor was receiving reimbursement for mileage for attendance at these meetings both from the City and the DCA. In September, 2010, the Mayor repaid a little over \$2,000 to the DCA for that mileage. Subsequently, he wrote another check in the amount of \$218 for one additional mileage check that he received from the DCA. Interestingly, these repayments came shortly after an Open Records Request was made to the DCA back in July, 2010. The reason for this request is that Mayor Fretti was 100% entitled to get mileage from the DCA because they have funding to reimburse Board members for travel expenses and there is nothing wrong with him requesting reimbursement from DCA for attending a meeting. Mr. Smith stated that he

assumed all of the other Board members are doing the same. The problem is that if the Mayor was going to repay those mileage expenses it should have been repaid to the City of Valdosta and not the DCA. Mr. Smith wrote a letter to Mike Beatty, Commissioner of the DCA, earlier this week asking this very same thing. Mr. Smith stated that he and Mr. Taylor both feel that this request will have a lot more magnitude if it comes directly from the City. Also, the money that the Mayor paid back to DCA was mileage only. The second request concerns hotel and meal expenses. During each time the Mayor would attend a meeting at the DCA in Atlanta, he would receive a \$105 per diem for hotel and meals. On the DCA forms, it specifically states that the daily per diem allowance is in lieu of payment for actual expenses incurred for meals and lodging. At that same time, the Mayor turned in expense reimbursements and received expense reimbursements from the City of Valdosta for the actual cost of meals and lodging. Mr. Smith stated that the second request is for the City Council to request the Mayor to refund the amount he received for meals and for hotels because he got a per diem for those same exact expenses from the DCA. Mr. Smith stated that they were asking the City Council to instruct the Mayor to reimburse or repay those expenses for which he received reimbursement directly back to the City. The third request, which may be the most important one, is to ask the City Council to convene a committee to make an inquiry into this matter. The focus of this Committee of Inquiry should be two fold. The first focus should be what should happen in the form of punishment or discipline to the Mayor, if any, for the fact that he knowingly received double reimbursement for these mileage expenses. The second focus of this Committee of Inquiry should be what procedure or protocol the City can implement to make sure that nothing like this can ever happen again. George Talley, City Attorney, inquired as to what legal authority the City should proceed with for these three things. Mr. Smith stated that for the first request, the Mayor was going on DCA business and he repaid funds to the DCA that he was legally entitled to; however, he did not have a specific Code section or case that says the DCA has to pay the City back. Mr. Talley inquired as to whether this was now under investigation by the District Attorney's office. Mr. Smith stated that was correct. Mr. Talley stated that it would be wise for the City to wait and see what the District Attorney decides before any action is taken. Mr. Smith stated that he felt the money was owed to the taxpayers and, in the big scheme of things, it is not a lot of money. Mr. Talley stated that Mr. Smith was entitled to his opinion but it would be wise for the City to wait and see what the District Attorney decides before we take any action. Mr. Smith stated that he disagreed with Mr. Talley because that money is owed to the City and there is no doubt about that. The money has already been repaid. Mr. Talley stated that he did not have all of the information that was supplied to the Mayor and Council but he would look into it. Also, the City may not have the authority as mentioned under Mr. Smith's second request. Mr. Smith inquired as to whether the City Council could not simply ask the Mayor to repay the money back. Mr. Talley stated that it would be wiser if the City waited and let the District Attorney's office decide what action should be taken before we do this. Mr. Smith stated that he did not want to infringe upon any investigation that is going on outside of the City Council and he did not want to comment on it; however, the event has already happened and either a crime has been committed or it hasn't and he agreed that it should be within the purview of the District Attorney. What is here and now is that the taxpayers of the City of Valdosta, in his opinion, should be paid back. It is not a lot of money, but it is the point that our elected officials should not be doing that. This would not affect any other investigation in any way. Mr. Talley stated that, in his opinion, the Mayor is paid every month and the City is not going to lose money over this thing and we need to wait and let the District Attorney's office make a decision and then we will proceed. Mr. Smith stated that a committee was recently convened to address certain allegations made against a City Council member. Mr. Talley stated that was because an ethical complaint was filed under the City's Ethics Ordinance. If a complaint is filed then we are required to do that, but without one being filed, this governing body may not be able to go out and start doing that. Mr. Smith stated that they could make sure that happens. Mayor Pro Tem Payton inquired as to whether he was going to file an ethics complaint. Mr. Smith stated that he would consult with his client but that would be his recommendation.

Roy E. Taylor, Sr., 2209 Bridlewood Drive, stated that he wanted to suggest an idea to Council. Many of the citizens have come before Council and talked and talked and Council has listened but they have not heard their concerns or answered them. Mr. Taylor suggested to the City Manager and his Assistant this week that on the first Saturday before the first Regular Council Meeting and the Work Session there could be a meeting for citizens to be heard and answered from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Mr. Taylor asked for Council's consideration in granting his request.

Nolen Cox, 1009 Cherry Creek Drive, stated that he reviewed some of the expense accounts and it was interesting. He has been on an expense account since 1965, from a big corporation to a small company, and he knows the standard reporting procedures. When someone is entertained on an expense account, you are supposed

to put their name, who they work for, and the purpose of the entertainment. He has never seen that on any of these expense accounts. That is a standard procedure and a good business practice and he encouraged Council to adopt it. Mr. Cox stated that all of his sales people fill that out and it is an IRS requirement. He was not certain as to why the City does not do that, but it is very sloppy bookkeeping and accounting the way it is being done. Mr. Cox stated that he was a concerned citizen and his goal is to take our City back. He is tired of the regulations, expenses, and his money being wasted. He is tired of the Mayor and Council buying lunches and dinner tickets which is just as egregious as what the Mayor did. He does not agree with the City's legal counsel in that it is proper for the City to buy dinners and spend money on stuff. He belongs to non-profit organizations and he has never come before Council to ask for anything because ethically it is not right and legally, you are not supposed to spend taxpayers' money to enhance other people without taxpayer approval. Mr. Cox encouraged Council to look at these charges and other issues because there is a lot of progress that needs to be made. Mr. Talley, City Attorney, stated that he has not rendered any such opinion that Mr. Cox just stated and he wanted to correct that. Mr. Cox stated that Mr. Talley said that according to the City Council that it was okay to buy tables of lunches and that it was legal to do that. Mr. Talley stated that he did not recall what occasion that was and he would speak with Mr. Cox later.

Dan Davis, 1001 Cherry Creek Drive, stated that the Travel Policy was addressed a few months ago but it needs to be readdressed. There needs to be much better accounting measures. He has been in business for 36 years and he has had sales reps that worked for him all around the country and he would not approve a single one of these travel vouchers on the expense reports that he has looked at. That is not proper business accounting or practices. The City should be requiring detailed receipts and not just charge card receipts because then there would be no discussion about what happened with a \$2,000 steak dinner with an additional \$500 tip. The Council needs to reel in the Mayor's travel and it should be approved by the Council. He should not be able to make 20 or 30 trips a year to the Ritz Carlton or Las Vegas and have the taxpayers pick up the bill for it. It is appalling to the taxpayers. Without a detailed receipt, there is no telling how many people were there and if there were a couple of \$600 bottles of wine. If you ever have the pleasure of going through an IRS audit you better have those detailed receipts or they will disallow it. This is what the business community does with their money and Council should be required to do the same with the taxpayers' money. Mr. Davis stated that he understood that there is required travel and expenses necessary in conducting business, but there should be much better accounting in place where the taxpayers can see what is going on. Another suggestion is that the Council meetings could be televised and done fairly simple. People in the community would like to know what is going on. Mr. Davis asked Council's consideration in getting serious about the travel and adding some lame duck language back to the Travel Policy.

Robert Hall, 18 West Adair Street, stated that he received a disturbing E-mail yesterday and it stated that members of Council do not have to vote on the sale of gray water to the proposed Biomass incinerator. Once again, he feels that Council is shirking their responsibilities and using Henry Hicks, Utilities Director, as a scape goat in this matter. Mr. Hicks has nothing to lose in this matter. On any given day, Mr. Hicks could do just like Brad Lofton, former Executive Director of the Valdosta-Lowndes County Industrial Authority, and put in his resignation and go back to Ocala, Florida and live a happy life leaving these children to be exposed to Dioxin which will be spewing from the Biomass Plant. This is wrong and Dr. King always said that there is never a right way to do wrong. Council needs to step up and take the responsibility that the people elected them to do. They need to give an up or down vote on this thing so that people will know where they stand and stop trying to shirk their responsibility and pass this off on someone else. This is not Mr. Hicks' responsibility. Mr. Hall stated that he worked for the City of Valdosta for ten years at the Wastewater Treatment Plant and he knows what comes out of there. The biosolids are nothing more than human feces so why would we would to expose the innocent children to this. Mr. Hall stated that he doubted anyone who was here today would want to take any of the feces from the Wastewater Treatment Plant and put it in their oven and burn it. Council should not pass this off on Mr. Hicks because that is wrong and it should not happen. Mr. Hall stated that for those Council members up for re-election this year, he will do everything humanly possible to see that they do not get re-elected. There is a lot of cancer on the Southside of town and it is not by accident and he was tired of it.

Roger Budd, III, 5 Cherokee Circle, stated that we live in a troubled time. The Middle East and countries around the world are experiencing uprising and civil unrest. The United States is also a country facing troubled times. We are in a war of ideas between those who believe in the principals upon which this country was founded which are liberty, capitalism, hard work, and freedom from government oppression. Our enemies in this war are those who wish to take our liberties, rights, and property and make the people subject to the all-powerful

government and its ruling elite. These people are socialists and communists and what they want to do with America is not the way it is supposed to be. His battleground in this war is in Valdosta. He is down here every day fighting for business and against the forces of government oppression. For example, on November 16, 2010, Jeremiah Horn with Maryland Fried Chicken contacted Mr. Budd about constructing a building on a vacant piece of property on Ashley Street so that he could operate a Maryland Fried Chicken. They made a deal and on November 30, 2010, they submitted plans to build the new restaurant. In the almost five months since then, between an architect, an engineer, a general contractor, and resubmitting plan revisions four times, they have not been able to get a building permit let alone a business license. This is a person who wants to come into our community, create jobs for construction workers, tradesmen, food service employees and their families, and to bring business into our community and pay taxes but he can't. These people are being kept out of business and out of the City of Valdosta by the burdensome requirements of the City's Land Development Regulations (LDR) and the needless red tape created by its enforcers in the City government. Mr. Budd stated that since this was the day before Good Friday, he wanted to read the following passage from the Bible, the Book of Isaiah, Chapter 10, Verses 1 and 2: "Woe to those who are enacting harmful regulation and those who constantly writing, have written out sheer trouble, in order to push away the lowly ones from a legal case and to wrest away justice from the afflicted ones of my people." Mr. Budd stated that this LDR has brought woe until the people of the City of Valdosta and to those who brought it here, this Book says woe unto you. Mr. Budd stated that he wanted a vote tonight to repeal the LDR and go back to the Ordinances the way they existed prior to its adoption. He would like to ask any City Council member for support on this position. Councilman Vickers inquired as to where the new building was to be located. Mr. Budd stated that it was at 1406 North Ashley Street across the street from the Coca Cola Plant.

Leigh Touchton, 610 Mack Drive, stated that she is the President of the NAACP and distributed a letter to Council from the NAACP branch requesting a position statement from each Council member and the Mayor on selling gray water to Wiregrass, LLC who wants to build the Biomass incinerator. Ms. Touchton stated that they wanted it in writing because she was told that none of the Council members were ever going to deliver their position publicly and that is unacceptable. She was also told that Henry Hicks, Utilities Director, is the person who is being put out there as the front person for what is going to happen with the gray water. That is unacceptable too. She was told that Larry Hanson, City Manager, is hired by the Council and then he hires all of the people like Henry Hicks. Ms. Touchton asked that Council members turn to Larry Hanson and ask him to tell Henry Hicks that they do not want to sell gray water to the Biomass Plant. Ms. Touchton stated that if Henry Hicks wants to keep his job and if Larry Hanson wants to do what is best for Valdosta, she was sure that would be conveyed to Mr. Hicks. Council's influence will be felt by the Utilities Director just as every Utilities Director in America feels the influence from their respective governing bodies. Ms. Touchton stated that she wanted to give Council the following ten reasons to give to Henry Hicks as to what he could tell Wiregrass, LLC as to why the City cannot sell them the gray water: (1) The City has never sold gray water to a company before and they do not want to set a precedent that would be dangerous. (2) The Mud Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant is probably not technologically advanced enough to handle the concentrated slurry that is going to come back to the Plant after the gray water is vaporized. (3) Valdosta does not want to spend millions of dollars to repair that Plant when the concentrated and very caustic slurry comes back into it. Nothing like that has ever come through the Plant before and what comes through the pipes in the normal course of storm drains and sewage runoff is nothing compared to the concentrated evil of that slurry. (4) The City has not been shown adequate health studies from any health organization to ascertain whether the vaporization of gray water is safe for humans to breathe. Gray water is not the same as potable water and it will not be steam coming out of the Plant. Even though it has been treated once it still contains heavy metals and other pollutants that are dangerous. (5) The EPA does not have a permitting process that covers the sale and vaporization of gray water and the City does not want to do anything that the EPA has not signed off on. (6) The area where the Biomass incinerator is located is near two City schools and the City is concerned about the students. (7) It is near the City's largest Head Start Program which has 165 students and there have been no studies submitted to the EPA on the safety of children breathing vaporized gray water. (8) The area has already been designated an Environmental Justice Community by the EPA and the City believes in the EPA. (9) Many of the citizens in Valdosta attend church in this area and their health will be negatively impacted. (10) Many of the citizens in Valdosta have relatives in the Sands Horizon Assisted Living facility and Valdosta leaders are respectful of the right of the elderly to breathe clean air. Valdosta does not want to establish a precedent of becoming the dumping ground for dirty industry that Atlanta will not allow which is primarily because of the wealthy Atlanta investors wanting to relocate down south where they think people do not understand and will not fight back when a dirty industry comes to town. Ms. Touchton stated that she wanted to suggest to the two Council

members who have gone public on this issue, Councilman Wright and Councilman Vickers, and who support the Biomass boondoggle, the Georgia State Conference of the NAACP is solidly against Biomass here, Biomass in Lithonia, and Biomass anywhere in the nation. Medgar Evers was a field marshal with the NAACP and he sacrificed his life so that Councilman Wright and Councilman Vickers could sit up there today. It is shameful that they have taken a position contrary to the NAACP.

John Robinson, 3227 San Juline Circle, Lake Park, stated that he wanted to discuss the economic changes that are needed in our City in order to get money on the Southside. He has been in discussions about the Martin Luther King, Jr. Corridor Project and things are coming along good. There is a tremendous problem in Valdosta and he is tired of children robbing stores and problems in Hudson Dockett and Ora Lee West. Mr. Robinson stated that he was tired of the underworld in our City where people have to trade in stamps to pay their bills and drugs are sold on the street. He is working with people in Washington, D.C. and they are talking about building an international model based upon our attitude and conduct and how we work together. He is working with the Chief of Staff and they are bringing in people from other areas to discuss the positive aspects. It is time we start talking about some real business and things that are happening in people's lives. The bottom line is that we need some money and jobs and to think positive about what we need to do. We need to find a way to drown the old worn out issues that we keep thriving on. We know we have problems with school boards and other issues that need to be resolved, but we cannot resolve them if we do not get money on the Southside which has always been neglected. They have never had anything over there. There is a VSEB Program that we need to get off the ground and operate. We need to come together as a group of people and start learning how to talk to one another. We do not need to fight over all these issues. Mr. Robinson stated that he will work hard to get something done, but they will not get any place if they keep bickering about things that do not make any sense. We need some progression to be made and we need to find some method to start talking to each other and come up with something positive.

Karen Noll, 2305 Glynndale Drive, stated that she lives in Councilman Carroll's district and is a speech language pathologist. She is trained to diagnose and treat communication disorders and Council is diagnosable. There are some real communication problems here but they are not restricted to Biomass which she thought they were. Maybe you all need to come to the clinic and get some help because at Valdosta State University they have a nice clinic with reasonable fees and they like to support the community. Ms. Noll stated that she has been communicating with Council on this specific issue for almost a year. Last May she began communicating with Councilman Carroll and expressing her concerns about the proposed Biomass Plant. He referred her to now the Ex-Director of the Industrial Authority, Brad Lofton. She corresponded with him for a few months last summer and in the fall she began attending Council meetings and other meetings to make her concerns known publicly. She presented articles, documents about research from medical associations and journals, resolutions, and letters, and they have gotten no response. Ms. Noll stated that she has presented more than 500 signatures of citizens who are concerned about the proposed Biomass Plant and the harm that it will cause them and their families. In that letter, they asked for Council to take action. No action has been taken and after many reminders, she was finally awarded a response from her elected official who said to wait and see. Ms. Noll stated that she has waited a year and that is not acceptable. Councilman Vickers may find this to be drama and he is entitled to his opinion, but unlike Sterling Planet, she is a real live person and she lives here. Her son and daughter, who are usually here tonight but are luckily outside not having to sit through this boring meeting, have been here through many meetings because they do not have grandparents nearby who can watch them when they are busy. They have watched them respectfully address this body and get no answers so when Councilman Carroll says to wait and see, she would like for him to look in her children's eyes and tell them to wait and see what some big company in Atlanta is going to decide for our community because that is unacceptable. Ms. Noll stated that she and her family have dedicated almost a year to fight this project, has received no response from the elected officials, and now she is supposed to worry about some company saving face. With more than 500 signatures and more than 500 concerned citizens begging Council to care, the last group in this debacle that needs to have face saving is Sterling Planet. It is Council, Ms. Noll, and this community that needs to save face for not sitting together and creating a solution for our community to remedy this. Ms. Noll stated that she was going to be meeting with Councilman Carroll tomorrow and she did not care if it was going to take another year because this is not just some Biomass Plant. It is a lot more than that. Ms. Noll asked that they work toward a resolution that this community will only move forward on clean energy projects. She will be talking with each Council member within the next few months to get their views on this and she will meet with the City Manager to see how they can bring this forward. Ms. Noll stated that she would like to see a clean energy future for Valdosta.

George Boston Rhynes, 5004 Oak Drive, stated that he wanted to remind Council in September, 1998, Willie James Williams died in the Lowndes County jail. They stood and protested throughout the City and County and asked for answers. There were 15 people who were arrested for trying to be heard at City Council on a select committee that was later formed. Not one person on that committee did the leg work to get that name changed and it was changed. Mr. Rhynes stated that he has been trying to get the number of blacks and poor whites who have received contracts with the City. They are concerned about Federal money coming into the community. They have addressed many issues and over the many years they thought it was a black problem; however, at the last few City Council meetings, we now see that it is a powder keg of problems. We see that the people in this community are fed up and want change so when you write on his blog, don't think that George Rhynes is addressing a personal issue because he has a vendetta against any of you. They have been waiting for a long time and he has been asking the question, "When will change come?" In 2004, there was an 1860 Charter on the wall at City Hall and it was removed because of the same thing you hear today. People are fed up, they want change, and they want it now. Mr. Rhynes stated that he did not want to see all of Council removed, but if the Mayor and certain others continue to go on certain radio stations and down and belittle our President by just the appearance of being on a station and you all sit here and do not say anything, then we believe in the old philosophy that silence gives consent. We want a change.

CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated the Electronic Recycling Event was held in April and it was very successful. There were 37,906 pounds of electronic recycling material collected which is approximately 19 tons. It included 58 televisions, 172 PCs, and 201 computer monitors that were recycled instead of disposed of in a landfill.

The City partnered with Goodwill, LAMP, Coastal Plains, and the United Way for the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program this year. It was extremely successful and as of last Friday, there were 317 tax returns processed with a total refund amount of \$581,865. That is money that came back to citizens in our community who would have perhaps otherwise not known they were entitled to it or filed for it. It was very positive that we had a hand in helping our citizens with their tax returns.

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that earlier this week he had an opportunity along with John Whitehead, Deputy City Manager of Operations, and Mara Register, Assistant to the City Manager, to visit the Valdosta Transitional Center. The City was the first customer of the Transitional Center which is a place where those who have been in prison are given an opportunity to begin working and transitioning back into the community. The City has been used as a reference and now there are many other businesses who are participating in the program. This has been very successful and has only been open since 2007. Since that time, 350 men have completed the program and the average employment rate for those that are there is 92%. To house a person in prison it costs \$60.49 per day and to house a person in the Transitional Center is \$29.76. The State of Georgia has the fourth largest prison system in the United States and what is good about this program is that the Transitional Center, and others like it, have already been proven to reduce recidivism by 33%. The average length of stay for these gentlemen is six to nine months. Once they are employed, they pay 30% of their salary toward the cost of room and board. In 2010, the Valdosta Transitional Center collected over \$280,000 from those people living there and that money was returned to the State of Georgia to help support the Transitional Center. Larry Hanson stated that he was proud that the City continues to employ men who are in the Transitional Center and there are a number of them working in Public Works and one at the Police Department. They heard the personal testimonies of two individuals, one who was in prison for 25 years for murder and is now working at Langdale Industries and is doing a very good job, and one who is working at Slap Daddy's. It was very rewarding to go out and meet with many of the men living there and know that the City is supporting that program.

This week is Georgia Cities Week and we have had a very successful week. Yesterday we had a Job Shadowing Day and there were 32 students from Valdosta High School who spent the day with us. We spent time talking to them about the things they need to do in order to prepare themselves for employment. They spent the morning with different departments and it was a great experience for these young people. They were encouraged become involved in careers in local government and inspired to stay in school to get a good education.

The Police Department had a successful CALEA onsite visit which consummated on Monday night with a public hearing which went extremely well. Chief Frank Simons feels very optimistic about reaccreditation of the Police Department.

There was an Employee Appreciation Luncheon today at Saunders Park to thank the City employees who deliver the services to our citizens and do a great job.

The Great American Cleanup was held last week in conjunction with Keep Lowndes-Valdosta Beautiful and it was very successful. The City of Valdosta's site included the Tom's Park area and there were 12.16 tons of junk, litter, and debris collected. There were 43 volunteers and 373 participants involved in the cleanup.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilman Yost stated that he hoped they were not boring the citizens to death at the meeting by conducting the City's business. That statement is very offensive to everyone who sits here and to every citizen who lives in this City. Council members work for the citizens and they sit through these meetings and listen to the citizens. He wants them to have every right to stand at the microphone every week to come here and speak and he will fight for that right; however, some people need to have the common courtesy to respect Council's decisions and their voices just as Council respects the citizens' right to stand up there. Approximately 99.9% of them do not throw stones at the citizens or mob them when they have something to say that they don't like. Councilman Yost stated that he appreciated those citizens who come up here and speak their views and he wants to hear it every time whether he agrees with it or not. Councilman Yost also thanked the citizens who sat through the entire meeting to hear the City's business instead of running out like some do after they sit here and yell, rant, and rave and then get up and march out. They do not listen to the most important parts of the meeting which is the votes they take that affects each and every citizen. Councilman Yost also thanked Sementha Mathews, Public Information Officer, and the team for their efforts in celebrating Georgia Cities Week. They did an excellent job and he appreciated the opportunity to serve the City employees who work for each and every one of us.

Councilman Wright stated that the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program was responsible for putting a half million dollars back into our community. This is a program where citizens can have their taxes done for free and they do not have to go to someone who might charge a large amount to have their taxes done. Councilman Wright stated that he learned about this in a National League of Cities class and this is a way to help people to get involved in society. Councilman Wright thanked the City for its support of this Program. Councilman Wright also stated that when comments are attributed to him and are taken out of context he wanted to address that. He does not believe now, and has never believed, that they would purposely do things to kill or harm people. If they disagree on that then they disagree, but to belittle and demean someone is not Christian like and we will all have to deal with it in the end. May God bless you.

Councilman Vickers stated that the Travel Policy will need to be addressed again at some point in time, but he did agree with the City Attorney that this is in the District Attorney's hands and we need to see if an ethics complaint is filed. We need to follow the advice of the City Attorney even though some of the things raised tonight do have some merit. Some of the Council members have discussed the issue and they will address it at the proper time.

Councilwoman White stated that she was in favor of the suggestion and would attend any meeting where they can hear and reply to citizens' concerns. She found it very difficult not respond tonight to most of the comments that were made. A lot was said tonight and she would like to reply; however, because she is bound by the Policy that she accepted to go by she would not do that tonight. Councilwoman White stated that she does support and would attend any called meeting that has been suggested.

Mayor Pro Tem Payton stated that Wiregrass Technical College has an adult education class and the people from the Transitional Center do very well. Also, from a travel prospective, he participated in some training this past weekend in Cordele and attended a class called Managing Growth. The presenters were from the University of Georgia and he would be glad to provide additional information to members of Council.

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

A MOTION by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Vickers, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to adjourn the April 21, 2011 meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:50 p.m. and enter into Executive Session.

Mayor Pro Tem Payton reconvened the regular City Council meeting at 7:13 p.m. and stated that there was discussion of real estate in the Executive Session and no action was taken.

Councilman Yost stated that, in his opinion, the individuals that Council has selected to sit on the Industrial Authority should put their minutes on their website as soon as possible for viewing by the public free of charge. He did not want to tell the Industrial Authority or the members what to do, but he honestly felt that they need to have those on their website. If the individual who wanted the minutes from years and years ago had to pay something for those then he understood that to a certain extent, but it would be like the City not having minutes on our website which would be ridiculous.

Mayor Pro Tem Payton entertained a motion for adjournment.

A MOTION by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilwoman White, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to adjourn the April 21, 2011 meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 7:16 p.m. to meet again in regular session on Thursday, May 5, 2011.

City Clerk, City of Valdosta

Mayor, City of Valdosta