

MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL
5:30 P.M., THURSDAY, JULY 11, 2013
COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY HALL

OPENING CEREMONIES

Mayor John Gayle called the regular meeting of the Valdosta City Council to order at 5:30 p.m. Council members present were: Joseph "Sonny" Vickers, Tim Carroll, Ben Norton, Alvin Payton, Jr., Robert Yost, and James Wright. Councilwoman Deidra White arrived at 5:45 p.m. The invocation was given by Sr. Pastor Mark Brady, Anchor Faith Baptist Church, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

AWARDS AND PRESENTATIONS

PRESENTATION OF THE JULY, 2013 EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH AWARD

Mike Martin presented the July, 2013 Employee of the Month Award (Sheree Johnson, Community Development Department).

Sheri Johnson began her employment with the City of Valdosta Community Development Department in October, 2005 as a Code Compliance Investigator which is the position she currently holds. As a Code Compliance Investigator, Sheri investigates contractor Ordinance violations, processes Code violations through the court system, testifies as needed, and investigates citizen complaints regarding construction Codes. During the Georgia Cities Week this year, Sheri helped the Public Information Office coordinate the employee luncheon which she has volunteered to do for the past four years. Using her personal time, she helped coordinate the details of food purchase and delivery, food preparation, and set up and clean up for the event which was enjoyed by hundreds of City employees. Sheri has also been instrumental in the New World computer software conversion for her Department by voluntarily learning the software months before it was deployed. To ensure accuracy, she reviewed, validated, and standardized over 41,000 City addresses which were absolutely critical for the successful migration onto the new software. Recently, Sheri assisted the Customer Service Center by streamlining the business license application process resulting in an improved application and the collection of better information. She also improved the alcohol license application process by proofreading information from the customer's point of view which resulted in overall better customer service. As these examples show, Sheri is a model City employee who goes above and beyond to identify and assist the needs of internal and external customers. For these reasons and many others, the Employee Relations Committee nominated Sheri Johnson as Employee of the Month.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the June 20, 2013 Regular Meeting were approved by unanimous consent (6-0) of the Council.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

ORDINANCE NO. 2013-13, AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND THE LAND DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS

Consideration of an Ordinance to rezone 1.35 acres (two parcels) from Residential-Professional (R-P) to Community-Commercial (C-C) as requested by Roger Budd Company (File No. VA-2013-09). The property is located at 2533 North Ashley Street and 304 Emory Drive. The Greater Lowndes Planning Commission reviewed this request at their June Regular Meeting and recommended approval (7-0 vote).

Matt Martin, Planning and Zoning Administrator, stated that the Roger Budd Company is requesting to rezone two parcels of land totaling approximately 1.35 acres from Residential-Professional (R-P) to Community-Commercial (C-C). The parcels are located at 2533 North Ashley Street and 304 Emory Drive. These are at the northeast corner of the intersection of Emory Drive and North Ashley Street, and are directly across from the Valdosta State University (VSU) north campus. The properties currently contain existing professional office buildings and the applicant is proposing to market the properties for commercial tenants.

The property is located within the Institutional Activity Center (IAC) Character Area on the Future Development Map of the Comprehensive Plan which allows the possibility of C-C zoning. The property is also located within the Urban Commercial Corridor Overlay District (UCCOD). This portion of the North Ashley Street corridor is dominated by the large institutional uses of SGMC and the north campus of VSU along the west side of the roadway. The east side currently has a mixture of commercial and office-institutional type uses as reflected in the mixed zoning pattern. The property has been zoned R-P and used for professional offices for several decades. It is located between existing commercial uses along North Ashley Street, restaurants to the north, and a small commercial center to the south. The applicant is proposing to have the flexibility of marketing the property for either office or perhaps mixed commercial usage. Even though the property was originally developed and used as professional offices, it meets the minimum parking requirements for retail commercial usage and can therefore qualify for conversion to a small commercial center. The proposed C-C zoning is very logical for this property and it is consistent with the surrounding zoning and land use patterns. Staff found the request consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the Standards for the Exercise of Zoning Power, and recommended approval. The Planning Commission reviewed this at their June 24, 2013 meeting, found it consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the Standards for the Exercise of Zoning Power (SFEZP), and recommended approval (7-0 vote).

Janna Hancock, Manager for the Roger Budd Company, spoke in favor of the request. Ms. Hancock stated that this building was previously occupied by Normal Life and there is a church that is currently located there. They would also like to add a barber shop. Ms. Hancock asked Council’s consideration in approving the request.

No one spoke in opposition to the request.

A MOTION by Councilman Payton, seconded by Councilman Norton, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to enact Ordinance No. 2013-13, an Ordinance to rezone 1.35 acres (two parcels) from Residential-Professional (R-P) to Community-Commercial (C-C) as requested by Roger Budd Company, the complete text of which will be found in Ordinance Book XII.

LOCAL FUNDING AND REQUESTS

Consideration of a request to close a portion of right-of-way located on Cowart Avenue.

Pat Collins, City Engineer, stated that in June, 2013, Mrs. Shirley Sainz petitioned the Engineering Department with a request to close off 0.158 acres of unimproved and unused wooded right-of-way at the east end of Cowart Avenue for redevelopment of the property. A petition was received and signed off by Nick C. Williams for Holly Hill Properties, Inc. and Shirley Sainz. Both parties own the properties which surround the unimproved right-of-way. All City Departments, as well as the local utility companies, were contacted and all are in agreement that the unimproved right-of-way can be closed. An advertisement for a Public Hearing ran in the Valdosta Daily Times as required. Pat Collins recommended that Council approve the request to close a portion of right-of-way located on Cowart Avenue.

A MOTION by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Norton, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to close a portion of right-of-way located on Cowart Avenue.

CITY MANAGER’S REPORT

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers has agreed for the Silver Jackets, a team of professionals from multi-jurisdictions, to lead the regional planning effort to deal with the regional stormwater issue. They met yesterday in Live Oak, Florida with the Georgia Silver Jackets, the Florida Silver Jackets, and the Army Corps of Engineers personnel. It was a very encouraging meeting. Not only have we signed the contract to do the preliminary planning that is in the flooding area of our City, but the Army Corps has requested in their budget to do a study of the entire Suwannee River drainage basin which will have to be done. It starts at Cordele and goes well into Florida and Valdosta is the midpoint of that drainage basin. To effectively resolve this issue, it will take a study and projects throughout the drainage basin. They expect the project to be funded with 75% of it paid for by the Federal government. We can request that the States of Georgia and Florida to provide matching funds and then once the study is done it will ultimately lead to funding for projects.

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that we had 212 youth from 9 states participating in the Southern Hospitality Workcamp this year. We were able to successfully improve 18 homes in Valdosta and there were 8,480 volunteer hours by these young people which is a generous donation of time and talent. He was presented with a plaque at the closing ceremony and the Group Workcamp volunteers thanked him for allowing them to come into our community.

A Press Release was sent out yesterday about the Gornto Road/Woodrow Wilson Extension Project which is entering the next phase. There will be some road closures beginning next week as we get to the other side of Patterson Street and begin to make the connection to move the street over.

The Police Department will have a Promotion Ceremony tomorrow afternoon at 3:00 p.m. at the City Hall Annex Building in the Multi-Purpose Room. The Mayor and Council are invited to attend to see our deserving men and women of the Police Department being promoted.

The City is working to promote the Federal Home Loan Bank Program and a Press Release was sent out on June 27, 2013 which was widely distributed. WCTV (Channel 6) did a story on the Program on July 10th, the Valdosta Daily Times covered it on July 10th, and Vanassa Flucas, Neighborhood Development Manager, is on the radio this week promoting the Program. We are promoting it on Metro 17, sending out flyers to churches in the Designated Revitalization Areas, the Senior Center, the libraries, City Hall, City Hall Annex, and Community Centers. We will have a booth at the upcoming 100 Black Men BBQ event as well as some back-to-school events. WALB (Channel 10) will also be covering it soon, and the Fair Housing Committee is helping to get the word out. The Public Information Office is also working to promote this and there will be a front page story in the next City Beat Newsletter.

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that we will need to have a brief Executive Session after the Citizens to be Heard to discuss potential litigation.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilman Carroll inquired as to whether there would be a Press Release sent out regarding the Georgia and Florida Silver Jackets and our efforts to do a study of the drainage basin in order to address flooding issues. Larry Hanson stated that we can do that. We just signed the contract yesterday and the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers will need to sign it and return to us so that we can formalize everything. We are in the early part of this process but we are very encouraged because they have acknowledged that this is an issue of regional significance. Council Carroll stated that it speaks volumes that they specifically asked for Mr. Hanson and Emily Davenport, Stormwater Superintendent, and Pat Collins, City Engineer, to come to Live Oak and meet. Larry Hanson stated that the State of Georgia has also been very supportive and he and Mayor Gayle were asked to meet with the Governor's Staff in Atlanta recently. We are also getting good support from the Environmental Protection Division (EPD), the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the State of Georgia, and the State of Florida. There are needs in both areas and we are all being affected by the same watershed. Councilman Carroll stated that this conversation came up after the flooding in 2009 and it has taken this long to finally get these organizations to pay attention and realize that this is a need.

Councilman Wright stated he and most of the Mayor and Council received an E-mail from Nolan Cox in reference to the Federal Home Loan Bank Program. Mr. Cox stated the following in his E-mail: "That 43% of every Federal dollar spent is borrowed with interest and a \$17 million debt. Repairing houses, like most welfare give-away programs, is not a legitimate function of government. Since the City gets 20% of the administrative fee, he understood the urgency. So often give-away programs are there to buy votes from the uniformed and keep politicians in office. It is shameful and immoral for the City Council to even apply for such Federal monies knowing that our nation is bankrupt and in a recession and knowing that our children will have to repay the loan." Council Wright stated that his response to Mr. Cox was to ask what he would suggest as a solution to the Housing Program. He did not believe that this was a loan but a grant. Secondly, he has relatives that live in the Housing Projects. There are not there by choice. After the reconstruction period, they had land taken away from them and family members did not have husbands to support them so now they are living in the Housing Projects. Mayor

Gayle stated that the City supports this Program. We are the ones who sponsor this Program and Mr. Cox is not on this panel. Councilman Wright stated that he wanted to let Mr. Cox know that he was a welfare recipient and his family started out on welfare. His daddy worked hard and he worked hard and now they are not on welfare. They went to school and borrowed money and repaid the money and did all the things that everybody else does. He now has two family members who are IT specialists, one is in cyber security, and one is an Enrollment Coordinator in college. Councilman Wright stated that this may not mean a lot to Council all but this is very sensitive to him because Mr. Cox spoke ill toward our residents in these lower income areas and it was very disrespectful.

CITIZENS TO BE HEARD

John Robinson, 3227 San Juline Circle, Lake Park, stated that he had filed Federal complaints against the City of Valdosta with the Housing Authority and he is filing others as well due to the unfairness of the system that has been here for so long. It seems as if sometimes we get insensitive to what is really going on with people in the community. He had a pamphlet from the Savannah School of Art and Design where his son attended and his son was in the Valdosta Small Emerging Business (VSEB) Program, but he had to shut his doors because of the lack of participation. There is not enough emphasis put on the VSEB Program. It is doing better but it is not that fantastic. Mr. Robinson stated that he was given a brochure by the Valdosta School Board at their last meeting and it has on there for the very first time local minority and women-owned business enterprises and it is the Project Procurement Workshop. They were under the impression that there was a new school being built but it is three years out. The school that was just built in our local community cost \$17 million to \$18 million and the contractors did not really get in on that. They were also misinformed about another project even from the Georgia Department of Transportation and they are fed up with it. There are a lot of different issues in dealing with the Analysis of Impediments. There are even issues with the homeless people. When they moved them out from underneath the bridge they were not taken to Kinderlou, but they brought and dropped them off at the nearest black community. Mr. Robinson stated that he did not mind working together and want to make certain that we can get something done economically. There are streets here that need to be repaired and they should have been done already but they have not been done. We have a lot of issues that need to be addressed and everyone seems to put on a charade of make believe that it is going to go away. There is more than one Valdosta here. We have the gated community and then we have the community that is plagued with problems. For example, he filed litigation against Henry Ford's son-in-law years ago and he won \$15 million for a community. The litigation last 12 years and he had lawyers from Palm Beach County. He is currently working with Ms. Vanassa Flucas, Neighborhood Development Manager, and they are trying to make some progress. She was moved into Ms. Mara Register's position and he called to find out if she was the new Assistant to the City Manager. He was told no that the City was not going to reopen that position. Ms. Flucas in a position with the full responsibilities but the title is being stripped which means that she cannot attend certain meetings with City management that Ms. Mara Register was exposed to. That means there may be something that someone wants to hide from us. This is supposed to be open because you work for the public arena. We need to focus on things where people can get some justification. If you have discriminatory policies among your own administration then that reflects discrimination. If Ms. Flucas can get in that position and do the full fledged job but yet she cannot be the Assistant to the City Manager for whatever the case may be that is self-explanatory. We look forward to working together to do something on a positive side and we want the City to put some thought into how we are going to fight these Analysis of Impediments.

ADJOURNMENT

A MOTION by Councilman Norton, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to adjourn the July 11, 2013 Regular Meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 5:59 p.m. and enter into Executive Session to discuss potential litigation.

Mayor Gayle reconvened the July 11, 2013 Regular Meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:22 p.m. and stated that no action was taken.

Mayor Gayle entertained a motion for adjournment.

A **MOTION** by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Payton, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to adjourn the July 11, 2013 Meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:22 p.m. to meet again in Regular Session on Thursday, July 25, 2013.

City Clerk, City of Valdosta

Mayor, City of Valdosta