

MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL
5:30 P.M., THURSDAY, JULY 8, 2010
COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY HALL

OPENING CEREMONIES

Mayor John J. Fretti called the regular meeting of the Valdosta City Council to order at 5:30 p.m. Council members present were: Sonny Vickers, Tim Carroll, John Eunice, Deidra White, Robert Yost, and James Wright. Councilman Alvin Payton was absent. The invocation was given by Deacon Yvette Owens, Christ the King Church, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

AWARDS AND PRESENTATIONS

Mayor Fretti entertained a motion for approval of the Awards and Presentations.

A **MOTION** by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Eunice, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve the Awards and Presentations.

PRESENTATION OF THE JULY, 2010 EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH AWARD

Mayor Fretti presented the July, 2010 Employee of the Month Award to Curtis Wade, Utilities Department.

Curtis Wade began his employment with the City of Valdosta in February, 2001 as a Laborer in the Utilities Department. In June, 2003 he was promoted to the position of Sewer Cleaner Operator which is the position he currently holds. In this position Mr. Wade is responsible for the operation of the of the sewer vac truck which provides emergency responses to blocked sewers as well as preventative maintenance to drainage systems such as catch basins and storm water sewers. As such, Mr. Wade is frequently called out at odd hours to respond to emergency situations where a clogged sewer main is threatening the property of citizen. The results of sewage back ups are not only expensive to repair, but pose a significant health and environmental hazard as well. A quick response for service is critical in these incidents and Mr. Wade is an employee who consistently shows a willingness to go above and beyond the requirements of his normal work duties to get the job done. In addition to these duties, Mr. Wade has recently worked additional hours at the Mud Creek facility to assist in its operation. He has done this while also responding to after-hours emergency calls which many times require working late into the night and early morning. Afterwards, he routinely reports in and works all day without complaint and has become known as an employee that can be counted on in a time of need as well as someone who is very competent in completing the day to day tasks at hand. It has been said that ability without dependability has no value. It is evident that Mr. Wade's supervisors recognize the fact that he is both a dependable and valuable employee worthy of recognition for his service to the citizens of Valdosta. For these reasons and many others, the Employee Relations Committee nominated Curtis Wade as Employee of the Month.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the June 24, 2010 Regular Meeting of the Valdosta City Council were approved by unanimous consent (6-0) of the Council.

CITIZENS TO BE HEARD

Terry Burton, 2304 Dukes Avenue, thanked Council for the opportunity to speak as a concerned resident. Mr. Burton stated that we do not need to be reminded about the continuing problems of our area businesses such as unemployment, housing repossessions, and so much more. The government has spent billions bailing out car manufacturers and others and now it seems that everywhere we look in Valdosta there are shop units to rent with ridiculous monthly rentals of \$1,200 or \$1,400. It no wonder the units continue to remain empty month after month or year after year because few people can afford to start a business of their own. Mr. Burton stated that about three weeks ago he was shocked to read in the Valdosta Daily Times about County employees losing their jobs and dozens of residents applying for Fresh Start assistance from Lowndes Associated Ministries. Then on Sunday there was a story about a wonderful lady at the Downtown Diner donating free lunches to the homeless and those in need.

People are existing on goodwill and charity and one wonders where we are really heading because we are supposed to be the most powerful and richest country in the world. Kay Harris, Editor of the Valdosta Daily Times, recently said in the newspaper that things are slow, very slow which was an understatement. Mr. Burton stated that, as a local business owner, he and many other businesses were hurting very badly too. He previously had twelve employees and now he has two. Food and beverage distributors have told him weekly stories about the slump in sales, doom and gloom, and how businesses are cutting costs, hours, jobs, and anything else they can do just to survive. Valdosta is not alone. In the town of Madison, Florida, five restaurants closed in just two months. Mr. Burton stated that there may be little that Council can do to help area businesses during this uncertain period but sometimes it is just the little things that can make all the difference. Mr. Burton stated that their request is this. Council rightly implemented zoning regulations to keep Valdosta clean and tidy and always looking beautiful. One of those regulations deals with the sometimes tacky and messy H-bar signs that are placed on the road, especially at intersections. They are also placed on grass verges of area businesses outside the small shopping centers to attract that all important passing potential customer. We often see Council officers going around and collecting the signs and taking them to the dump. Now we are awash with them everywhere with the elections but this is allowed. Mr. Burton stated that most, if not all, of the signs are set out by area businesses fighting for their very survival and to keep jobs. They are trying to attract customers with these signs because they have no choice. They cannot afford advertising on the radio, television, or magazines at this time. They spend \$44 to \$100 on these H-bar signs. There have been discussions with many business owners and they are pleading for Council to amend the zoning regulations immediately to help the businesses during this great time of need. They do not think that it is unreasonable to allow business owners the opportunity to promote their business with just one sign on their premises beside the road and only during the daylight hours between 8:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. They ask for this urgently and for Council to show its support to help the area businesses.

George Boston Rhynes, 5004 Oak Drive, stated that there have been three articles in the media concerning the proposed Travel Ordinance which was defeated by a 1-6 vote and some of the Council members are getting a bad rap in the community because the citizens have not heard why Council voted as they did. Mr. Rhynes inquired as to why Council's views were not brought into the media for the citizens to know why they voted the way they did because there were some Council members who had their opinions and views printed in the newspaper. Also, Mr. Rhynes stated that he was told by some residents who live in the Historic District on Martin Luther King, Jr. drive that the windows are expensive to repair but yet they are building Habitat Houses in the same community. Mr. Rhynes inquired as to how the City can have a Historic District and then justify having a Habitat house in that same area. Mr. Rhynes stated that there are no crossing lines or passing lines on Williams Street and they need to be replaced. The last issue that Mr. Rhynes wanted to address Council about was the response that he received from Council regarding some questions that he had over a year ago. In the last paragraph of the response sent to him it appears that there is a great possibility that Council does not want citizens to come to City Council meetings but they want us to address it by other means. Mr. Rhynes stated that this may be a good idea but he loves coming before the elected officials.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

AN ORDINANCE AMENDING THE LAND DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS ORDINANCE WITHDRAWN

Consideration of an Ordinance to rezone 1.04 acres from Single-Family Residential (R-10) to Multi-Family Residential (R-M) to accommodate proposed apartments as requested by Kurt Lamon (File No. VA-2010-10). The property is located at the southwest corner of Pine Tree Road and Azalea Drive. The Planning Commission reviewed this request at their June Regular Meeting and recommended denial (6-1-1 vote).

Mayor Fretti stated that the applicant has withdrawn the request.

LOCAL FUNDING AND REQUESTS

Consideration of bids for adjusting utilities on Patterson Street from Five Points to Magnolia Street for the Georgia Department of Transportation Resurfacing Project.

Von Shipman, City Engineer, stated that bids were received on July 7, 2010 for the lowering of 51 water valve covers and 35 sewer manholes which must be adjusted due to the upcoming Georgia Department of Transportation (DOT) Resurfacing Project on Patterson Street which will run from Magnolia Street to Five Points. The only bid received was from Southern Allied Contractors in the amount of \$79,000 and the Engineering Department estimate was \$85,000. In order to complete the Project within the time frame specified by the DOT, this work must be completed by August 2, 2010 in order for the paving contractor to begin the Resurfacing Project. Councilman Vickers inquired as to how long the contractors had to respond to the bid request. Von Shipman stated that it was out for bid approximately three to four weeks.

A MOTION was made by Councilman Eunice to approve the bid submitted by Southern Allied Contractors in the amount of \$79,000 for adjusting utilities on Patterson Street from Five Points to Magnolia Street for the Georgia Department of Transportation Resurfacing Project. Councilman Carroll seconded the motion. Councilman Vickers inquired as to whether there was a contingency on the bid. Mayor Fretti stated that there was no contingency. The motion was unanimously adopted (6-0).

CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that James Dean, City Marshal, has been deployed for quite some time and was honored with a luncheon this week to welcome him back.

The Georgia Department of Transportation (DOT) is implementing a new program, the Local Maintenance Improvement Grant Program, to replace the Local Assistance Resurfacing Program (LARP). The City's primary purpose in using it will be for continuation of the traditional LARP. The DOT will now be using a formula to identify needs instead of submitting a list. They will take the road mileage of each community (paved and unpaved miles) as well as the population and apply a formula to it. The City of Valdosta's allocation for this fiscal year will be \$210,000. Council will need to submit a list of streets in their District that they would like to be evaluated by the Engineering Department for resurfacing. Staff will then rate those streets and submit a list to the DOT in early August. This will be placed on the Council Agenda the first meeting in August to approve the list.

In conjunction with the Sesquicentennial Celebration, the 2010 People's Photo Contest winners will be announced along with the debut of a special Valdosta tribute song on July 12, 2010 at the Turner Center for the Arts.

Larry Hanson, City Manager, thanked Henry Hicks, Utilities Director, and his Staff and Sementa Mathews, Public Information Officer, for the 2009 Water Quality Report that was sent out to the citizens of Valdosta.

There will be a Crime Lab Dedication Ceremony on Monday, July 12, 2010 at 10:30 a.m. and Council is invited to attend. The new Utility Building Dedication Ceremony will be held on Friday, July 16, 2010 at 10:30 a.m. and the public is invited to attend this event.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilman Vickers inquired about the impact of the Crime Lab in Moultrie and whether it would remain open. Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that the Crime Lab in Moultrie was formally closed and the employees were let go and many have taken other jobs outside of their occupation. The Legislature then put money in the budget and the Governor instructed that the facility would remain closed; however, last week he has changed course and instructed the Georgia Bureau of Investigation to reopen the Moultrie and Columbus Crime Labs. There is work that needs to be done to the Moultrie Crime Lab such as a new roof and new air conditioning, and based upon the amount of money appropriated there is no way that they can provide the type of service as they did in the past. It is still questionable whether the Moultrie Crime Lab will be merely a collection point for samples to be delivered to and then farmed out to other labs or how soon they would be able to provide some of the services they did in the past. We still feel there will be Police and Sheriff Departments in the immediate area will choose to use our Crime Lab.

Councilman Yost stated that Mr. Rhynes asked some good questions earlier about the proposed Travel Ordinance and a mountain has been made out of a mole hill on that subject. The reporter that usually covers the Council meetings did call Councilman Eunice and that was reported in the newspaper. She was asked by Councilman Eunice to call other Council persons to give their view on the Ordinance and what happened at that meeting. She stated that everyone was on their way to Savannah to attend the Conference. Councilman Eunice was also on his way to Savannah when she called. Councilman Yost stated that if she had asked then he would have given her his opinion; however, now that Mr. Rhynes has asked he would give his opinion and would not represent the rest of the Council. Councilman Yost stated that he voted no on the issue because he believes 100% that when a Council person is elected they serve from the day they are sworn in until the day they leave office. That is what he wants his Council person to do whether it means he would go to Atlanta to represent us at the Capitol or go to a meeting like the one on Savannah. The newspaper owes us an apology for comparing what Council did to how the County's budget has played out. That was very one-sided and though we feel bad about the situation the County is going through right now, the City planned ahead, managed their budget, and made the right decisions. Councilman Yost stated that Council did the right thing on the proposed Travel Ordinance and his vote would not change when it comes up again. He would be glad to discuss this with the newspaper; however, they do not need to feed the public information that is so one-sided and incorrect. Councilman Yost stated that he has been a member of a committee for the Georgia Municipal Association for four or five years and he goes to the meeting, votes, and is heard when he needs to be heard. If the newspaper had asked him the question then they would have found that out instead of listening to one other person on Council who said that none of them are members and do not go to meetings. If you want the accurate information then ask all of them and they will give you their opinions. It is not always right and you may not agree with it but you will always get the truth from him and other Council members. Councilman Yost stated that he appreciated what the County is going through and he felt bad that they are having trouble with their budget but the City should not be persecuted for having prepared for this day and for running the City in the right way.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Fretti entertained a motion for adjournment.

A MOTION by Councilman Vickers, seconded by Councilman Carroll was unanimously adopted (6-0) to adjourn the July 8, 2010 meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:08 p.m. to meet again in regular session on Thursday, July 22, 2010.

City Clerk, City of Valdosta

Mayor, City of Valdosta