

**MINUTES**  
**REGULAR MEETING OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL**  
**5:30 P.M., THURSDAY, AUGUST 11, 2011**  
**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, Tim Carroll, Ben Norton, Alvin Payton, Jr., Deidra White, and Robert Yost. Councilman James Wright was absent. The invocation was given by Pastor George Boston Rhynes, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

**AWARDS AND PRESENTATIONS**

Mayor Fretti entertained a motion for Awards and Presentations.

A **MOTION** by Councilman Norton, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (6-0) for the August Awards and Presentations.

**PRESENTATION OF THE AUGUST, 2011 EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH AWARD**

Police Chief Frank Simons presented the August, 2011 Employee of the Month Award (Christopher Crews, Police Department).

Christopher Crews began his employment with the City of Valdosta Police Department in November, 2000 as a Patrol Officer. In 2006, he transferred to the Investigations Division as a Detective which is the position he currently holds. In 2009, the Police Department opened an investigation into the death of a homeless Hispanic male who was not a legal citizen of the United States. With little evidence to go on, the case remained unsolved. In May, 2011, Detective Crews was assigned to the investigation as a Cold Case. Starting with interviews of individuals that knew the victim or had been in the area on the day of the incident, Detective Crews zeroed in on a person who had several discrepancies in his story. Through skillful interviewing and thoroughness, Detective Crews was able to obtain a confession from this individual and an arrest warrant was issued. This closed the only remaining homicide unsolved in 2009. It has been said that victory belongs to those who persevere. Obtaining a confession to a homicide is rewarding; however, it is extremely rewarding when it involves a Cold Case containing many obstacles. Detective Crews' diligence in solving the case and dedication to the victim's family and the citizens of Valdosta is worthy of recognition. For these reasons and many others, the Employee Relations Committee nominated Christopher Crews as Employee of the Month.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The minutes of the July 21, 2011 Regular Meeting were approved by unanimous consent (6-0) of the Council.

**PUBLIC HEARINGS**

**REQUEST TO CLOSE AN ALLEY LOCATED NORTH OF WISENBAKER LANE**

Consideration of a request to close an alley located north of Wisenbaker Lane.

Pat Collins, City Engineer, stated that this request to close an un-named City alley north of Wisenbaker Lane was initiated by Reverend Thomas J. Haynes of St. James Missionary Baptist Church. The alley is surrounded by Church property and there are no City or private utilities in the alley. Pat Collins stated that since there is no apparent future need for the alley, the unified ownership surrounding the alley, and no objections to closing the alley, he recommended that Council approve the request to close the alley.

**REQUEST TO CLOSE AN ALLEY LOCATED  
NORTH OF WISEBAKER LANE (CON'T)**

**08/11/11 CONTINUED**

No one spoke in favor of the request.

No one spoke in opposition to the request.

A **MOTION** by Councilman Yost, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to close the alley located north of Wisenbaker Lane.

**ORDINANCE NO. 2011-27, AN ORDINANCE FOR TEXT AMENDMENTS TO THE LAND DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS (LDR)**

Consideration of an Ordinance for Text Amendments to the Land Development Regulations (LDR) for Chapter 238, Historic Preservation of the City's Land Development Regulations. The Planning Commission reviewed this at their July regular meeting and recommended approval (6-0 vote).

Matt Martin, Planning and Zoning Administrator, stated that the City of Valdosta is proposing to amend Chapter 238 Historic Preservation of the City's Land Development Regulations (LDR). The proposed amendments are for Section 238-19 which contains the provisions for governing the failure to provide maintenance to historic properties. The purpose of the amendments is to modify the language in Chapter 238 to mesh a little better with the International Property Maintenance Code, and also the procedures that our City Marshals use for substandard properties elsewhere in the City and not just in the local Historic District. Currently, the language in Chapter 238 places some of the administrative and enforcement responsibilities with the City Manager and Valdosta City Council. The proposed amendments will shift these responsibilities more to the Community Development Director, the Historic Preservation Commission, and its Commission Administrator. The current language also prescribes a set time period of 90 days for repairs to be made once the owner has been notified of the substandard condition. Not every situation of this kind is the same, and the proposed Text Amendments will give the Commission and its Administrator some flexibility to prescribe alternative timeframes depending on the circumstances of the situation. The Historic Preservation Commission reviewed these proposed Text Amendments at their July 11, 2011 Regular Meeting and recommended approval. These proposed Text Amendments add some needed clarity to the existing language, as well as better define the penalties and procedures for violations of the permitting process. Staff found the request consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and recommended approval. The Planning Commission reviewed this at their July 25, 2011 Meeting, found it consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, and recommended approval (6-0 vote).

No one spoke in favor of the request.

No one spoke in opposition to the request.

A **MOTION** by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Payton, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to enact Ordinance No. 2011-27, an Ordinance for Text Amendments to the Land Development Regulations (LDR) for Chapter 238, Historic Preservation of the City's Land Development Regulations, the complete text of which will be found in Ordinance Book XII.

**LOCAL FUNDING AND REQUESTS**

**ORDINANCE NO. 2011-28, AN ORDINANCE TO ESTABLISH THE 2011 MILLAGE RATE**

Consideration of a request to establish the 2011 millage rate.

Mark Barber, Deputy City Manager of Administration, stated that the Five Year History of Tax Levy was published in the Valdosta Daily Times on July 15, 2011, notifying the community of the proposed tax millage to be set by the City of Valdosta. The purpose of this ad is to inform property owners of the growth in the ad valorem tax digest and the level of taxes collected in the last five years. All governmental units and school districts are required by State law to publish growth rates in the tax digest and changes in tax rates. The Valdosta Board of Education adopted a 16.98 millage rate for this year at their July 11, 2011 Meeting. The 2011 Net Tax digest decreased by 1.384 percent compared to the 2011 digest. The majority of the decrease is from the State-wide elimination of

taxes on certain inventories. This was voted upon last year and was enacted January 1, 2011. Applying the proposed millage rate to the current digest will generate approximately \$5,767,521 in revenue, which represents a \$79,787 decrease from the prior year. Additionally, adopting the proposed millage rate will create a \$198,579 shortfall when compared to Fiscal Year 2012 projections; however, the City can absorb that into the current budget because we may collect a little more in some areas and spend a little less in others. Also included in the Ordinance are 16.98 mills for the Valdosta School Board's millage rate, 5 mills for Central Valdosta Development Authority (CVDA) for maintenance, and 5 mills for a debt repayment on the Streetscape Project. Two years ago, Downtown property owners paid 15 mills to the CVDA in addition to the taxes paid to the City of Valdosta. This rate included 10 mills dedicated to the repayment of debt incurred for the streetscape project. Under the terms of the bond, a dedicated millage sufficient to service the debt must be levied. Over the past few years, the reassessment of Downtown properties has created a significant additional tax burden on these property owners. In an effort to maintain a business friendly Downtown environment and offer relief of the additional tax liability, the City of Valdosta suggested two options to Downtown property owners. The Downtown property owners voted to reduce the CID millage to 5 mills and the CVDA Board has requested that the City set the millage accordingly. Under this scenario, the bond debt will be extinguished in the year 2012 as opposed to 2020. Early retirement is possible due to the increase in revenue due to growth in the downtown area. Mark Barber recommended that Council approve the request to establish the 2011 millage rate of 4.112 mills for the City of Valdosta, 16.98 mills for the Valdosta School Board's millage rate, 5 mills for Central Valdosta Development Authority (CVDA) for maintenance, and 5 mills for a debt repayment on the Streetscape Project.

**A MOTION** by Councilman Payton, seconded by Councilman Norton, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to enact Ordinance No. 2011-28, an Ordinance to establish the 2011 millage rate at 4.112 mills for the City of Valdosta, 16.98 mills for the Valdosta School System, and 10.0 mills for the CVDA, the complete text of which will be found in Ordinance Book XII.

#### **BOARDS, COMMISSIONS, AUTHORITIES, AND ADVISORY COMMITTEES**

Consideration of appointments to the Valdosta Tree Commission.

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that the Valdosta Tree Commission has three members, Brenda Thrasher, Jane McLane, and Patsy Giles whose terms will expire on September 6, 2011. These appointments were advertised according to the Boards, Commissions, Authorities, and Advisory Committees Policy that was adopted by Mayor and Council. Brenda Thrasher expressed an interest in being reappointed but was unable to submit her application prior to the deadline. The only other application received was from David Dempsey. Larry Hanson recommended that an appointment not be made and that we re-advertise for all three slots with appointments to be made in 30 days. We will also be re-advertising for vacancies on the Keep-Lowndes Valdosta Beautiful Board and the Valdosta Housing Authority – Resident Appointment.

**A MOTION** by Councilman Vickers, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to postpone the appointments to the Valdosta Tree Commission for 30 days and re-open the application process.

#### **CITY MANAGER'S REPORT**

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that the Valdosta State University reopens on Monday, August 15, 2011 so there will be a little more traffic. Pat Collins, City Engineer, and his Staff will be managing the traffic and helping the freshman become oriented to the community over the next several weeks with some gentle warnings.

Sementa Mathews, Public Information Officer, is working on the 9-11 Ceremony which will be held on Sunday, September 11, 2011 at 8:30 a.m. at the Lowndes County Courthouse square in conjunction with Lowndes County and Moody Air Force Base. Mayor and Council are invited to attend this meaningful and moving ceremony which will include a flyover by Moody Air Force Base.

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that he and Pat Collins continue to work on the Regional T-SPLOST tax and the Regional Roundtable. The Executive Committee of the Regional Roundtable had their final meeting last week to try and agree on a project list as the timeline is now winding down. Some progress has been made with the projects that the City has on the list. Currently, there are eight projects that total approximately \$70

million for Valdosta and Lowndes County has projects totaling approximately \$109 million. This is approximately \$179 million for Lowndes County over ten years out of the \$503 million that is expected to be generated in the region. Over the course of the next year, there will be an effort to educate and inform the residents and voters of the region as to the projects for the region. Each County will have a Referendum and if the majority of the

residents in the region pass that, the Referendum will be implemented in October, 2012. The City has been trying to get as many projects on the list not knowing whether we are for it or against it at this point. Councilman Yost inquired as to whether the City Manager could send Council which projects he has worked on out of the \$70 million and what the County is doing. Larry Hanson stated that the City has eight projects and the County has five or six but they have two Interstate interchanges that are quite expensive.

### **COUNCIL COMMENTS**

Councilman Carroll inquired as to why the ballot referendum would be held on October 12, 2012. Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that there would be a Special Session of the General Assembly beginning on August 15, 2011 and the Governor has added this to the Special Session Agenda so they will discuss in the next week. That is what the law says now and now there is going to be a proposal for the Legislature to change that date to the November Election but since that has not been done he could only speak to what the current law says.

Councilman Payton stated that he attended the Valdosta-Lowndes County Airport Authority Meeting yesterday and wanted to provide the Mayor and Council with a brief summation. The President of the Chamber was at the Airport Authority Meeting and stated that she had great service recently utilizing ASA. Also, the food service will be improved and Subway will be opening from 4:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. since one of the complaints they have had was inconsistent food service.

Councilwoman White inquired about the status of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Corridor Project. Pat Collins, City Engineer, stated that AT&T has mobilized and they expect to be finished September 23, 2011. They have ordered some pedestrian lights for the walkways and are waiting for AT&T to complete their work. Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that the street has been open since mid-July and AT&T has removed the portion from one side so Georgia Power has now come in and removed the old poles from one side of the street.

Councilman Yost stated that one of the parents had called him about the two World Series Championship Baseball Teams from Valdosta being recognized by Council for their accomplishments in Mississippi. Councilman Yost asked that this be placed on the Agenda for the next Council Meeting. He also noted that it would also be a good time to introduce George Page, Executive Director of Parks and Recreation, to the Mayor and Council. Larry Hanson stated that he would contact George Page.

Councilman Vickers stated that the City made a request to the Georgia Department of Transportation (DOT) about putting a crossing at the intersection of Madison Highway and South Patterson Street near the McDonald's restaurant; however, it was turned down. Councilman Vickers stated that we may need to discuss this with our State Representatives and get them to work on that so that the DOT could put money in their budget next year. Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that he would contact our two DOT Board members, Jay Shaw and Johnny Floyd, to see if they could have any influence on that. The DOT does not oppose the project but they did not have any funds in the budget at this time.

### **CITIZENS TO BE HEARD**

Bryan Almand, 310 Victory Drive, stated that he wanted to express his compliments to the City for the quality of our Fire Department. He woke up last Sunday a week ago with his fire alarm going off and within four to five minutes the Fire Department was there. They put the fire out quickly and the damage from the fire was not that bad. Mr. Almand stated that the Firefighters did an excellent job and he was very appreciative.

### **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 August 11, 2011 meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:03 p.m. to meet again in regular session on Thursday, August 25, 2011.

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City Clerk, City of Valdosta

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Mayor, City of Valdosta