

MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL
5:30 P.M., THURSDAY, MAY 25, 2017
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, Alvin Payton, Jr., Sandra Tooley, Robert Yost, and Vivian Miller-Cody. Councilman Ben Norton was absent. The invocation was given by Pastor David Adams, Mt. Calvary Baptist Church, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

AWARDS AND PRESENTATIONS

Special Presentation of the Valdosta State University Social Media Awards.

Mayor John Gayle stated that organizations all over the world, including municipalities and local authorities, are using social media to communicate with increasingly diverse and large audiences. The City’s Main Street Program has continued a partnership with the Valdosta State University (VSU) Social Media Theory class that began through the Public Information Office in 2015. Taught by Dr. David Nelson, the students were divided into groups and tasked with developing a realistic social media plan that targeted and engaged millennials in the Downtown area. The Project, which was judged by the Main Street Office, constituted a large part of their overall class grade and provided a real-life experience for the students. Group #4 students, Shadia Black, Eshay Keaton, Hannah Tabrizi, and Hunter Terrell, provided the Main Street Program with innovative ideas for reaching students who attend Valdosta State University, who use social media as their primary source of communication, and who seek new and engaging experiences in their community. The plan included creatively building upon the Main Street Program’s current social media strategy, as well as promoting a year-long competition among the VSU Student Organizations. The Student Organizations will participate by hosting events Downtown to see who can bring the most students. They will also be required to promote their event on social media and the winning Student Organization will receive a prize. The team’s outstanding ideas are being planned for implementation and will significantly impact the way the Main Street Program communicates more effectively with students at VSU. Overall, these efforts have demonstrated the Main Street Program’s continued efforts to provide applicable experiences to VSU students that will help bridge the gap between the University and Downtown. Mayor Gayle and Ellen Hill, Main Street Manager, presented Certificates of Appreciation to the Group #4 VSU Social Media Theory students.

Special Presentation of the 2017 Valdosta Historic Preservation Awards.

James Horton, Historic Preservation Planner/Special Projects, stated that May of each year is Historic Preservation Month all across America and the theme this year is “This Place Matters.” Valdosta is celebrating the historic places that matter to us with the 9th Annual Valdosta Historic Preservation Awards. These awards showcase projects and people in the Local Historic District who have gone above and beyond to preserve and protect Valdosta’s history and historic buildings. There are five categories that awards will be made in and they are: Outstanding Achievement for large rehabilitation projects, Distinguished Merit for smaller scaled rehabilitations, Stewardship Award for preserving an individual building for many years, Excellence in New Construction for buildings that fit well within the District, and the Harold Bennett Lifetime Achievement for a person who has given many years to preservation in Valdosta. These awards provide positive reinforcement of the Historic District Design Review process, promote goodwill within our community, and acknowledge the hard work and dedication of our citizens in the preservation and restoration of our historic buildings. Mayor John Gayle and Valdosta Historic Preservation Chairman Celine Gladwin assisted with presentation of the awards.

The recipient of the Outstanding Achievement Award is Albert Slone for rehabilitation of the building located at 101 North Patterson Street in Downtown Valdosta. Mr. Slone transformed a rather plain commercial box into a dazzling Art Deco themed, multi-story, 18,000 square foot event center. The Patterson has become a focal point for Downtown activities and events. The center is comprised of two, 9,000 square foot levels equipped with furnishings, catering kitchens, elaborate dressing rooms and restroom areas, staging areas with sound systems, and

beautiful tables and chairs. Art deco detailing and lighting fixtures compliment the theme as well as fine art works for decoration. Each floor can be used independently or they can be coupled for an extra-large event. The lower level can accommodate 450 people and the upper level will hold 344 people for a total of 794 possible guests at a single event.

The next recipient of the Outstanding Achievement Award is Keira Moritz-Johnson who is definitely invested in Downtown Valdosta. Some years ago, she opened the well-known and enjoyed Steel Magnolias restaurant. She is receiving recognition for the rehabilitation of the old Alamo Theater building. When she came across this building in 2015, it was partially collapsed, open to the elements, and in danger of being demolished forever. She bought it and re-built the structure inside the walls to create Birdies Market, which is a retail store and restaurant on the bottom floor and a large event space on the second floor. The retail store is filled with wonderful and fun items for the home and stomach and the café boasts a full menu in addition to the specialty Grassroots Coffee shop. The upstairs holds 100 or more people and has the charm of old wood floors, brick walls, and tall ceilings. What a great save!

The Distinguished Merit Award goes to Dr. Alex Alvarez and Joel Grimes for the transformation of 502 North Patterson from a Non-contributing building to a Contributing Historic Resource to the Valdosta Local Historic District. They removed vinyl siding, replaced windows, replaced decorative details, and re-opened a significant closed-over porch on the front of the building. The exterior of the building is dramatically more attractive and beautiful as a result and the historic character now shows through.

The second Distinguished Merit Award goes to Langdale Ford Motor Company who has been a Downtown partner for many years generating visitors and dollars into the economy of the area. Langdale Ford is receiving a Distinguished Merit Award for the architectural update to the Dealership Building and to their Used Car Sales Building and for the construction of the Fast Lane Building. The rehabilitations and new construction have all met the Design Guidelines as the company desires to be a cooperative community player. Langdale Ford has done a great job fitting its buildings neatly into the fabric of the Local Historic District.

The third Distinguished Merit Award recipient is the Valdosta Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce for the rehabilitation of their office which is the former E. R. Barber House. The Chamber has occupied and maintained this beautiful Neoclassical Historic Home for many years. Although the building remained beautiful, the need for some major system improvements arose and the Chamber raised over \$200,000 to not only replace the systems but to thoroughly rehabilitate the entire house on the interior and exterior. Now the Barber house and the Chamber of Commerce can enjoy each other's company for many years to come and the house will stand as a proud example of Neoclassical Architecture associated with grand historic southern homes.

The Excellence in New Construction Award goes to the Wesley Foundation, located at 1601 North Patterson Street, for the Discipleship House completed in 2015. For many years, the Wesley Foundation has resided in the historic two-story Prairie Style house on North Patterson. The new Discipleship House was constructed to the rear of the historic building and uses the same red brick, same basic form and scale, and has some nice finish details that reflect the character of the historic building very well.

The Harold Bennett Lifetime Achievement Award recipient is Bruce Green, a true Valdosta native who has always had Valdosta in his heart even when he has lived away for many years. Bruce grew up here and became a teacher in the local school system. Before preserving historic buildings was fashionable, Bruce and his mom purchased a two-story Victorian Era house on River Street and turned it into a quaint B&B and Tea Room. Adjacent to the house, Bruce laid thousands of antique bricks to form a street. He was also involved in the creation of the Valdosta Heritage Foundation and the Valdosta Main Street Program. Most recently, Bruce has helped Valdosta get on the Camellia Trail and has worked with the Heritage Foundation to save and promote the Robert's House. Historic Preservation in Valdosta would be nowhere close to what it is today without Bruce Green.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the May 11, 2017 Regular Meeting were approved by unanimous consent (6-0) of the Council.

Consideration of a request to approve a Contract Item Agreement Memorandum of Understanding between the City of Valdosta and the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) to resurface a portion SR38 WE (West Central Avenue) from SR 38 to SR 38 and perform the required utilities adjustments.

Henry Hicks, Utilities Director, stated that the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) is proposing to resurface SR 38 WE (West Central Avenue) from SR 38 to SR 38. Following a review of the GDOT plans for the Roadway Project, the Utilities Department surveyed the area and identified 13 manholes and 32 water valve boxes that will require adjustment in preparation for the Project. The work involves lowering the valve boxes and manhole rings prior to milling the road and then raising them back to the designed grade prior to resurfacing. These utilities adjustments are required in accordance with 23 CFR Part 645, Subpart A and O.C.G.A. 32-6-171. With the City responsible for the cost of the work, Staff had two viable alternatives to address the needed adjustments. The first was to advertise for bid a contract to complete the work in conjunction with the GDOT Roadway Project. Coordinating and scheduling the work would be more costly, complex, and ultimately the City's responsibility. The second was to include the work in the Roadway Contract to be let by the GDOT with the estimate provided by the City. GDOT would be responsible for all Project scheduling and coordination. Performing the work in-house by the Utilities Department is not considered a viable option because of the high level of resources necessary to perform the required work. Due to this and the Project's complexity, it will be beneficial to the City to have the utilities adjustments included in the GDOT Roadway Contract. Cost for the work is estimated to be \$61,904. Maximum potential cost to the City will be \$68,094.40. Henry Hicks recommended that Council approve the Contract Item Agreement Memorandum of Understanding between the City of Valdosta and the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) to resurface a portion SR38 WE (West Central Avenue) from SR 38 to SR 38 and perform the required utilities adjustments.

A MOTION by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Vickers, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve a Contract Item Agreement Memorandum of Understanding between the City of Valdosta and the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) to resurface a portion SR38 WE (West Central Avenue) from SR 38 to SR 38 and perform the required utilities adjustments.

Consideration of a request to approve a Contract Item Agreement Memorandum of Understanding between the City of Valdosta and the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) to resurface SR 38 from Forrest Street to east of the Valdosta City Limits and perform the required utilities adjustments.

Henry Hicks, Utilities Director, stated that the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) is proposing to resurface SR 38 from Forrest Street to east of the Valdosta City Limits. Following a review of the GDOT plans for the Roadway Project, the Utilities Department surveyed the area and identified 28 manholes and 27 water valve boxes that will require adjustment in preparation for the Project. The work involves lowering the valve boxes and manhole rings prior to milling the road and then raising them back to the designed grade prior to resurfacing. These utilities adjustments are required in accordance with 23 CFR Part 645, Subpart A and O.C.G.A. 32-6-171. With the City responsible for the cost of the work, Staff had two viable alternatives to address the needed adjustments. The first was to advertise for bid a Contract to complete the work in conjunction with the GDOT Roadway Project. Coordinating and scheduling the work would be more costly, complex, and ultimately the City's responsibility. The second was to include the work in the Roadway Contract to be let by the GDOT with the estimate provided by the City. GDOT would be responsible for all Project scheduling and coordination. Performing the work in-house by the Utilities Department is not considered a viable option because of the high level of resources necessary to perform the required work. Due to this and the Project's complexity, it will be beneficial for the City to have the utilities adjustments included in the GDOT Roadway Contract. Cost for the work is estimated to be \$89,019. Maximum potential cost to the City will be \$97,920.90. Henry Hicks recommended that Council approve the Contract Item Agreement Memorandum of Understanding between the City of Valdosta and the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) to resurface SR 38 from Forrest Street to east of the Valdosta City Limits and perform the required utilities adjustments. Councilman Vickers inquired as to whether local contractors would be used for the resurfacing. Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that they will bid the work and hire one contractor and incorporate this work into whoever the low bid contractor is. Henry Hicks stated that they use Reames Construction or Scruggs Concrete. Larry Hanson stated they will then either do the work or sub it out to one of the local utility contractors such as Standard Contractors or Radney Plumbing.

A **MOTION** by Councilwoman Miller-Cody, seconded by Councilwoman Tooley, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve a Contract Item Agreement Memorandum of Understanding between the City of Valdosta and the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) to resurface SR 38 from Forrest Street to east of the Valdosta City Limits and perform the required utilities adjustments.

LOCAL FUNDING AND REQUESTS

Consideration of a request to change the name of a portion of Deeb Street to James R. Wright Drive.

Emily Davenport, Assistant Director of Engineering, stated that on April 28, 2017, a petition was received asking that the City rename Deeb Street between Vallotton Drive and Brookwood Drive to James R. Wright Drive in honor of the former City Councilman’s outstanding local contributions and service to the City. Mr. Wright, who passed away earlier this year, was very active in the community and served as an advocate for the people of Valdosta for many years. He served as District 1 Councilman from January 1, 2004 until December 31, 2015. His commitment as a public servant has been of great value and has helped to enhance and better his District and surrounding areas. The 12 properties that abut this street do not have legal addresses on the street. The requirement that a name change not occur for 90 days will not be necessary due to the fact that this 90-day period is used to notify the Post Office, 911, utility providers, and other correspondents that the address has changed. Since no one has a legal address on this street, the 90-day period will be waived. The petition was signed by 8 of the 12 residents that abut Deeb Street in favor of changing the name. There was also a total of 70 signatures from the surrounding area in support of this request as well. The public notice ran for the appropriate length of time. The name change will become effective no later than September 1, 2017. Notification will be given to all utility companies and 911 in regards to the street name change. Emily Davenport recommended that Council approve the request to change the name of a portion of Deeb Street to James R. Wright Drive.

A **MOTION** by Councilwoman Miller-Cody, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve a request to change the name of a portion of Deeb Street to James R. Wright Drive.

Consideration of a request to approve the forgiveness of loans for participants in the Urban Development Action Grant (UDAG) Loan Program.

Chuck Dinkins, Finance Director, stated that the City's Urban Development Action Grant (UDAG) fund holds mortgages receivable from homeowners who qualified for assistance as part of the UDAG program. These notes were set up to be forgiven at the City's option after 30 years if the homeowner satisfied all program conditions. The City has mortgage receivables in a number of funds with automatic forgiveness at the end of an eligibility period but the UDAG mortgages were written with the City having the option to forgive them. The following mortgages have now reached 30 years and are eligible for forgiveness according to the terms of the program: (1) Loan #7009 for Daniel Sirmans (11/10/86) - \$10,000, (2) Loan # 7011 for Ernest & Sonja Garland (09/26/86) - \$10,000, and (3) Loan # 8014 for Richard & Susan Oelkers (09/18/86) - \$3,822.53. Chuck Dinkins recommended that Council approve the request for the forgiveness of loans for participants in the Urban Development Action Grant (UDAG) Loan Program.

A **MOTION** by Councilman Vickers, seconded by Councilman Payton, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve a request for the forgiveness of loans for participants in the Urban Development Action Grant (UDAG) Loan Program.

CITIZENS TO BE HEARD

Horace Solomon, Jr., 605 East Brookwood Drive, stated that there is a ditch in front of his residence that is a hazard to them. People throw beer bottles, cans, and all kinds of trash in the ditch. He also has problems with his lawn maintenance person who always has to get the trash out of the ditch. Sometimes the ditch grows up as high as two feet before the City comes by and cuts it. Mr. Solomon asked Council’s consideration in covering the ditch and having some culverts put in there so it can be level in front of his residence. There is also a smell coming from the ditch depending on what has been thrown in it. The City has covered the entire ditch except the last two residences which is his house and his neighbor’s house. He would like to get this done but the City has told him

that the cost will be totally his. He would have to purchase the culverts and get the work done. He pays taxes just like the rest of the people who had their ditch done. It is unfair for him to have to pay all of the expense in covering the ditch. Mr. Solomon asked Council to aid him with this request.

CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that this week is National Public Works Week and there were many events planned to show our appreciation for the 105 employees who work hard each day throughout the year on behalf of our City. On Monday, May 22, 2017, Mayor Gayle presented a Proclamation declaring it Public Works Week. On Tuesday a Recycling 101 event was held at Public Works, and then a Public Works Employee Appreciation Luncheon was held at Mathis Auditorium on Wednesday. Mayor Gayle, Councilwoman Miller-Cody, and Councilman Payton were in attendance at this event where they recognized Public Works employees for their service to the City. They had a guest speaker, Nate Taylor, Landfill Director for the City of Thomasville, who did a great job in delivering an important message that emphasized the changes in the Public Works field and the importance of on-the-job adaptability and professionalism. The Public Works Department also held an Adopt-A-Street Campaign today and tomorrow they will have a Touch-A-Truck event for area youth to participate in.

The Stormwater Division will be teaching participants about harvesting rainwater on May 26, 2017 from 12:00 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. at the City Hall Annex, Multi-Purpose Room. Each participant will receive one, 55 gallon rain barrel to make and take home and all supplies will be provided. This event is being held to encourage people to help with stormwater by collecting rain water on their property and using it to water plants and for other things.

The popular Downtown Valdosta Farm Days will continue this Saturday, May 27, 2017 from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. in the 100 block of East Valley Street which is located behind the historic Courthouse in Downtown Valdosta.

The City graduated 20 local citizens from the 8th annual Valdosta Government 101 Citizens Orientation on May 8, 2017 which brings the total to more than 200 graduates from the program to date. This initiative of the Mayor and Council has been a great success. It is inspiring to be at the graduation and hear about the class members' perspective on what they have learned and what they thought coming in versus what they left with. They all leave being ambassadors of the City. Also, the Citizens Police Academy is getting ready to graduate over 20 citizens on June 15, 2017. We have three of these programs, which includes the Fire Academy, and this is something no other local government in our area does for their citizens. We are very proud of the outreach to the community.

On May 17, 2017, the City of Valdosta recognized 12 Valdosta High School seniors who graduated from the Great Promise Partnership (GPP) program during a ceremony held in the Valdosta City Hall Annex Multi-Purpose Room. The City is proud to have hosted 17 of the 26 GPP students working in our community. These graduating seniors have been replaced with new GPP students who will begin their work at the City this summer. This program has been a real success and we are enjoying being a part of it.

The Southern Hospitality Work Camp will be back in Valdosta on June 25 - July 1, 2017 and dozens of youth will be working and improving 12 homes in our City neighborhoods. The Mayor and Council will be invited to take a tour of the homes and attend the final ceremony on Friday evening before the return home on Saturday.

The City of Valdosta Budget Hearings will be held on June 14-15, 2017 and a third Public Hearing will be held on June 22, 2017 where the Council will vote on it. State law requires two Public Hearings but we always have three. Last year, the schedule was for the Public Hearings to start at 3:00 p.m. on the first night and break for dinner around 5:30 p.m. They finished around 8:00 p.m. On the second night, the Public Hearing went from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. If Council has no objection to this schedule then they will go ahead and advertise the Public Hearings. The ad will run on June 6, 2017 to inform the public and Council will receive a copy of the Budget at that time as well

Fire Chief Freddie Broome was featured in an article that appeared in the Albany Herald on May 23, 2017 for training that he conducted for more than 24 Lee County Fire Department and EMS personnel. The training

focused on communication, teamwork, and sound decision-making and it was a great example of how the City of Valdosta collaborates with our neighboring counties and counties across the State for the betterment of the public safety field.

The City was proud to host Leadership Moody on May 17, 2017 and the members visited City Hall and the Valdosta Police Department. Leadership Moody, which was started by Col. Tom Kunkel, is a development leadership program at Moody Air Force Base where selected Senior Non-Commissioned Officers, Field Grade Officers, and civilians gain leadership insights from local area leaders in government, education, or other community agencies. Councilman Alvin Payton, Jr., Police Chief Brian Childress, and City Manager Larry Hanson presented information to the group of leaders about our City organization. They were very engaged and asked a lot of interesting questions.

The GEFA loan on the Force Main Project will be closed out very soon. That was a \$37 million Project and everything has been completed. They came in approximately \$13,000 under budget and ahead of schedule. Next week, GEFA will be in Valdosta to do a documentary on the Force Main Project and the new Withlacoochee Wastewater Treatment Plant. They want to use our City as an example and will be here videoing the Projects and interviewing Staff. They want to use our experience as a way to teach other cities and counties throughout Georgia how a community can and should respond to a disaster event and use GEFA. We finished 16 months ahead of schedule and used a Design/Build approach. In fact we changed GEFA's methodology because at the time we were in that predicament, GEFA did not even allow Design/Build. We worked with them and convinced them that it was a great delivery method to accelerate the Projects. Now GEFA is actually recommending that all of their customers use Design/Build. It is a great story to tell about Valdosta and turn it into a documentary to use as a sales tool for other cities and counties in Georgia.

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that Henry Hicks, Utilities Director, will be retiring from the City of Valdosta on May 31, 2017. Henry joined the City on October 13, 2008 which was approximately six months before the Presidentially-declared flood of 2009. Henry led the City and the Utilities Department Staff through some difficult times and the after effects of the flood that FEMA described as "destroyed facilities." We waited three years before FEMA responded and denied our claims. We were in limbo for that long until July 12 and then in four years we acquired land, designed, and built a \$23 million Wastewater Treatment Plant and a \$37 million Force Main that was six miles long and required over 100 parcels of land. These were extremely difficult and complicated Projects. On the morning of the flood, he and Henry stood at the Withlacoochee Wastewater Treatment Plant and this was one of the more difficult things he has been through in his career. We would have never been able to accomplish all of that without Henry's professionalism, knowledge, leadership, and perseverance because those were some difficult times. Larry Hanson stated that Henry was a great teammate and friend, and on behalf of the Mayor and Council, he thanked Henry for his service to the City and for getting us through those difficult times.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Mayor Gayle stated that he has enjoyed working with Henry Hicks, Utilities Director. He has always been so jovial and very prompt. Henry always responded immediately whenever he was called upon and that is the sign of a true professional.

Councilwoman Miller-Cody stated that on behalf of the late Councilman James Wright, his wife, his mother and father, his other family members, and many others, she wanted to thank Council for approving the request to rename a portion of Deeb Street in his honor. He was a leader and role model and gave it his all.

Councilman Payton stated that he had the same sentiments as Councilwoman Miller-Cody.

Councilwoman Tooley thanked everyone for their support in renaming a portion of the street in Councilman Wright's honor and it was very much appreciated. Also, she had finally gotten to where she could understand Henry Hicks and now he is leaving. He will be missed very much.

Mayor Gayle entertained a motion to adjourn the regular Council meeting and enter into Executive Session for the purpose of discussing real estate and litigation.

A MOTION by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Payton, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to adjourn the May 25, 2017 meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:16 p.m. and enter into Executive Session for the purpose of discussing real estate and litigation.

Mayor Gayle reconvened the regular City Council meeting at 6:36 p.m. and stated that there was discussion of real estate and litigation in the Executive Session and action would need to be taken on the real estate item.

A MOTION by Councilman Vickers, seconded by Councilwoman Miller-Cody, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to accept an offer of \$12,500 for the purchase of a remnant parcel located at the corner of Woodrow Wilson Drive and Bemiss Road.

Mayor Gayle entertained a motion for adjournment.

A MOTION by Councilman Vickers, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to adjourn the May 25, 2017 Meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:37 p.m. to meet again in Regular Session on Thursday, June 8, 2017.

City Clerk, City of Valdosta

Mayor, City of Valdosta