

MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL
5:30 P.M., THURSDAY, APRIL 6, 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, Ben Norton, Alvin Payton, Jr., Sandra Tooley, Robert Yost, and Vivian Miller-Cody. The invocation was given by Pastor William Morgan, Morning Star Missionary Baptist Church, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

AWARDS AND PRESENTATIONS

EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH AWARD

Consideration of the April, 2017 Employee of the Month Award (Administrative Battalion Chief Johnny Henry and Special Operations Captain Jeffrey Thibodeau, Valdosta Fire Department).

Johnny Henry began his employment with the City of Valdosta Fire Department in April, 2002 and presently holds the position of Administrative Battalion Chief. Chief Henry is responsible for assisting the Department with the day-to-day operations, overseeing the hiring and promotional process, ISO internal audits, and serves as the Health and Wellness Administrator. Jeffrey Thibodeau began his employment with the City of Valdosta Fire Department in September, 2000 and presently holds the position of Special Operations Captain. Captain Thibodeau is responsible for managing the GSAR and Haz-Mat teams, coordinating regional specialty rescue training, and conducting haz-mat site surveys. Last year during the holiday season, a young lady with a small infant child stopped by Fire Station 1. She was in need of a car seat as the one she owned was broken and unsafe for usage. The mother had an 11-hour drive ahead and was not financially able to purchase a new car seat. Chief Henry contacted several resources trying to obtain a new car seat. Once all efforts were exhausted, Chief Henry and Captain Thibodeau went to Wal-Mart and purchased a new car seat with extra items. Chief Henry and Captain Thibodeau’s humanitarian actions put the mother at ease. The mother was able to drive the 11-hour trip while ensuring her infant child was safely secured in a car seat. This is a perfect demonstration of the City of Valdosta’s city slogan “Quality Service by Quality People.” For these reasons and many others, the Employee Relations Committee nominated Battalion Chief Johnny Henry and Capt. Jeff Thibodeau as Employees of the Month.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the March 23, 2017 Regular Meeting were approved by unanimous consent (7-0) of the Council.

BIDS, CONTRACTS, AGREEMENTS, AND EXPENDITURES

Consideration of bids for installation of lighting on the Martin Luther King, Jr. Corridor Project.

Pat Collins, City Engineer, stated that since its inception of the original Streetscape Project in Downtown Valdosta, the City of Valdosta has planned, designed, and constructed several phases to include the Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) Corridor Streetscape Project. In March, 2017, the latest construction of the second portion of the Project including sidewalk, street, and landscaping improvements were finished and have since been accepted as complete. This most recent work extended from South Patterson Street to South Oak Street. Street lighting for this phase was intentionally not included in the original construction contract because it was to be provided directly by Georgia Power. The lighting includes Tiger Green aluminum poles on concrete bases with high pressure sodium Primasphere fixtures identical to the lighting fixtures installed on the previous phase of MLK and also used Downtown. The approved 2016-2017 Capital Improvement Plan budget for MLK allotted \$80,000 for the installation of these lights. Georgia Power submitted a quotation to the Engineering Department on March 24, 2017 which included two proposed costs for the installation of these lights. The cost for Proposal 1 was \$48,000 and includes the complete installation of the fixtures using underground services and a low \$300 monthly rate for operation and maintenance. Proposal 2 would finance the upfront cost of the fixtures and include a much higher

BIDS, CONTRACTS, AGREEMENTS, AND EXPENDITURES

\$935 monthly rate for fixture charges, operation, and maintenance. Pat Collins recommended that Council approve the bid submitted by Georgia Power in the amount of \$48,000 plus a 10% contingency to handle any unforeseen circumstances for a total of \$52,800 for installation of lighting on the Martin Luther King, Jr. Corridor Project.

A MOTION by Councilwoman Tooley, seconded by Councilman Payton, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to approve the bid submitted by Georgia Power in the amount of \$48,000 plus a 10% contingency to handle any unforeseen circumstances for a total of \$52,800 for installation of lighting on the Martin Luther King, Jr. Corridor Project.

Consideration of an Agreement for governmental affairs representation for the City of Valdosta.

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that Government Solutions, LLC serves as a governmental affairs consultant and provides representation for municipalities and counties in the State of Georgia. The overall scope of their work is to collaborate in the development of governmental affairs strategies for the State of Georgia and for the Georgia Congressional Delegation. The Staff of Government Solutions, LLC consists of the following: Terry Mathews, a founding partner of Mathews & Maxwell, Inc. and a long-time senior advisor to former U. S. Senator Sam Nunn, Scott Maxwell, a founding partner of Mathews & Maxwell, Inc. and who has successfully represented major companies and associations at the State Legislature, and Terry L. Coleman, Speaker Emeritus of the Georgia House of Representatives and who retired after 34 years of service. Government Solutions, LLC has long established relationships with key legislative and executive leadership and they will work with the City of Valdosta to implement a public policy agenda and communicate directly with members of the General Assembly, Governor Nathan Deal and Staff, Lt. Government Casey Cagle and Staff, various state agencies and others as appropriate to advocate for policies that best serve the City of Valdosta. Government Solutions will develop a well-planned strategy to educate and influence the opinions of government leaders. The proposed monthly fee will be \$4,000. The term of the Agreement will run from April 1, 2017 through June 30, 2018 and either party can reserve the right to terminate the Agreement without cause by a 30-day notice. Larry Hanson recommended that Council approve the Agreement with Government Solutions, LLC. Councilman Payton inquired about the two additional years that could be added to the Agreement. Larry Hanson stated that most of the contracts that we have with vendors allow the City to have the option to renew the contract for two additional years which is standard procedure. This is the City's option to exercise it to continue for an additional year. It is not automatic and it is not at the discretion of the contractor but it is up to Council as to whether they want to include that in the Agreement. Councilwoman Tooley inquired as to whether this would be brought up to them again if they add that to the Agreement. Larry Hanson stated that it would not be voted upon and that is why you enter that into the contracts so that you will have options to renew it automatically. Council will meet with Government Solutions in the fall to help develop our platform for next year. It will be up to the Council as to whether they want to renew or extend the contract. It just does not require a vote each year.

A MOTION by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Payton, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to approve the amended version of the Agreement for governmental affairs representation for the City of Valdosta.

LOCAL FUNDING AND REQUESTS

Consideration of a Request for Proposal (RFP) for Section 125 Cafeteria Plan-Supplemental Benefits for the City of Valdosta.

Renassa Small, Human Resources Director, stated that this Request for Proposal (RFP) process was conducted for the City of Valdosta's Section 125 Cafeteria Plan - Supplemental Benefits. It is a three year contract with two, one-year renewal options. The Section 125 Cafeteria Plan is part of the IRS Code that allows the conversion of taxable earnings/salary into non-taxable benefits. The program allows you to pay for qualified benefit premiums, via payroll deduction, prior to any taxes being calculated/deducted from the earnings/salary. Sealed RFPs were received from six participating vendors for the Section 125 Cafeteria Plan. All six vendors were invited to conduct presentations to the Committee, which was comprised of the Assistant City Manager, Human Resources Director, Finance Director, and a City Council member appointed by the Mayor. Upon conclusion of all presentations and deliberation, the Committee selected vendor Taylor Insurance. Renassa Small recommended that Council approve Committee's selection of Taylor Insurance for the Section 125 Cafeteria Plan-Supplemental Benefits for the City of Valdosta.

A **MOTION** by Councilman Payton, seconded by Councilman Norton, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to approve the approve Committee's selection of Taylor Insurance for the Section 125 Cafeteria Plan-Supplemental Benefits for the City of Valdosta.

CITIZENS TO BE HEARD

Ken Klanecki stated that he had no address to give because he is homeless. Over the past five weeks, his personal circumstances have led him to look for a room with a bed on Ashley Street. There are only three motels and the Studio Courtyard is always filled. He has also gone to the Ashley Oaks and they have no rooms. He went to a third motel, The Delmar, and they do not even a phone there and they only get one channel on the television. He has also found that there is so much debris discarded on North Ashley Street and he is appalled. This is one of the main streets in Valdosta and at one time it was the meeting place for all the young people in the 1970's. He urged the Council and the Public Works Department to try to get the merchants to clean up in front of their businesses. The grass is not cut and there are bottles, plastic, and trash all over the place.

Evelyn Tooley Smith and she had a concern. Last week they had a big 18-wheeler come down their street and it tore down the wires and part of the side of a house. They were trying to get some information on the man but he did not want to give them any information. They would not let the truck leave until a Police Officer came. Ms. Smith thanked Police Chief Brian Childress for his assistance. The man tore the wires down and then he said he could not speak English but he knew enough English to tell them he could not speak it. Ms. Smith asked him about the truck because they know they are not supposed to be on South Street and Troup Street in a residential area. The man said he got lost. Chief Childress told them that he would get some information on the man and the company. Ms. Smith stated that she then called a City Department about signs because they were saying there were not any signs up there; however, on Troup Street where they renovated it there are signs that prohibit big trucks. Ms. Smith asked for Council's help in getting some signs saying, "No Large Trucks Allowed" between South Street and Troup Street.

Susan Wheling stated that she has a vindictive neighbor who called her out about her chickens. She will be putting up a fence so the neighbor does not have to see her dogs which she does not like either; however, there are hundreds of people in the City limits who have had chickens. They are wonderful pets and eat insects, lay delicious organic eggs which she sells at the Farmer's Market and gives away to neighbors, and they are fun to have as pets. Her chickens are five years old and there are many coops that you will see on people's front lawns. Ms. Wheling stated that she was cited for the livestock Code but there is also a Code which states you can have fowl but they are to be kept in a safe area. Everyone who has chickens, including the lawyers and doctors, referred her to that Code which states the fowl should be contained nicely. Ms. Wheling asked Council's consideration in changing the livestock rule and take out reference to chickens. Across the country people are raising chickens because it is a fun thing to do and it is part of community-supported agriculture. She has copied Ordinances from ten different cities including Atlanta, Savannah, and Athens and there is a 22 page list of all the cities in Georgia that do allow chickens. Some of the cities only allow 4 chickens, some allow 25, and some have a noise limit meaning no roosters. Ms. Wheling stated that she and her friend developed gardens at the City schools five years ago and they brought their chickens into the school so they could see what they are like and watch eggs hatch. This would be a fun and cool idea for Valdosta to do that. She would be happy to host a workshop on how to raise backyard chickens. Ms. Wheling stated that she loves her chickens and did not want to give them up. Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that there is a contradiction in the Ordinance because there is a section that is referred to back from 1976 which states, "Any person who shall have fowl in the City shall be required to provide a coop." However, there is a section that was added a few years ago that states, "It should be unlawful for any owner of property located in a residential neighborhood to keep or maintain livestock in a residential area." It goes on to define livestock elsewhere to include chickens and roosters. Larry Hanson suggested that the Mayor and Council authorize Staff to do some research and look at developing appropriate regulations. Many cities limit the number of chickens, many do not allow roosters, many require certain cleanliness standards, and many require an annual permit and inspection. However, in the interest of fairness, we do not want anyone crying foul so we will not be writing any citations. Ms. Wheling inquired as to whether she could keep her chickens while the City is doing research. Larry Hanson stated that we would hold the Ordinance in obedience.

Clifton Rogers, who resides at the corner of Rogers and Board Street, stated that on his street someone has chickens and they keep coming in his garden. It is time to put a stop to it. Larry Hanson, City Manager, asked he if

tried to put a sign up saying "No Chickens Allowed." Mr. Rogers stated that chickens do not read but they know how to come into your garden and eat it up. Mr. Rogers asked Council's consideration in doing something about it or allow him to shoot the chickens.

Leigh Touchton stated that all of their children grew up with Susan Wheling's chickens and it makes it a real vibrant part of their community. She even has Easter egg chickens and there have been many Easters when those eggs got in all of their children's Easter baskets. She got into raising chickens and all of the neighbors supported her. They buy eggs from her because they read these horrible stories about the big mass production of chickens and the inhumane way that they are taken into these factories to produce eggs. They wanted to do something in a little way that supported a more humane way of developing eggs. They even participate in Farm Days and they could even get involved with the Mildred Hunter Center and Boys and Girls Club. This is like a small business and it is a way to start people about a better form of agriculture. Councilman Carroll has been to their Christmas parties and the chickens are an incredible draw. Everyone wants to go out and feed the chickens. It is a stress reducer. Ms. Wheling's chickens are in a cage and they are not allowed to go in anyone else's yard. Ms. Touchton asked Council's consideration in letting Ms. Wheling keep her chickens.

CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that the CALEA visit went very well and we are very proud of our Police Department. We look forward to receiving the official confirmation but to go through that process and meeting 484 standards with no findings and 100% compliance is an incredible achievement. We are very proud of all the members of the Police Department and Chief Brian Childress.

The Fire Department is featured this month in Firehouse Magazine. It discusses our City and the four new fire trucks we purchased. It is a very nice story about a good purchase to meet the needs of our City.

The Main Street Program was named by the State as 1 of 16 Georgia Exceptional Main Streets (GEMS) recipient. We were one of the first 5 in the State and now there are 16 out of approximately 100 Main Street Programs in the State. This demonstrates the good things our Main Street is doing for the Downtown area.

The first class of City Government was held on Monday, April 3, 2017 and it went very well. Larry Hanson, City Manager, Mayor Gayle, Councilman Payton, and the Development Authority spoke at the session. The second class will be held on Monday, April 10, 2017 and it will be Public Safety night. They will be exposed to the Municipal Court as well as Police and Fire. That is always a fun and exciting night for the class.

National Community Development Week will be held April 17-21, 2017. There will be a lot of activities scheduled and Council is encouraged to participate in this event.

The Citizens Police Academy starts April 13, 2017 and there are still a couple of slots to fill. Council members are asked to encourage their constituents to sign up and participate in that program.

The Electronic Recycling Event will be held on Saturday, April 8, 2017 from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at Mathis Auditorium. This has been a very popular event and it is a great way to keep all of the electronics out of our landfill. Citizens are encouraged to participate in this event.

Farms Days will begin on Saturday, April 8, 2017 from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. in the Downtown area. It will be held the first and third Saturday of each month through November of this year and citizens are encouraged to attend.

Some of the LMIG Projects have been completed and a few were delayed by the weather. Work this week on Redwood Road, Clay Road, and Old Clyattville Road will be taking place over the next several days. The East Park Avenue work that was scheduled to be done during the spring break was delayed due to rain. The demo work was started today and they will be working next week to complete it.

Clay Road will be closed temporarily for ten days starting April 10, 2017 for the Georgia Department of Transportation to do the finishing portions of relocating the railroad arm. This will finish up the realignment of

Hollywood Road and Clay Road. This was approximately a \$3 million Project and will improve safety in that area. They will also be adding a turn signal, turn lanes, and a bicycle lane.

The TSLOST, which is by State law the new Transportation Act, allows regional referendums again this year. It basically states if 10 out of the 18 counties in our region pass a Resolution there will be a regional referendum. Ten counties have now passed that Resolution and Lowndes County has not yet voted on it; however, it does not matter now because there will be a regional TSPLOST referendum. It is now incumbent upon us to develop a list of projects. We do not know the revenue projection for the region or any negotiation about what our share might be but we may need to have a special Work Session to talk about transportation and the type of projects we would like to propose for the regional referendum because it will be taking place in November. Councilman Vickers inquired as to whether the money would go into one pot and then be divided up. Larry Hanson stated that was correct. It will go to one pot and part of the negotiation will be to decide how it would be divided up so it is not automatically based on population. Councilman Carroll inquired as to whether the original TSPLOST was a 13-county region versus 18. Larry Hanson stated that it was 18 because they consolidated the RDC regions.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilman Carroll inquired as to whether the Electronics Recycling Event was just for City residents or could County residents participate as well. Larry Hanson stated that this was opened up to allow anyone in Lowndes County or adjacent counties to participate. There is no cost to the City so we allow other residents to participate. The only thing that a fee is required for is a television and that is because part of it has to be disposed of. Councilman Payton inquired as to the amount of the fee for televisions. Larry Hanson stated that it was \$20 per television.

Councilman Vickers inquired as to when they would have a Work Session on the TSPLOST. Larry Hanson stated that they would like to bring something to Council in categories such as what roads that might need widening, resurfacing priorities, intersection priorities, and traffic signal priorities. Also, we do not want to propose projects that we think will be funded by Federal or State funds. We want to compliment and add to and not fund something that we think could be funded by another source. We would not look at projects such as Jerry Jones or the roundabouts at Five Points which will be 100% State-funded. Council needs to be thinking about projects in their Districts. Sidewalks and transit are also eligible. Mayor Gayle stated that this is going to happen fast. He will be meeting with the Mayors from Dasher, Hahira, Lake Park, and Remerton on Monday, April 10, 2017. The Chairman of the County Commission will be on the Regional Roundtable and then the other five Cities in the County will have to select one representative to be on that also which will be done on Monday. Councilman Vickers stated that the City and the County need to work together on this. Larry Hanson stated that this is a great opportunity for projects that we would not be able to fund. Councilman Carroll stated that it would be important to link this to our website to help educate citizens about the TSPLOST, how it works, and how we got to where we are at because many people are angry. They are saying that this was voted down several years ago and they are wondering why it is being brought up again. There are a lot of questions and concerns and we owe it to the citizens to provide them with as much information as we can. Larry Hanson recommended that they have a special Work Session at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, April 18, 2017 and have a presentation on TSPLOST. The Mayor will have met with the other Mayors and the region will have met by then so they should have a ballpark estimate. They are saying that the estimate now will not be as high as it was several years ago which was \$640 million for ten years for the entire region. We are very early in it but we have to move fast. Council was in agreement to meet on Tuesday, April 18, 2017.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Gayle entertained a motion for adjournment.

A MOTION by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Norton, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to adjourn the April 6, 2017 Meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:11 p.m. to meet again in Regular Session on Thursday, April 20, 2017.