

**MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL
5:30 P.M., THURSDAY, AUGUST 25, 2016
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: Tim Carroll, Ben Norton, Alvin Payton, Jr., Sandra Tooley, and Vivian Miller-Cody. Councilman Joseph "Sonny" Vickers and Councilman Robert Yost were absent. The invocation was given by Pastor Johnnie Quarterman, North Valdosta Church of God, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the August 11, 2016 Regular Meeting were approved by unanimous consent (5-0) of the Council.

ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS

ORDINANCE NO. 2016-16, AN ORDINANCE TO ADOPT THE TAX MILLAGE RATE FOR THE CITY OF VALDOSTA

Consideration of an Ordinance to adopt the tax millage rate for the City of Valdosta.

Mayor John Gayle stated that there were three Public Hearings on the tax millage rate increase. Council has had time to study this and ask questions and they have also heard input from citizens. Mayor Gayle entertained a motion for adoption of the tax millage rate for the City of Valdosta.

Councilman Carroll stated that this is not an easy thing to do when raising taxes but in the past 22 years the City has had 11 reductions in the millage rate. We are now looking at our second increase. With the projects that we have in our community and Lowndes County, it is our hope that in a couple of years we will 12 reductions and only 2 increases. After looking at the difficulties that the Police, Fire, and other Departments in the City are having in employee turnover and morale and the costs associated with high turnover rates, this is something that we must do in order to look toward the future for our City.

A MOTION by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Payton, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to enact Ordinance No. 2016-16, an Ordinance to adopt the tax millage rate for the City of Valdosta, the complete text of which will be found in Ordinance Book XIII.

RESOLUTION NO. 2016-11, A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE SALE OF A TAX ANTICIPATION NOTE (TAN) TO THE BANK OF AMERICA

Consideration of a Resolution authorizing the sale of a Tax Anticipation Note (TAN) to the Bank of America.

Chuck Dinkins, Finance Director, stated that each year, the City of Valdosta receives the majority of its property tax revenue at the end of the calendar year with substantial receipts occurring in November. Given the acceleration of the schedule of several SPLOST projects, the General Fund has loaned funds to the SPLOST fund to cash flow its activities in addition to capital funded from General Fund. This has an impact on the City's available cash reserves. In an abundance of caution, Staff is recommending the sale of a \$3,000,000 Tax Anticipation Note (TAN) to Bank of America to ensure adequate liquidity for operations for the next 90-120 days. Bank of America has proposed a taxable rate of 1.65% (actual over/360) on a single draw note with principal and interest due December 29, 2016. This will result in a payment at maturity of \$3,000,000 in principal together with approximately \$16,949 in interest. In addition, there will be approximately \$12,000 in fees for the preparation of the documents and the origination of the note. This will yield a full cost of borrowing of about 2.81%. Chuck Dinkins recommended that Council approve a Resolution authorizing the sale of a Tax Anticipation Note (TAN) to the Bank of America.

A **MOTION** by Councilman Payton, seconded by Councilman Norton, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to enact Resolution No. 2016-11, a Resolution authorizing the sale of a Tax Anticipation Note (TAN) to the Bank of America, the complete text of which will be found in Resolution Book V.

RESOLUTION NO. 2016-12, A RESOLUTION FOR A COMMUNITY HOME INVESTMENT PROGRAM (CHIP) GRANT AWARD BY THE GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

Consideration of a Resolution for a Community Home Investment Program (CHIP) Grant Award by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs.

Vanassa Flucas, Neighborhood Development Manager, stated that the City has been a recipient of Community Home Investment Program (CHIP) Grant funding from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) from 2006 through 2011 to assist in addressing the housing needs of our community. In previous years when funding was awarded to the City, both the Valdosta Public Housing Authority (down payment assistance) and Valdosta-Lowndes County Habitat for Humanity (down payment assistance and rehabilitation) benefited from the financial support this funding source placed in the community to assist with affordable housing. The Council approved a Resolution in February, 2016 to apply for a CHIP Grant that was offered by DCA to provide homeowner rehabilitation or new construction of single family homes for low to moderate income families who were eligible for program services within the Designated Revitalization Area (DRA). The Grant application was submitted in partnership with the Valdosta-Lowndes County Habitat for Humanity. The partnership was seeking to apply for the maximum amount allowed per applicant, which was \$600,000. The Grant required up to 15% cash/in-kind match and a \$250.00 application fee payable to the Georgia Housing and Finance Authority, which will be paid equally. The City of Valdosta was awarded a \$612,000 CHIP Grant on May 24, 2016 to provide housing rehabilitation assistance for a minimum of 12 homes and new construction of a minimum of 12 homes within the DRA. Vanassa Flucas recommended that Council approve the Resolution for acceptance of this Grant Award by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs.

Councilman Payton inquired as to how they received an additional \$12,000 for the Grant. Vanassa Flucas stated that was an administrative fee that is allowed for the Grant funding. It is not something that they set aside for actual activities and it is for the administration of the Grant. Councilman Payton inquired as to whether the \$600,000 was totally for the rehabilitation of 12 homes and the building of 12 new ones. Vanassa Flucas stated that was correct and \$300,000 was going to Habitat for Humanity for 12 new homes and \$300,000 was being retained by the City for the rehabilitation of 12 homes. They will allocate \$25,000 for each project which averages out to be \$500 for the administrative fee for each. Councilman Payton inquired as to whether the Land Bank Authority would be involved in the new homes. Vanassa Flucas stated that was a possibility. They have worked in conjunction with Habitat for Humanity on some parcels that the Land Bank Authority has but it is not guaranteed. Councilman Payton inquired as to what things could be included in the rehabilitation of a home. Vanassa Flucas stated that when they get a request to look at a house some of the things they look at are electrical, plumbing, siding, and weatherization. If they spend rehabilitation money on the home they must bring it completely up to Code. Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that even with lead paint they have to do an analysis. Councilman Payton inquired as to whether some of the homes could be torn down and rebuilt due to the poor condition they may be in. Vanassa Flucas stated that Habitat for Humanity has criteria for their program and people who apply must be at a certain income level. With this infusion of money from DCA, they are able to use the funds for down payment assistance for some of the applicants who are below the income threshold and who qualify for their programs. They may be extremely low income and do not even qualify for Habitat's normal program. This funding will allow them to reach that population and pull them up to the level in which they can apply and qualify for the Habitat program. The \$25,000 would be put toward a new home because the average cost of a new home for them is between \$75,000 and \$80,000. Councilman Payton inquired as to whether they would be utilizing MBE and WBE builders if possible. Vanassa Flucas stated that they would be utilizing MBE and WBE because they have to do the same criteria for the CDBG funding and that is an on-going process with them. They also solicit residents and Section 3 business entities because that is something they have to track. Larry Hanson stated that the Valdosta Small Emerging Business (VESB) Program that the City has had for some years has developed some very good contractors that are already doing a good bit of housing renovation work on these contracts for the City. We know we have existing contractors who have come through the VSEB Program that can perform this work and meet the MBE requirements. Any time you are using Federal funds that are passed through to the State there are

always more requirements. The CHIP Grant is very competitive and we have not had one in several years. It is another effort we are doing to meet the housing needs and issues in our City. We are very fortunate to have written a competitive application to get basically two different housing projects going on. Councilman Payton inquired as to whether the DRA encompassed Districts 1, 2, and 3. Vanassa Flucas stated that the DRA is the 17 contiguous neighborhoods that make up the City of Valdosta. There are small areas in the south tip and the north tip that are not included in the DRA. Citizens can apply at the Neighborhood Development Department or on-line. Mayor Gayle inquired about the 15% match and if we were able to use any in-kind services. Vanassa Flucas stated that the entire Grant was based on in-kind and they did not have to come up with any cash. All of the expertise that we have in-house with the Neighborhood Development Staff gave them points and financial leverage. They also have their own in-house Inspections Division with the City of Valdosta and they do not have to outsource that money. They had approximately \$165,000 of in-kind services for this Grant.

A MOTION by Councilman Payton, seconded by Councilwoman Tooley, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to enact Resolution No. 2016-12, a Resolution for a Community Home Investment Program (CHIP) Grant Award by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, the complete text of which will be found in Resolution Book V.

BIDS, CONTRACTS, AGREEMENTS, AND EXPENDITURES

Consideration of bids for turnout gear for the Valdosta Fire Department.

Fire Chief Freddie Broome stated that there were some unforeseeable resignations in June and the Fire Department was forced to hire 13 new employees who started work on August 22, 2016. The Fire Department needs to purchase turnout gear for the 13 new recruits who are due to go to training in the very near future. The turnout gear consists of a helmet, mask, hood, coats, gloves, pants, and shoes and is fitted to the individual to meet all safety requirements. Due to the nature of their duties, the Department is mandated to meet stringent requirements for the outer wear used when Staff is dispatched to emergencies for their protection. The Department selected the Morning Pride brand several years ago due the quality and durability of this particular brand. The Morning Pride turnout gear is on a State of Georgia contract that was awarded to Fisher Safety. The contract and the Valdosta Purchasing Ordinance will allow the City to utilize these State contracts which represents a cost savings through volume buying by many entities. The cost for the gear for 13 recruits is \$33,583.16 (approximately \$2,800 per recruit) which is currently budgeted. Chief Broome recommended that Council approve the bid submitted by Fisher Safety in the amount of \$33,583.16 and allow the Fire Department to proceed with the purchase. Councilwoman Tooley inquired about the gear that was purchased for the employees who resigned. Chief Broome stated that the gear is measured for a particular individual and they have tried to use it for some of their current employees whose gear is near the expiration. They are trying to recycle the gear of the employees who just left but will still have to purchase new gear. Councilwoman Tooley inquired as to whether there is some type of contract that the firefighters have to sign for reimbursement of the gear and what we have invested in them. Chief Broome stated that they do have something in place for new employees up to three years. All employees who resigned had been with the Department for five years or longer. Councilman Carroll stated that if we had the pay scale right we would not be incurring this expense. Chief Broome stated that we lost 11 employees and out of those 10 went to other Fire Departments. Eight of them went to one particular Fire Department and they all went for more pay. Since we have hired the 13, we lost one Lieutenant last week who went to another Fire Department in the Atlanta area. Larry Hanson stated that we lost the Lieutenant to Johns Creek and she was making more there as Firefighter than as a Lieutenant here. Larry Hanson stated that he had instructed Chief Broome to let any new applicants know what the new pay scale would be. Chief Broome stated last year they only had 27 applicants and this year they had over 60 applicants. Larry Hanson stated that all the new hires will have to sign a contract that they will be here for three years or they will have to reimburse the City for some of their costs and training; however, there is no way that you can legally require a person to sign a contract for five or ten years and not give them the opportunity to improve themselves. This was a unique situation in that Tift County did not have a Fire Department and they separated themselves from Tifton and created a new Fire Department. The Tift County Manager called and said they were looking at the best Fire Department in South Georgia with the only Class 1 ISO rating so they literally came and hired our people because they knew they were getting skilled people who were already trained and certified. Councilwoman Tooley inquired as to whether we would hire any of these people back if they wanted to come back to Valdosta in three years. Chief Broome stated that we would consider hiring them back but they would have to go through the process like everyone else. Larry Hanson stated that they have to go

through 13 weeks of training so we invest a lot in someone before they are ever placed on a fire truck. That is why it is important to have good salaries and benefits so that they will choose to stay and make it a career.

A MOTION by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilwoman Miller-Cody, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to approve the bid submitted by Fisher Safety in the amount of \$33,583.16 for turnout gear and allow the Fire Department to proceed with the purchase.

Consideration of bids for two generators and cabling for the Utilities Department.

Henry Hicks, Utilities Director, stated that the Utilities Department needs to purchase two mobile generators and cabling. These generators will be used at various locations when power outages occur to provide power to lift stations which move waste through the wastewater collection lines to the Wastewater Treatment Plants. These generators were mandated by the Environmental Protection Division (EPD) and need to be in our inventory by December, 2016. Funds are in the current year budget for this purchase. Sealed bids were received on August 16, 2016. Several vendors were sent the invitation to bid and the only bid received was from Ace Electric in the amount of \$144,700 for two generators and various heavy duty cabling. These generators are required to have multiple power capabilities where they can power anything from a 480 volt three phase, a 240 volt three phase, and a 208 volt three phase. A lot of generators do not come with that capability and the reason they had that spec in there was because the lift stations are located not only in residential but in commercial areas as well. The voltages will vary in those areas and they have to be able to switch the generator to match the voltage. These generators are more expensive because we had to meet Tier 4 of the EPA regulations for emissions. Tier 4 is more stringent and requires more cleaning of the exhaust. Henry Hicks recommended that Council approve the bid submitted by Ace Electric in the amount of \$144,700 for two generators and cabling for the Utilities Department. Councilman Payton inquired as to how many generators this would give the City. Henry Hicks stated that we would have three generators. This would also clear up one of the three remaining action items. The other two actions items include the lift station rehabilitation and we have the last four lift station designs completed but have not sent that out for bids yet. The last one is the sewer collection system rehabilitation and it is long term. The effective date for that is December, 2018 but at the same time we have to give them a future plan on what we are going to do in the coming years. Larry Hanson stated that this all works together with the rehabilitation of the lift stations, re-wiring them for generators, and using SCADA as a communication tool so we will have some time from when the power goes down before it is really a crisis. Councilman Norton inquired as to why we had only one company bid on this. Henry Hicks stated that the voltage requirement may have been the reason for only one bid because a lot of the companies do not want to do that but they do have the capability.

A MOTION by Councilman Payton, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to approve the bid submitted by Ace Electric in the amount of \$144,700 for two generators and cabling and allow the Utilities Department to proceed with the purchase.

Consideration of a request to approve a design-build bid for the extension of utilities to Annexed Islands 85, 87, 91, and 92.

Pat Collins, City Engineer, stated that the City Ordinance for annexation and subsequent Court documents states that the City will install and pay for water and sewer mains to serve all properties in annexed islands. This Utility Extension Project is part of a larger effort and would provide water and sewer infrastructure to the four annexed islands 85, 87, 91, and 92. This Project was originally advertised as a lump sum Design-Build Project for seven annexed islands. Under a design-build scenario, the licensed Design Engineer works under a licensed contractor (builder) for the design and construction of all 8" sanitary sewer mains, sanitary sewer manholes, sanitary sewer services, 8" water mains, water services, and other related work installed in the Project. The design-build approach gives the owner less direct control of the design decisions; however, the approach is quicker than contracting separately for design and construction and the price of the Project is contracted as a fixed lump sum cost that is less subject to overruns (except for unavoidable and unforeseen circumstances). Bids were received on May 31, 2016 and the sole bid for the seven annexed islands scope was submitted by Standard Contractors in the amount of \$2,396,900.00. Funding for the annexed island Projects is through Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA) loans and as of August, the estimated available funding is \$1,169,000.00 with the current loan. The Engineering Department has been working with Standard Contractors on ways to reduce the cost and to

determine which islands could be completed at this time with the available funding. As a result, Standard Contractors produced cost breakdowns for each annexed island and Staff recommends moving forward with islands 85, 87, 91 and 92. The total requested funding for these four islands is \$1,067,310.44, and the breakdown is as follows: Island 85 - \$632,875.46, Island 87 - \$149,014.14, Island 91 - \$134,856.25, Island 92 - \$34,900.00, Bid Total - \$951,645.85, 10% Contingency - \$95,164.59, Estimated Cost of Easements - \$20,500.00, Project Total - \$1,067,310.44. As for all remaining islands, Staff is working to determine and secure the additional funding needed to ensure that the December 31, 2018 deadline is met. Pat Collins recommended that Council approve the bid of Standard Contractors in the amount of \$951,645.85, plus a 10% contingency (\$95,164.59) and easement cost (\$20,500.00) for a total of \$1,067,310.44.

A MOTION by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Payton, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to approve the bid of Standard Contractors in the amount of \$951,645.85 plus a 10% contingency (\$95,164.59) and easement cost (\$20,500.00) for a total of \$1,067,310.44 for the design-build of utilities extension to Annexed Islands 85, 87, 91, and 92.

LOCAL FUNDING AND REQUESTS

Consideration of a request to solicit participation in the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH) survey for housing and transportation.

Vanassa Flucas, Neighborhood Development Manager, stated that in November, 2015, the Neighborhood Development Division applied for a Community Assistantship Program (CAP) Grant through the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH). This Program provides approximately 100 hours of student and faculty time to work on an applied Research/Mapping Project within our community. The Program is designed to enhance the capacity of communities to address housing and community development goals. Through partnerships with the Department of Financial Planning, Housing and Consumer Economics (FHCE), and the College of Environment and Design (CED) at the University of Georgia (UGA), GICH provides access to student support for small and mid-sized housing. The City of Valdosta was selected for a CAP, which focuses on the community's need for affordable workforce housing and transportation. This information would be solicited in the form of an electronic survey given to employees who work for the top five employers in Valdosta (South Georgia Medical Center, Valdosta State University, Lowndes County Schools, Valdosta City Schools, and Lowes Regional Distribution Center). We are also seeking to include employees from the Lowndes County and Valdosta City governments. Those employers would be asked to encourage their employees to participate in the survey so the City can utilize this valuable information for both funding and resource allocation decisions in these two areas of focus (affordable workforce housing and transportation). The survey will be made available for a specific period of time on the City of Valdosta's website and will also be available in paper form for those who do not have access to a computer or the internet. Vanassa Flucas recommended that Council approve the request to solicit participation in the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH) survey for housing and transportation.

A MOTION by Councilman Norton, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to approve the request to solicit participation in the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH) survey for housing and transportation.

BOARDS, COMMISSIONS, AUTHORITIES, AND ADVISORY COMMITTEES

Consideration of an appointment to the Central Valdosta Development Authority /Downtown Development Authority.

Mayor John Gayle stated that the Central Valdosta Development Authority/Downtown Development Authority had a member, Kiera Moritz, who resigned due to personal reasons. Her term will expire on December 31, 2016. This appointment was advertised according to the Boards, Commissions, Authorities, and Advisory Committees Policy that was adopted by Mayor and Council. The only applicant to apply that met the requirements for serving on the Central Valdosta Development Authority/Downtown Development Authority was Michael C. Lee - Accountant (Lee & Associates Accountants).

Mayor Gayle asked for nominations. Councilman Carroll placed in consideration the name of Michael C. Lee. There being no other nominations, Mayor Gayle closed nominations. Michael C. Lee was appointed by acclamation to fill the unexpired term of Kiera Moritz on the Central Valdosta Development Authority /Downtown Development Authority.

Consideration of appointments to the Valdosta Tree Commission.

Mayor John Gayle stated that the Valdosta Tree Commission has three members, William G. Williamson, Dr. Leon Meeks, and Amy Hall (current Chairman) whose terms expire on September 6, 2016. Mr. Williamson and Dr. Meeks have not expressed an interest in being reappointed and Ms. Hall has expressed an interest in being reappointed. These appointments were advertised according to the Boards, Commissions, Authorities, and Advisory Committees Policy that was adopted by Mayor and Council. The applicants were as follows: (1) Morris H. Dukes – Retired, (2) Amy Hall - Budget Manager (City of Valdosta), (3) Robert Jones - Traction Manager (South Georgia Medical Center), (4) David Nelson - College Professor (Valdosta State University), (5) Catherine Nordin - Community Outreach (McLane Funeral Home), (6) Sally Querin - Landscape Architect (Self Employed), (7) Marion Ramsey - Orthopedic Technician Supervisor (South Georgia Medical Center), (8) Jonathan Vigue - Director of Revenue (Wild Adventures) - Second Choice, (9) Gregory Williams - Chief Executive Officer (PLAY-ON Foundation, Inc.).

Mayor Gayle asked for nominations. Councilman Carroll placed in consideration the name of Amy Hall. Councilwoman Tooley placed in consideration the name of Marion Ramsey. Councilman Payton placed in consideration the name of Sally Querin. There being no other nominations, Mayor Gayle closed nominations. Councilman Carroll called for a Point of Order and inquired as to whether Council could vote on all three with vote. Mayor Gayle stated that they could vote all three in at one time.

Amy Hall, Marion Ramsey, and Sally Querin were unanimously appointed (5-0) to serve a four year term on the Valdosta Tree Commission.

Consideration of an appointment to the Valdosta-Lowndes County Construction Board of Adjustments & Appeals.

Mayor John Gayle stated that the Valdosta-Lowndes County Construction Board of Adjustments and Appeals has a member, James D. Cone, whose term expired on June 30, 2016. Mr. Cone has expressed an interest in being reappointed. This appointment was advertised according to the Boards, Commissions, Authorities, and Advisory Committees Policy that was adopted by Mayor and Council. The only applicant to apply was Mr. Cone.

A MOTION by Councilman Payton, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to approve the appointment of James D. Cone to the Valdosta-Lowndes County Construction Board of Adjustments & Appeals for a term of three years.

Councilman Payton inquired as to whether the Ex-Officio position on the Valdosta-Lowndes County Construction Board of Adjustments & Appeals which was previously held by Councilman James Wright would be filled by the Council person who is now in that District. Mayor Gayle stated that this position is still vacant and will be filled at the next Council Meeting.

Consideration of appointments to the Valdosta-Lowndes County Zoning Board of Appeals.

Mayor John Gayle stated that the Valdosta-Lowndes County Zoning Board of Appeals has one member, Nancy Hobby, whose term expired July 1, 2016 and another member, Satrina Plyler whose term expires October 11, 2016. Ms. Hobby has expressed an interest in being reappointed and Ms. Plyler has not expressed an interest in being reappointed. One of these slots must be filled by an Attorney. These appointments were advertised according to the Boards, Commissions, Authorities, and Advisory Committees Policy that was adopted by Mayor and Council. The applicants were as follows: (1) Terry Cooper - HR Manager (Saft America, Inc.), (2) Nancy Hobby - Professional Multi-tasker (Self Employed), (3) Jonathan Vigue - Director of Revenue (Wild Adventures) -

First Choice, (4) Nathaniel D. Brantley - Attorney (Dover, Miller, Karras, & Langdale, P.C., and (5) Robert A. Rogers - Assistant District Attorney (Office of the District Attorney, Tifton Judicial Circuit).

Mayor Gayle asked for nominations for Position No. 1. Councilman Carroll placed in consideration the name of Nancy Hobby. There being no other nominations, Mayor Gayle closed nominations. Nancy Hobby was appointed by acclamation to serve a term of three years on the Valdosta-Lowndes County Zoning Board of Appeals.

Mayor Gayle asked for nominations for Position No. 2 to be filled by an Attorney. Councilwoman Tooley placed in consideration the name of Nathaniel Brantley. There being no other nominations, Mayor Gayle closed nominations. Nathaniel Brantley was appointed by acclamation to serve a term of three years on the Valdosta-Lowndes County Zoning Board of Appeals.

CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that we are currently in Phase 4 of smoke testing sewer lines. It began this week and they will be working in the areas of Northside Drive, Jaycee Shack Road, and McAfina Trail. This Phase is actually two years of Phases in one and it is the biggest Phase. We have done very well with the smoke testing.

Fire Chief Freddie Broome was recently appointed to the Wiregrass Technical College Board of Directors and Dr. Tina Anderson, President of Wiregrass Technical College, thought enough of him to put him in that leadership position. We are proud to have him representing our City and community on the Board.

There was a nice article in the Valdosta Daily Times recently about the Downtown Projects that are continuing to progress. We have 75% drawings of the Customer Service Center and some submitted drawings for the hotel. The Central Valdosta Development Authority recently made a decision on the location of the parking deck so now the engineering drawings can be prepared. We are continuing to see progress and the developer hopes to be able to break ground later this year.

Congressman Buddy Carter was in Valdosta last week to see the Mosquito Spraying and Surveillance Program which is very unique. The City works in conjunction with Valdosta State University and Lowndes County on this Program. Richard Hardy, Public Works Director, did a great job making a presentation and sharing information about how we try to keep our community safe in regards to mosquitoes.

The City has now completed water and sewer service to 66 annexed islands and we have contracted 4 more islands tonight. There are 16 left and some of those are very small. We first did a study and Phase 1 was where 50% or more of the residents wanted the service. We are now nearing the end and the remaining areas are either the least populated ones or undeveloped.

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that it was a difficult decision to increase the tax millage rate. While it is true that 11 times in the last 22 years the City lowered the millage rate, this is only the second time in 22 years that it has been increased. It is the hardest recommendation that Council can make and it is the hardest vote that elected officials take. We have a lot of potential development on the horizon in our community so it is our hope and goal that through this growth we can get back to reducing the millage rate. Larry Hanson thanked Council for their position on this and for helping citizens to understand what our goal is as a governing authority which is to begin to grow our way out of the economic downturn and reduce the millage rate in the future.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilman Carroll stated that recently he attended the second "Think Tank" Meeting that the Neighborhood Development Division has been working on and the attendance has more than doubled from the first one. Councilwoman Miller-Cody and Councilman Norton were also in attendance and it says a lot that the City is very committed to its on-going project to eliminate substandard housing and to improve the quality of the housing stock in our community for our children and the elderly.

Councilwoman Tooley stated that it was not an easy decision to vote on the tax millage rate increase tonight and they understand how the citizens feel. There were not too many other choices that they had at this point. They heard what the citizens had to say and they appreciate their attendance. Councilwoman Tooley stated that she would ask Council to consider some of the things that the citizens said such as moving up the Citizens to be Heard portion on the Agenda. They want to work with the citizens and encourage them to continue to attend the Council Meetings.

Councilman Norton stated that he had some citizens call him and tell him how ridiculous it was that the City adopts a budget before they receive the funding for it and he agrees. It is a ridiculous process to say that we are going to spend a certain amount of money on something but we do not know how much we are going to spend. That is the process and they are adhering to it; however, since he has been on Council they have heard comments about how the Land Development Regulations (LDR) affect business practices in Valdosta both new developing businesses and ones that are already here. They hear good and bad things and they heard a lot of negative comments about that in the past three Public Hearings on adoption of the tax millage rate. This Council does not take it lightly. Councilman Norton stated that he would make himself available to business people each Friday between the hours of 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. to discuss the LDR and suggested changes. This Council has already reviewed the LDR and made changes that benefit businesses. We all need to meet and discuss what needs to be done to make Valdosta more successful so we do not have to raise taxes again.

CITIZENS TO BE HEARD

William Helm, resident of the City of Valdosta, stated that the information that is posted on the television screens in the Council Chambers is not readable by anyone in the audience. Also, there is a major problem with the sound system. Mr. Helm stated that he wanted to make an emergency appeal to the Governor of Georgia and the FBI for an injunction because of criminal wrongdoing. We have all these civil rights violations on Northside Drive in the City. His black friends do not have any voices. All of the black people here in Valdosta are asking why the streets are not being attended to by the City system and why all the big houses on Northside Drive have immediate care. He heard recently from an authorized source that one reason they are not putting sidewalks in front of these big, beautiful houses on very expensive streets is because they want to avoid the riff raft. That is definitely discrimination. Mr. Helm thanked the Mayor and Council for their time.

Dwight Ruis, a resident of District 1, stated that a month ago there was something in the Valdosta Daily Times regarding the Sign Ordinance in Valdosta and he inquired as to whether anyone from the City checks the signs for violations. Mayor Gayle stated that the City Marshals check the signs. Mr. Ruis stated that the Precision Tune on Ashley Street has a sign that has been out for over a year. He asked someone at Precision Tune if they were still open and when they were going to get a new sign. He was told that they were not getting a new sign because they could not afford it. Mr. Ruis stated that when he lived in Atlanta businesses were fined for not keeping their signs up to Code. Ashley Street appears to be in poor condition and the entire strip near the old Coca Cola building looks bad. His other concern is with the new hotel that is going in the Downtown area and how it would affect small businesses. Small businesses move several times in the Downtown area and it is very confusing. Right now there is not a lot of growth in the Downtown stores. Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that when the City implemented the LDR it had an Ashley Street Overlay District and there was a lot of criticism. There were over 200 pages of changes to the LDR to eliminate regulations and often times we are caught between those who think that there should be less regulations and those that think the regulations should be enforced. Signage was one of the issues that the LDR was attempting to address to improve the appearance and the perception of Ashley Street over time.

Rev. Willie Simons, 303 Hampton Lane, inquired as to whether there was any attempt for the City Departments to interact with the Stormwater Division. Perhaps the City could send out some of those employees who have been furloughed to help with maintenance of the drainage ditches because the vegetation is overgrown and twice a year is not sufficient enough for the kind of rain we have been having and the growth. Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that each year during the budget hearings they have conversations about adding or redirecting Staff and one of the reasons they increased the stormwater utility fee was so that we could have additional funding to outsource more work in the Stormwater/Utility Divisions and do a better job of taking care of drainage canals. With the new budget adopted and the new rate change, the City is planning to have additional resources but not

necessarily hiring more employees. We have the same number of sanitation workers today that we had 20 years ago despite the fact that the City has grown by 11,000 residents. We have also reduced the workforce from 700 to 596 so there are not any extra employees or employees who do not have anything to do. Most of our Departments, other than Public Safety, have less people than they did ten years ago. We are addressing the issue in the Stormwater Division by raising the fee. The stormwater fee in the City of Augusta implemented the lowest tier of residential to \$6.50. Our fee is not unreasonable and we raised it from \$2.50 to \$3.50. That will give us additional resources over the next few months. Rev. Simons inquired as to whether the City would be bringing in private enterprise or contractors. Larry Hanson stated that it would be contract labor and we have outsourced labor for our retention ponds which has worked very well. We started small and we have added to it. We have some local Valdosta Small Emerging Business (VSEB) contractors that are now doing work maintaining the retention ponds so we are going to be looking at replicating that by defining certain areas, putting out bids, and outsourcing that work to private contractors so that we do not have to add people. Rev. Simons inquired as to whether the City is being proactive in that area. Larry Hanson stated that the City is being proactive. Rev. Simons stated that he is also concerned about the tax millage rate increase and hopes that the City can do a better job of using City vehicles and the maintenance of those vehicles. The City needs to be more conscientious about the purchasing of things and the use of vehicles. The Department Heads do not need to take their vehicles home. There are ways that we can all help rather than depend on the City. We need to have an active relationship because we are all in the same house. He will be glad to help the City in doing a better job and joining hands to get it done. We need insight from each and every individual because everyone is important. We are all in the same boat and we will either float together or go down together. Rev. Simons stated that he is willing to talk to anyone to help. There needs to be steps between citizens and government to make for a better existence. Mayor Gayle stated that there are only two Department Heads, the Police Chief and the Fire Chief, who drive City vehicles home because they are on call 24 hours a day. Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated the City also has a sophisticated Motor Pool operation where every vehicle has a life expectancy of so many years due to the wear and tear. They are depreciated over that period of time. We have our own 12 mechanics taking care of our vehicles and they do a work order on every repair that is made. Each year Staff evaluates the cost of operating a vehicle versus replacing it so if a Police car has a five-year depreciation schedule that costs \$20,000 we are basically paying \$4,000 and after five years it is paid for. At some point when a vehicle is costing more annually to repair than it then it is time to replace the vehicle. We have a very detailed Motor Pool operation that has a life expectancy, a life cycle cost, and work orders on every vehicle in the City's fleet so that we make smart decisions about what we replace and when we replace it. Rev. Simons inquired as to whether there was any way we could use individuals who are incarcerated to do work in the Stormwater Division. Mayor Gayle stated that we tried that before and there was a lot of scheduling conflicts with them.

Gregory Williams stated that he was concerned about the Troup Street Project. This past summer he did a lot of traveling through that area and the road is very bumpy. School has started back and vehicles have to detour through neighborhoods that normally would not have a lot of traffic. Having citizens take these new routes is causing more issues than just allowing citizens to use the road because it leads to a major highway. He is glad that they are working on the Troup Street Project because it is something that they have needed for a while but it seems like it is taking a long time. Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that construction projects in built out neighborhoods are always a challenge and in this case there is infrastructure in the ground that is over 100 years old and had to be replaced. They are placing new water and sewer lines underground so everything had to be torn up in order to do that and now the construction will take place. A Project of this magnitude is complex and it is a 12-month construction schedule. The Project is moving along well even though there were delays during the summer with rain that no one can control. We have the same interest as the citizens do and that is to complete the Project as quickly as possible to minimize the disruption to the neighborhood. Mayor Gayle stated that they met with the property owners in that area about the Project and explained that there would be some disruptions; however, when it is all said and done it will be a street with new sidewalks, curbs and gutters, and all new water and sewer lines. Mr. Williams stated that his final concern has to do with the budget and the increase in the taxes. According to some of the stats he has seen, the budget is approximately 60% public safety. Mr. Williams inquired as to whether anyone has thought about increasing the community side of the budget and put more jobs in the community. There are too many duplicate resources in the City and we are not taking advantage of the possible free resources such as the State resources. We have State-certified Officers but we are funding a full City-wide Police Department. We are putting the money in one big bowl but at the same time there is a duplication of service when a lot of that money could go back to the community. They City needs to look at the biggest chunk of the budget and ask why that is the biggest chunk. The community is watching and with the increase in taxes that triggers some things to pay attention to.

George Cleland inquired as to whether the City would give the citizens a chance to vote on an increase in taxes. Mayor Gayle stated that it would not be a possibility. Mr. Cleland stated that the citizens are the ones who actually have to pay for it. The way that Council is conducting it seems like robbery. There is no difference between that and a person going to a liquor store with a gun and robbing the cash register. Mayor Gayle stated that they are elected to represent the citizens and they pay taxes as well. They are concerned about the citizens of this community. Mr. Cleland inquired as to whether the Mayor and Council were residents of the City of Valdosta. Mayor Gayle stated that they were residents of the City. Mr. Cleland inquired as to whether the Mayor and Council considered themselves as conservative. Mayor Gayle stated that he considered himself as a moderate. Mr. Cleland stated that since all of the Council members voted on the tax increase he was sure that none of them were conservative because no one voted against it. He is looking for conservative people who will look out for his best interest since he works hard to pay for his house and his taxes. Councilman Carroll inquired as to whether this meant Mr. Cleland would be running for office. Mr. Cleland stated that he might run for office in the future and he would reduce taxes for everyone.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Gayle entertained a motion for adjournment.

A MOTION by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Payton, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to adjourn the August 25, 2016 Meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:54 p.m. to meet again in Regular Session on Thursday, September 8, 2016.

City Clerk, City of Valdosta

Mayor, City of Valdosta