

MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL
5:30 P.M., THURSDAY, MAY 19, 2016
COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY HALL

OPENING CEREMONIES

Mayor John Gayle called the regular meeting of the Valdosta City Council to order at 5:31 p.m. Council members present were: Joseph "Sonny" Vickers, Tim Carroll, Ben Norton, Alvin Payton, Sandra Tooley, and Vivian Miller-Cody. Councilman Robert Yost was absent. The invocation was given by Dr. Ronnie Mathis, Pastor of Crossing Jordan Baptist Church and was immediately followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

AWARDS AND PRESENTATIONS

Special Presentation of the 2016 Valdosta Preservation Awards

Mr. James Horton, Historic Preservation Planner, thanked everyone for coming out and stated that May is Historic Preservation Month all across America. The theme for this year is "This Place Matters." This is the eighth year that the City of Valdosta has recognized and participated in this important awards ceremony. Mr. Horton asked Mayor Gayle and Celine Gladwin, Chairperson of the Historic Preservation Commission, to assist him with the award presentations.

The first award was presented to West Hill Properties, LLC for Outstanding Achievement. This property is owned by Mike Lee, Albert Stone, Wes Vallotton, and Matt Green and is awarded an Outstanding Achievement for the rehabilitation of the Cranford Building located at 110-114 West Hill Avenue previously vacant for almost 20 years.

The next Outstanding Achievement Award was presented to Dr. Alex and Dr. Jennifer Alvarez for the rehabilitation of three historic residential properties all designed by local architect Felton Davis. The properties are located at 1506 Williams Street, 204 East Brookwood Place, and 102 Rogers Street.

The final Outstanding Achievement Award was presented to Rise, a real estate company that opened its doors in February 2016. This business is located between 127 & 131 North Patterson Street in the former McCrory's building in downtown Valdosta.

Rhode's Family Properties received a Distinguished Merit for rehabilitation of the Felton Davis home located at 1507 Williams Street. Mr. Horton stated that the home had been turned into a showpiece for the neighborhood.

The Stewardship award was presented to Mr. And Mrs. Paul Cribbs for their rehabilitation and maintenance of their beautiful Victorian Era home located at 418 River Street in the Fairview neighborhood.

The Excellence in New Construction Award was presented to The First Baptist Church for the new construction of their Family Life Center located at the corner of Central and Oak Street in downtown Valdosta.

The Harrold Bennett Lifetime Achievement Award was presented to Mr. Donald O. Davis for his lifelong dedication to preserving the written and built history of Valdosta and Lowndes County. Mr. Davis, a history graduate from Valdosta State University, has been a resident of Valdosta since the early age of five years old.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes from the May 5, 2016, Regular Meeting were approved by acclamation.

LOCAL FUNDING AND REQUESTS

Consideration of a Request to Contract with Innovate Engineering Solutions for Sidewalk and Ditch Piping Designs.

Patrick Collins, City Engineer, presented a contract for sidewalk and ditch piping designs. Each year the City of Valdosta earmarks funds for new sidewalks and ditch piping projects which are funded through SPLOST. The City has a system in place that identifies sidewalks and ditch piping improvements needed in the city. This is a request for survey work and design for the projects identified below.

- South Oak (Twitty Lane to Savannah Avenue) or Griffin Avenue
- Lee Street (Gordon Street to Ann Street)
- Lee Street (Vallotton Drive to Park Avenue)
- Lakeland Avenue (Melrose Drive to Forrest Street)
- Lake Park Road (existing sidewalk to South Street)

Staff recommends approving the survey/design fees submitted by Innovate Engineering Solution in the amount of \$85,868.51. Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that the first project listed is South Oak or Griffin Avenue. For clarification, Griffin Avenue was selected because the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) has committed to funding 70% of that project with LMIG funds. This is a tremendous opportunity to only pay a 30% match for a project that is anticipated to cost about \$400,000. A while back Councilman Vickers wrote a letter to GDOT asking for their consideration to invest in sidewalks in our community and Griffin Avenue is one of the areas GDOT agreed to help fund. Mr. Hanson stated that he really appreciated Councilman Vickers for taking time to write the letter.

A **MOTION** by Councilman Norton, seconded by Councilman Payton was unanimously adopted (6-0) to accept the request as presented.

Consideration of the approval of the Pay Study and Compensation Plan as prepared by Condrey and Associates.

Renassa Small, Director of Human Resources, stated that in October of 2014, the City of Valdosta implemented a Comprehensive Compensation and Pay Plan Study developed by Condrey and Associates. To increase the validity of the study, employees and management were included in the study. Employees were asked to complete position questionnaires to determine all of the duties and responsibilities performed on a daily basis. Management then verified those duties and responsibilities. Condrey and Associates also interviewed approximately 50% of the full-time employees to include one person in each unique classification. Their next step included obtaining salary data from cities comparable to Valdosta and information from Lowndes County. At the conclusion of the study it was determined that approximately 2.1 million dollars would be needed for full implementation. This plan has been presented to Council on two separate occasions for review and comments and has not changed from what was originally presented. According to the study four major city departments (Valdosta Fire Department, Valdosta Police Department, Public Works, and Utilities) salaries are well below market and will receive the greatest amount of the funding.

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that the compensation study will boost beginning wages so that everyone can get to a market rate particularly in police and fire which is an area of great competition and it is imperative that the City becomes more competitive with salaries. Ms. Small further stated that the City has recently lost a number of employees to other cities who pay higher wages. Implementing this study will definitely make us more competitive and help the City to retain quality trained employees who have a lot of institutional knowledge and employees that we have spent a lot of funds training and enhancing their skills.

Mr. Hanson stated that although Council is not voting to fund the study at this time, staff felt it important to make a commitment to the plan for its inclusion in the budget and share how it will be funded. If you recall, this was one of the goals that Mayor and Council set at the Retreat earlier this year. Councilman Tim Carroll made everyone aware that the compensation study does not include funding for Senior Leadership or Mayor and Council.

Councilman Vickers commented that in all of his 28 years as a Councilman, this is the first time he's witnessed this much turnover. At some time, we will have to bite the bullet to increase salaries because the City is losing too much talent.

Mr. Hanson also commented stating the City is losing numerous employees because of an increase in wages but also because a lot of employees are being promoted. This says a lot about city staff; they are well respected and highly qualified personnel. Tift County is starting their own fire department and are hiring personnel from one of the best trained fire agencies in the area. City employees are being promoted and that says a lot about the caliber of employees we have and can be received as a compliment and a sign of respect. Generations have changed, most people today have five or more careers which means that we have to adapt how we handle our benefits and compensations. There is a significant cost to the loss of personnel, there is a cost of the institutional knowledge that they have, and there is a cost in training to bring new people in, so sometimes it is in your best interest to keep people and pay a little more.

Councilwoman Miller-Cody questioned if firefighters who have been employed for a number of years would be getting a raise since salaries for new hires would be increased under the new compensation matrix. Mr. Hanson replied that current fire fighters would receive what is called an equity adjustment. In implementing a market study not everyone will get the same raise. Employees who have been employed longer with the City have received raises over the years, however, equity adjustments will be implemented so that long-time employees will not be making less than new hires. The Mayor asked if there would be a recommendation on any particular portal included in the survey. Ms. Small explained that salaries listed are a minimum and maximum range for pay grades. The compensation plan study is based on the same process that is currently in place. Mr. Hanson stated that payroll is a large part of the budget but according to the Compensation Study, the City is only 10% away from where it needs to be. A year ago the number needed for the study was 1.7 million; this year it is 2.1 million and the figure will continue to increase in the coming years.

Councilman Payton asked for clarification regarding the totals for the Valdosta Fire Department as it relates to salaries and equity. Mr. Hanson explained that if salaries for firefighters are increased, an amount will be set aside to ensure that firefighters who are currently on staff will not be jumped. The Equity Column will ensure that those personnel's salaries will be increased so that new hires will not pass them in salary. Equity adjustments will be based on longevity.

Councilman Carroll asked staff to comment on an implementation date for the plan if adopted. Mr. Hanson stated that changing to this compensation plan will change the matrix from 2.5 increments to 1.25 increments which will make it easier for the City to give raises even in lean years. It will take staff about 60 days to program a new classification system and test it to ensure payroll is correct. The anticipated rollout date if adopted would October 1, 2016, and would affect the September 28, 2016 payroll.

A **MOTION** by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Vickers was unanimously adopted to approve the Pay Study and Compensation Plan as presented.

Consideration of a request for a change in scope due to unforeseen circumstances to replace water and sewer systems on the South Troupe Street Project.

Henry Hicks, Director of Utilities, stated that unforeseen circumstances caused staff to request a change in scope of work for the Troupe Street Project. This project was originally listed as an enhancement project in the City's Master Transportation Plan. In October of 2015, Council approved and awarded a bid to Standard Contractors in the amount of \$1,510,655.74 and included alternate bids 1 and 2, if deemed necessary during construction. After starting construction, numerous conflicts arose to include the location of various utilities and we expect other issues to arise in the future because of the limited partial replacement of water and sewer services. This is one of the older sections of the City meaning some of these lines are some of the oldest in the city and are very likely to fail sooner rather than later which would require numerous road cuts and patches even after the road is paved. Staff asked Standard Contractors to submit alternatives ranging in partial replacement of the sewer system to complete replacement of the sewer system. Standard submitted three alternatives for staff to review.

Alternative 1 - will cost \$734,424.10 and will completely replace the sewer main, manholes, install new sewer service lines, install new water service lines but continue to use the old 6-inch cast iron water main. This would provide the City with a new sewer system that would last anywhere from 30 - 50 years and replace old and worn out water services. However, the old 6-inch water main would eventually need to be replaced and there is potential for water leaks at the new service line connection point due to the age of existing taps on the water main. Also, existing isolation valves associated with the water main are inoperable and will cause a much larger area to be shut down for major repairs. This alternative will provide no improvement in the fire flows due to the smaller size of the water main and will include some new base and new pavement.

Alternative 2 - will cost the City \$466,020.00 and use Cured In Place Pipe (CIPP) for rehab on the existing sewer main, existing manholes, and install new sewer services lines. Utilizing this alternative would install new water service lines only and continue using the old 6-inch cast iron water main. However, the old 6-inch water main which will eventually need to be replaced. It also has potential for water leaks at the new service line connection point due to the age of existing taps on the water main and potential for some leaks and inflow and infiltration at sewer service line connections to the CIPP liner. Additionally existing isolation valves associated with this water main are inoperable and would also cause a larger area to be shut down for major repairs. The existing fire hydrants are old, outdated and cannot be repaired, and there would be no improvement in fire flow due to the size of the main. This alternative will include some base and new pavement.

Alternative 3 - is quoted at \$1,046,613.00 and will include new water and sewer system and will increase the water main size to an 8-in water main which will improve fire flows. The quote also includes all new water valves, fire hydrants, service lines, a mostly new base and new paved road. In using this alternative everything will be replaced and this alternative is the one that would least likely fail and cause the road to be opened for point repairs. Therefore, staff recommends Alternative 3. Even though it has the highest cost, it is considered the best long term solution and is the option least likely to require point repairs. The cost of the additional work would be paid for with CDBG and SPLOST VII funds. \$400,000 would come from CDBG and \$646,613 from SPLOST VII for a total cost of \$1,046,613.00 plus a 10% contingency. Mr. Hanson stated that in communicating with the Engineer who originally designed the project, he basically quoted the same figure.

Councilman Vickers stated that the project should be done right. This is not the first time we have encountered this kind of issue. It benefits the City in the long run to spend a little more and do it the right way. Mr. Hanson stated the project has been discussed internally and staff feels Alternative 3 is the best solution and moving forward Staff will assume that these type issues will be encountered and will therefore build them into the design. Councilman Carroll also commented stating that he was not surprised especially after the MLK Project. It doesn't make much sense to make such an investment and not do the right thing. Councilwoman Tooley also agreed that spending the additional money on the project would be best for the City but wanted to know if the look of the project would change on top of the surface. Mr. Hanson replied that the changes would only affect what is underneath the surface.

Councilman Norton stated for clarification that the new lines would only go as far as the water meters. Mr. Hanson replied that the comment was correct. Councilman Payton questioned the funding sources again. Mr. Hanson reviewed distribution of the funds and stated that the project meets the criteria for CDBG funding. This amount was not budgeted but there are some excess undesignated CDBG funds carried over from a previous year that can be used to complete the project. This project fits all the criteria for CDBG fund use. It is infrastructure and the location is in a low to moderate income area so we were able to find the funding for the project.

A **MOTION** by Councilwoman Tooley, seconded by Councilwoman Miller-Cody was adopted unanimously to approve the recommendation as presented by staff.

CITYMANAGER'S REPORT

City Manager, Larry Hanson, stated that graduation for City Government 101 took place a week ago. It was a very successful year and we are grateful that many of you came out and interacted with the class. This year we added a facility tour after the classes ended which allowed the participants to see the new Waste Water Treatment Plant, the Crime Lab, and the Traffic Management Center.

City Manager Hanson thanked Mayor and Council for approving the street name change for Melvin Nelson. The Melvin Nelson Way dedication was held this past Saturday. Councilwoman Miller-Cody, Councilwoman Tooley, Councilman Vickers, and Councilman Payton were all in attendance. It was a beautiful ceremony, a beautiful day to celebrate a great man. Mr. Hanson stated that he was honored to be a part of the event.

This week is National Public Works Week. On yesterday a luncheon was held in honor of the City's Public Works employees. Mr. Hanson stated that Mayor Gayle, Councilwoman Miller-Cody and he were all in attendance. Nine awards were given out to our Public Works employees. This has been a busy week and a lot has been done in the City in recognition of this week. There was a Recycling 101 Program held on Tuesday. Richard Hardy, Director of Public Works, had a great theme for this week - **Public Works Always There**. This is certainly a true statement as Public Works is always there doing a great job with sanitation and our streets regardless of the weather conditions. We were also featured in an American City/County Magazine article that highlighted the City's activities during Public Works Week. I know Mayor and Council extends their appreciation to the excellent job these employees do for our city.

City Manager Hanson also commented on the promotional and award ceremony for the Valdosta Police Department officers held earlier in the week. It was uplifting listening to the stories of valor and heroism. You might also be interested to know that the FBI gave credit to the Valdosta Police Department and the Southwest Georgia Federal Gang Task Force for the recent indictment of the 48 gang members. We have officers who serve on that task force and they are doing a great job helping to keep our city safer.

Mr. Hanson stated that the Parks and Recreation Authority is doing good things these days. They have put in a new road leading to the river off of St. Augustine Road. The road project was funded with \$75,000 of state funds and \$20,000 local funding. Also, if you visit the Vallotton Youth Complex you will see that new bleachers have been installed to make seating more comfortable. The Miracle Field at Freedom Park is in the design stage. This will be a great asset to the park and a benefit to a special population in our community and handicapped individuals. Parks and Recreation will also be making improvements to the McKey Tennis Courts. The improvements will include four more tennis courts along with some additional features.

Moody Air Force Base has informed us that they will have aerial training exercises on tomorrow from 11:00 to 3:00 pm, so citizens might hear a lot of noise. If you get calls from citizens on tomorrow just let them know that's the sound of freedom.

Just a reminder that Budget Hearings for the City will be held June 1 and June 2. Both sessions will begin at 3:00 pm. Our goal is to have the budget hearings and adopt the budget at the first meeting in June rather than the second meeting. Budget information will be sent out next week so you will have time to review it prior to the hearings. Also, you should have received some information on the 100 Black Men Black Tie Dinner. That event is scheduled for Friday, May 27, 2016, and we do need a response from you so that we can purchase the correct number of tickets.

Our Downtown Farm Days is underway again. Councilman Norton has always been an avid supporter of this event. You are all invited to come out and join in as local vendors sell their products. The community has been very supportive of the event and it seems to be a huge success.

Finally, a month ago we had a project that came before you asking for the City's support to renovate some properties in our community. Council gave its blessing and the vote was unanimous to write a letter of support for Omni. They have asked that we do that by resolution. We did not adopt a resolution at that time, however, with everything said, you clearly gave your support to the project and unless anyone objects we are going to say that your intent was to approve a resolution. Mr. Hanson asked if anyone objected to placing the words that were on the agenda into a resolution for the project. There were no objections to changing the format of the request.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilman Carroll complimented staff on the social media activities. He stated that he follows the activities and loves how citizens are sharing.

Councilwoman Miller-Cody stated that she found the activities for Public Works Week outstanding and appreciated recognition of the employees and truly enjoyed the entire celebration.

CITIZENS TO BE HEARD

Willie Simons, 303 Hampton Lane, commended staff for their efforts in cleaning ditches near his property and said he appreciated the prompt response but additional efforts are needed. He stated that he is concerned about the canal that runs near Hudson Docket and he would like the City to evaluate it. He further stated that if a child grows up in an area that is taken care of the child will take pride in his surroundings. Mr. Simons said last time he addressed Council he had concerns about garbage surrounding the Family Dollar Store's property but has since learned that a private company disposes of their garbage; however, he feels that something needs to be put in place regulating removal of garbage by private companies to ensure areas are cleaned and picked up more frequently. Mr. Simons further commented that he needs the help of Council to clean the area. He feels that the storm drain pipe being put down on Lee Street should be extended to the Hudson Docket area to help combat standing water and fight mosquitoes. The children in this area are exposed to health issues. We are all responsible and should make a greater effort to make this City a better place.

Chris Bergman, 713 E Ann Street, praised the Public Works Department and stated that he has resided at this residence since 1982 and has only one complaint. The ditches in my community are not being cleaned properly. When it rains debris comes up onto the grass. The policy for ditch cleaning may have changed over the years but if it has not, the City should make a better effort to keep the ditches clean. Mr. Bergman also questioned the process to get speed bumps in his neighborhood to help protect children from speeding vehicles.

Mr. Hanson stated that the City Engineer would contact Mr. Bergman regarding the placement of speed bumps. The City will schedule a speed study for your street to check the volume and rate of speed vehicles are traveling. If the study meets the criteria, then someone in the neighborhood would have to go out and get 70% of the residents on your street to sign a petition. A couple of things have to happen but the speed study is the start.

Mr. Bergman, asked if the residents had to be property owners. Mr. Hanson stated that residents may be property owners or tenants.

ADJOURNMENT

A **MOTION** by Councilman Vickers, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to adjourn the May 5, 2016 Meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:31 pm to meet again in Regular Session on Thursday, June 9, 2016.

Mayor, City of Valdosta

Associate City Clerk, City of Valdosta