

MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL
5:30 P.M., THURSDAY, MARCH 24, 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: Joseph “Sonny” Vickers, Tim Carroll, Ben Norton, Sandra Tooley, Robert Yost, and Vivian Miller-Cody. Councilman Alvin Payton, Jr. was absent. The invocation was given by Chris Musgrove, Future Now Ministries, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the March 10, 2016 Regular Meeting were approved by unanimous consent (6-0) of the Council.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

Consideration of a request to rename Laurel Avenue in Sunset Hill Cemetery to Melvin Nelson Way.

Pat Collins, City Engineer, stated that Melvin Nelson was the Supervisor at Sunset Hill Cemetery and worked there for 44 years. He was a respected member of the Lowndes County community and a friend to all who visited the Cemetery. With the help of local residents, Mr. Nelson discovered the unmarked slave graves at the Cemetery and helped to secure the area for a monument which was dedicated in 1996. Councilman Sonny Vickers has requested that the City rename Laurel Avenue in Sunset Hill Cemetery to Melvin Nelson Way in honor of Mr. Nelson’s faithful service as a public servant and employee and citing his outstanding local contribution to establish the Unknown Slaves Memorial. The property on either side that abuts this street is owned and operated by the City of Valdosta as part of the Cemetery. Consequently, there are no legal addresses on the street. The requirement that a name change not occur for 90 days will not be necessary due to the fact that this 90-day period is used to notify the Post Office, 911, utility providers, and other correspondents that the address has changed. Since no one has a legal address on this street, the 90-day period will be waived. The public notice of the name change was published in the Valdosta Daily Times on Saturday, March 12, 2016. The name change will become effective no later than May 30, 2016 if Council approves the request. Pat Collins recommended that Council approve the request to rename Laurel Avenue in Sunset Hill Cemetery to Melvin Nelson Way. Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that Melvin Nelson worked at Sunset Hill Cemetery for many years and he started as a Laborer and retired as a Superintendent. Mr. Nelson was one of the finest human beings that he has ever known. He was a model employee and was the type of person who treated everyone with respect, dignity, and professionalism. He had the privilege to speak at Mr. Nelson’s funeral service in 2014 and this request is very fitting. Pat Collins has spoken with Mr. Nelson’s family about planning an appropriate ceremony for the unveiling of the street sign in May if Council approves the request.

Rachael Bradley spoke in favor of the request. Ms. Bradley stated that she was Melvin Nelson’s daughter and she grew up in the Cemetery. Mr. Nelson was very passionate about the Cemetery and how people were laid to rest and he made sure that they were buried with dignity and respect. He was very professional and he would be honored to have the street named after him. Ms. Bradley asked for Council’s consideration in approving the request.

No one spoke in opposition to the request.

A MOTION by Councilwoman Miller-Cody, seconded by Councilwoman Tooley, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve the request to rename Laurel Avenue in Sunset Hill Cemetery to Melvin Nelson Way.

BIDS, CONTRACTS, AGREEMENTS, AND EXPENDITURES

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, LLC will develop a well-planned strategy to educate and influence the opinions of government leaders. The proposed monthly fee will be \$3,500. The term of the Agreement will be for one year and either party can reserve the right to terminate the Agreement without cause by providing a 30-day notice. Larry Hanson recommended that Council approve the Agreement with Government Solutions, LLC for governmental affairs representation for the City of Valdosta

A MOTION by Councilwoman Tooley, seconded by Councilman Yost, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve the Agreement with Government Solutions, LLC for governmental affairs representation for the City of Valdosta.

CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated the City is hosting a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Public Hearing today at the City Hall Annex Building. The City is expected to receive \$576,889 from the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for funding of services in our City. Advertisements have been run in the Valdosta Daily Times and this was also discussed last weekend at the Mayor and Council Retreat as to how those funds would be allowed.

The Spring Electronics Recycling Event will be held on Saturday, April 11, 2016 from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at Mathis Auditorium. This has become a very popular event and is a great way for citizens to get rid of unwanted electronic equipment they no longer have a need for. This keeps the equipment out of the landfill and also saves the City money.

The City of Valdosta Annual People's Choice Photo Contest is underway and citizens are encouraged to take photographs about life in our City and submit their photos.

There will be a Martin Luther King, Jr. Observance Ceremony on Monday, April 4, 2016 at 4:00 p.m. at the MLK Memorial Park. The Mayor and Council are encouraged to attend.

The City of Valdosta currently has 30 job openings which are posted on the City's website. Citizens are encouraged to visit the website to review the job opportunities and apply on-line.

National Community Development Week is scheduled for the week of March 28, 2016 and a lot of activities have been planned. On Tuesday, March 29, 2016 there will be a Ribbon Cutting Ceremony at 10:00 a.m. at one of the new CDBG constructed homes located at 907 Myrtle Street. There will also be a Seeds for Success Program to help small emerging businesses and to provide them with more information and education. There will also be a Home Buyer Education Program on Wednesday, March 30, 2016 as well as a Workshop on Knowing Your Fair Housing Rights on Thursday, March 31, 2016.

The Valdosta Fire Department is having a Public Safety Career Expo on April 12, 2016 from 12:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. to inform citizens of career opportunities with the Fire Department.

Larry Hanson, City Manager, also thanked the Mayor and Council for their time this past weekend at the Annual Mayor/Council Retreat. It is a big commitment of time, effort, and energy, and they worked through over 40 issues and 304 pages of information to help plan for the City’s future. There is nothing more important than having this type of event so that we can make sure the City is on the right path to meet future needs.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilman Vickers inquired as to whether City Hall would be closed tomorrow for the Easter Holiday. Larry Hanson, City Manager, stated that City Hall would be closed tomorrow in observance of Good Friday.

Councilman Yost stated that he knew Melvin Nelson from when he worked with Parks and Recreation almost 30 years ago. This is a very deserving honor as he was a very good man and employee of the City of Valdosta. Councilman Yost also stated that he has had many telephone calls, text messages, and E-mails from individuals who agree with him about the Hospital Authority and the statements that he made at the Mayor/Council Retreat. He is not sure that the Hospital Authority agrees with him as he has seen no movement as far as any of the four City appointees on the Authority resigning. He will probably talk about this at every Council Meeting until they do resign. The need to resign and there may be a time in the very near future that an investigative agency, such as the Attorney General or the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, looks into the activities of the Hospital Authority. The Attorney for the Hospital Authority should have also resigned yesterday, the day before, or last month when he was appointed. The Administrator of the Hospital Authority should be fired immediately as well as several others. Until the Hospital Authority starts listening to this community, we need to continue to work to remove those who are impeding the actions of what needs to happen in this community.

CITIZENS TO BE HEARD

There were no citizens to be heard.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Gayle entertained a motion for adjournment.

A MOTION by Councilman Vickers, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to adjourn the March 24, 2016 Meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 5:46 p.m. to meet again in Regular Session on Thursday, April 7, 2016.

City Clerk, City of Valdosta

Mayor, City of Valdosta