

MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL
5:30 P.M., THURSDAY, MAY 23, 2019
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, Eric Howard, Andy Gibbs, and Vivian Miller-Cody. The invocation was given by Pastor Curtis Jenkins, New Life Bible Church, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

AWARDS AND PRESENTATIONS

SPECIAL PRESENTATION OF THE 2019 VALDOSTA HISTORIC PRESERVATION AWARDS

James Horton, Special Projects/Historic Preservation Manager, stated that May of each year is National Historic Preservation Month and this year’s theme is “This Place Matters,” a campaign for showcasing one’s favorite historic building. Tonight, the City of Valdosta is celebrating with the 11th Annual Historic Preservation Awards. These awards are given to a select few who have gone above and beyond to rehabilitate and preserve a particular contributing historic building or construct a new building which blends well with the historic character of the District. The categories for the awards are: Outstanding Achievement for large rehabilitation projects, Distinguished Merit for smaller rehabilitation projects, Stewardship for long term preservation and care of a historic building, and Excellence in Compatible New Construction for new construction that blends well with the historic character of the District. There is also the Harold Bennett Lifetime Achievement Award for a Valdostan who has preserved buildings or promoted the Historic Preservation Movement in Valdosta in an outstanding way over a long period of time. These awards provide positive reinforcement to the Historic District Design Review process, promote goodwill within our community, and acknowledge the hard work and monetary re-investment back into the community’s building stock. Mayor John Gayle along with Celine Gladwin, Chairman of the Valdosta Historic Preservation Commission presented the awards.

For the Outstanding Achievement Award, the building at 109 and 111 South Ashley, fondly known to long-time Valdosta residents at the Southern Salvage building is a local landmark that has been brought back to life. The building sat vacant for many years after the business closed, but the folks at Coleman Talley decided they wanted to be Downtown and saw the potential in this building. The project represents the second largest private investment in the Valdosta Historic District. The project was begun in April of 2017 as a Historic Tax Credit Rehabilitation project under the direction of BFB Gladwin Architects. The building was rehabilitated to very high standards preserving the existing historic materials to the maximum extent. The offices, conference rooms, and other working spaces are not only beautiful but are constructed with the latest technologies within the confines of the historic character retained in the building. This project has been such a success in so many ways not only saving a huge, unused historic relic Downtown, but also by bringing over 50 new people into the Downtown area to enjoy their work, shopping, and dining.

For the Distinguished Merit Award, the Valdosta Water Works building at 109 South Briggs Street was once a bustling place full of workers and pumping millions of gallons of water for Valdostans each day; however, in the 1980’s, the system was old, the demand was too high, and the quality of the water had deteriorated so the Plant was closed. The big brick building with the huge arched windows began its long wait for a new occupant. For many years, probably almost 30 years, this building was used for storage and became a place for natural ferns on its interior dirt floors. The Georgia Beer Company, Valdosta’s first brewery and the southern-most beer brewery in the State of Georgia, is now proud to call this building home. The Project was a public/private partnership between the Georgia Beer Company, the City of Valdosta, and the Valdosta-Lowndes County Development Authority. Today the building has been rehabilitated while preserving its industrial historic character defining features and has been retro-fitted with the most modern brewing equipment. IPG was the Architect for the Project.

For the Stewardship Award, the Valdosta Junior Service League found the Converse Dalton Ferrell House at 305 N. Patterson deteriorating and threatened with demolition in 1982 and decided to save it and make it a place for Valdostans to always see, use, and enjoy. The Service League completed a huge rehabilitation by 1983 and has called this southern beauty their home ever since. The house was constructed in 1902 by the Converse family from

lumber cut from their own farm. Over the past 37 years, the Valdosta Junior Service League has lovingly maintained the home as their meeting place and an event place for Valdosta. They have continuously worked on the maintenance of the building on the interior and exterior with hard earned money from fundraisers. In 2017, the League discovered some major problems with the building due to water damage and had to stop and focus all of their efforts on getting the building repaired. While working on the building, they rebuilt all of the gutters and repaired rotten wood work all over the building. In addition to this, there was extensive plumbing work, porch work, and a new paint job to keep the building a gleaming white picture of Neoclassical preservation for Valdosta. The League plans on continuing their affair with this lovely home for many years to come.

For the Harold M. Bennett Lifetime Achievement Award, not many people can compare to Albert Slone when it comes to a love of Valdosta and a love for its history and its historic buildings. Mr. Slone began his work in Downtown over 20 years ago when Downtown was on the brink of extinction. He came to Downtown at a time when malls and shopping centers were taking the businesses out of Downtowns all over the country. Mr. Slone could see the potential that Downtown Valdosta had through his appreciation for history and eye for architectural detail. One of his first buildings was at 105 to 111 W. Central, a three-story vacant building in need of façade help and total interior rehabilitation. He took on the challenge and brought the building back to life making it his engineering firm, a restaurant, clothing shop, a residence for himself and his family, and apartments for lease to others. The rehabilitation of the building was done through the Rehabilitation Tax Credit program and was done under strict guidelines. The result was a project that revitalized an entire area and became part of a new trend Downtown - bringing it back! Over the years, Mr. Slone has been involved in purchasing and rehabilitating many more buildings downtown like 102 West Rogers Street, 118 North Patterson Street, 116 West Hill Avenue, 116 North Patterson Street, 213-215 North Ashley Street, 111 North Patterson Street, 114 North Patterson Street, 113 to 115 North Patterson Street. Mr. Slone was also involved in purchasing, with others, the old Southern Salvage building and stabilizing it while new owners were found. Two of Mr. Slone's latest and largest rehabilitations are 110 West Hill Avenue, which he along with his partners, rehabilitated the 19,000 square foot building into 11 luxury apartments and several ground floor businesses. After that, Mr. Slone worked for a year on 101 to 109 North Patterson Street making it into a pristine events center known as The Patterson. Mr. Slone has always had his eye on Downtown Valdosta and kept its preservation and revitalization close at heart. A couple of years ago, he found a building on South Ashley Street, the old Whitehead Hardware building, just days away from demolition and he purchased the building to save it. He held the building while looking for a tenant and has now sold the building for a new French Market. What a guy he is! More recently, Mr. Slone has purchased several historic properties on Moore Street for his residence and some smaller rehabilitation projects. Mr. Slone is always interested and willing to serve on boards and commissions and to help anyone struggling with an overwhelming preservation project. He has been involved in many, many projects selflessly giving of his time and expertise. No one could be more qualified to receive this award than Albert Slone.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of May 9, 2019 were approved by unanimous consent (7-0) of the Council.

PUBLIC HEARING

ORDINANCE NO. 2019-8, AN ORDINANCE FOR THE ADOPTION OF THE FISCAL YEAR 2020 BUDGET

Public Hearing for the Adoption of the Fiscal Year 2020 Budget. (Third Hearing)

Mayor Gayle stated that this will be the third Public Hearing for the Fiscal Year 2020 Budget and he called on Mark Barber, City Manager, to make a final presentation.

Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that he wanted to recap what they discussed at the first two Budget Hearings. The numbers have not changed since the first two Public Hearings and City-wide, they are looking at total resources of \$99.9 million and total uses of \$99.8 million. Overall, that is excess of resources over uses of approximately \$74,000. This is a continuation Budget and it gives everyone something they need to offer the superior services for our citizens. Some of the highlights of the Budget include a 1.5% cost of living increase for

all career and part-time employees at the City of Valdosta. There was no increase in the benefits offered to our employees. We did create the following new positions: (1) Police Department - four new Police Officers and a new Sergeant position who will be over the School Resources Officers, and a new Sergeant in the Patrol Division, (2) Fire Department - two Community Risk Reduction Officers who will inspect all of the retail-commercial establishes to ensure compliance with fire safety codes, (3) Water/Sewer - a new Assistant Superintendent to the Central Lines Division, two SCADA positions (SCADA Technician and Electrician/Instrumentation Technician) at the Withlacoochee Wastewater Treatment Plant the Mud Creek Water Plant, (4) Facilities - a new part-time Custodian. As far as fee increases, we are asking to continue with the 5% utilities increase in water and sewer as we have in the past. There will be an increase on the commercial side of the Sanitation Department with roll-offs and dumpsters. We have had a nice, systematic fleet replacement that has been needed over the years, and we do not anticipate a millage rate increase. All the funds are balanced which are required by State law and our Charter. Councilman Vickers inquired about the salary increase for the City Council salaries. Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that the Mayor and Council have a Contingency Account and money is budgeted in that Account if the decision is made to increase compensation for the Council. Mark Barber also thanked Amy Hall, Budget Manager, Carolyn Sampson-Burgess, Budget Analyst, and Chuck Dinkins, Finance Director, for their work on the Budget.

Mayor Gayle asked if there was anyone in the audience who wanted to speak in regard to the Budget. There was no one in the audience who wanted to speak in regards to the Budget.

A MOTION by Councilman Vickers, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to enact Ordinance No. 2019-8, an Ordinance to approve the adoption of the Fiscal Year 2020 Budget, the complete text of which will be found in Ordinance Book XIV.

CITIZENS TO BE HEARD

Charles Judge, 1739-B Poplar Street, stated that he was assaulted by John Corbett's brother, Ron Corbett, and he is using his power and purse to try and cover it up. It has been going on for three years and has not come to trial yet. They charged him with a felony aggravated battery and the District Attorney said they were not going to prosecute. He has taken evidence to the Sheriff's Department to show that he has committed perjury. Mr. Judge stated that he was providing the Council with some Affidavits and Depositions of someone who saw Ron Corbett assault him with no provocation. One of the girls who worked for Mr. Corbett testified against him which got him charged with the aggravated felony. Tim Tanner, City Attorney, inquired as to whether Mr. Judge had an Attorney. Mr. Judge stated that he does have an Attorney. Tim Tanner stated that he has a right to speak but he may want to consult his Attorney. Mr. Judge stated that they keep promising him month after month and what they are going to do is keep on until all the witnesses disappear. People need to know what is going on. He is the fifth person that Mr. Corbett has assaulted. He has paid people off before and it is an ongoing thing with him. The County, City, and Hospital all do business with him and he wanted them to know they are sending their money to a thug. He is accusing Mr. Judge of being into drugs but his brother just signed a Marijuana Bill but they have been flying it in over Echols County for years. Mr. Corbett brought all this up himself and if he wants to play dirty then he will get into the nitty gritty. Mayor Gayle stated that the Court system is under the jurisdiction of the County so the City does not have a lot to do with that. Mayor Gayle suggested that he consult with his Attorney and then go to the County and express his dissatisfaction. Mr. Judge stated that he has been to the Courts, the County, City Council, and he does not know where else to go. He wants to try and get the Court of public hearing. Mr. Corbett made some derogatory remarks in the Deposition. He is so haughty and thinks it is funny. Mr. Judge stated that he was injured by Mr. Corbett and he needs some help. He is not here to make trouble for no reason but this is being covered up. Mayor Gayle inquired as to who Mr. Judge was using for his Attorney. Mr. Judge stated that he was using Jody Peterman for his Attorney. Mayor Gayle stated that he would have City Attorney Tim Tanner contact Mr. Peterman.

Floyd Rose, 411 Orange Street, stated that in July of last year he and several others appeared before the Council and asked the City to rename Forrest Street, which is currently named after Nathan Bedford Forrest who was a member of the Klu Klux Klan. They asked that the street be renamed after Barrack Obama. That was almost six months ago. He received a call from the City Manager and he met with him and Mayor Gayle in his office and he was told then that whatever they did it did not matter because it would be up to the City Council. They have heard nothing since then. He has not and he wanted to know what the Council was going to do. If they are going to vote on it, then just vote on it. If you are going to vote no then vote no. If you are going to vote yes then vote yes

but tell them something and just don't leave them hanging like this. Mayor Gayle stated that the City has a process that you have not gone through. Mr. Rose stated that they did. Mayor Gayle stated that they never came up with the number of names needed. Mr. Rose stated that the City changed the rules. Mayor Gayle stated that the City did not change anything. Unless that process has gone through then there is no reason to vote. Mr. Rose stated that they did everything the City Charter asked them to do and you changed the rules. Don't say you didn't because you did. He knows you did and you know you did. Mayor Gayle stated no sir we did not. He is the type of person who is fair to everybody and they did not change any rules and he can assure you of that. Mr. Rose asked what happened. Mayor Gayle stated that they did not present enough names. They needed 171 names and they did not present anything close to that. Mr. Rose stated that they did everything they were asked to do and you changed the rules and don't say you didn't because you did. Mayor Gayle stated that he was sorry that he felt that way. Mr. Rose stated that the City Manager told him that it did not matter what they did anyway because it would be up to the City Council. Valdosta, Georgia is the only place that he knows in this country that has a problem doing that. They have done it in Florida, northern Georgia, and Chicago and everywhere but south Georgia. He does not understand that. Mayor Gayle stated that we have a process that you are required to go through and we have not changed that process in any other situation. Every one we have changed has gone through the same process. Mr. Rose stated that this is the only place he knows where every position of power is held by white folks. Every one of them. The Mayor is white, the City Manager is white, the Sheriff is white. Everybody that is in any position of power that makes decisions is white. This City is 51% black and that would not happen anywhere else in this country. Mayor Gayle stated that they have a majority of black people on this Council and we probably have a majority of the Department Heads in this City. Mr. Rose stated that they do not make decisions. Mayor Gayle stated that Mr. Rose's three minutes time limit was up. Mr. Rose stated that he could call the Police or do whatever he wanted but he was not finished. Mayor Gayle stated that we have been through this before and he hated to have him remove but your time is up. Mr. Rose stated that he could do that and have him removed and sent to jail. That is fine with him. Mayor Gayle stated that he was not sending him to jail but they would just usher him outside. Mr. Rose stated that they could send him to jail and he did not mind. If you want to put him in jail go right ahead.

George Boston Rhynes, 5004 Oak Drive, stated that Rev. Floyd Rose is 80 years old and his heart goes out to him. You may have done everything you were supposed to do but one thing he knows as a human being, and another thing as a black man, we caught hell in this country. A lot of them think that they will never get justice here in terms of equality and justice. There are people sitting on the City Council that feel the same way he does. They may never say it but he is. You may think that these issues are small but they are major. He had said it to the Mayor and Council many times before that we can act as if racism does not live here but he thinks it made its home here. He has historical facts to back it up. He has white people who tell him behind the curtain that they know what is going on. He would go as far to say that he has documents that white folks gave him. He is hoping that one day Valdosta will change from the way she is today. It is a disgrace how public and overt racism is in Valdosta. People know it but people don't say it. He has been fighting for two or three years. He goes across the State of Georgia and May 27th will be Memorial Day. There is not a Georgia flag flying at City Hall and it is disrespectful for the people at Moody Air Force Base and for every veteran who has ever served including him and the parents who had children die. There is not a flag on the Rec Center, the City Hall Annex, the Courthouse, the Museum, or the VA place and that is not by accident. He may not be a rocket scientist but he is rocking chair operator and he knows why you do not fly it and you are not by yourself because there are other cities who don't fly it. He has some cities that do fly the flag and he is working on a video right now. When you see it, he hopes that one day Valdosta takes in some citizens that are more diverse and respectful of veterans and the people at Moody Air Force Base including the Squadron Commanders who are not saying anything about it.

CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that the Juneteenth Program is coming up and they will be hosting several activities.

We had a first neighborhood walk with Chief Leslie Manahan and Councilman Howard in District 4. It was very successful and the next one is scheduled for June 5, 2019 from 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. in District 6. It will start at Williams Street and go to East Jane Street.

The mural unveiling will be held on June 7, 2019 on building wall located at the corner of Ashley Street and Central Avenue. It will look very nice for our Downtown area.

A Super Dad 5K Run will be held on June 15, 2019 in Downtown Valdosta. It will end up at Georgia Beer Company and it will be a fun event. We will also be incorporating food trucks in the Downtown area beginning with the third Thursday in June. It will be held on the grassy area located at the corner of Central Avenue and Lee Street. We will shut down that portion of Lee Street and line the food trucks up. They will also have a nice table area for people to sit at and eat as well as entertainment. This has generated a lot of positive comments.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilman Vickers stated that they have been invited to have breakfast with the School Crossing Guards tomorrow morning at 9:00 a.m. at Greenleaf which is located on East Park Avenue. Councilman Vickers encouraged Council Members to attend to show them how much they appreciate their job in keeping our children safe.

Councilwoman Miller-Cody stated that we have asked that at least two Council Members be a part of a Promotion Board and succession plans for offices such as City Manager, Assistant City Manager, Police Chief, and Fire Chief. They should be a part of making suggestions on this Board. Since they serve the City and people come to them with their questions, it is time that two Council Members be a part of that Board. Her next request is that money be placed in the Budget to train for internal candidates for hirer positions. We need to try our best trained within management and supervisory positions. We need more professional training within the City because we have workers who have been here 30 years on these jobs and they cannot be promoted because they are not getting the training they need. We would not have to keep going outside to hire people because there is nothing better than a person who has worked their way up. They will stay here forever and not leave. If given the training there could be promotions. She previously worked as a Law Enforcement Officer and they cross trained in case their Supervisor was out of town. Someone could step up and do the job and then stepped back down when that person came back. Then if a promotion came up you were qualified to do the job. The City should be doing that same thing. Yesterday she was at an Appreciation Luncheon for City employees at Mathis Auditorium. She listened to one employee who stated that he started out as a Trash Collector and was now a Director for that Department. If you take a man from the bottom to the top he will work very hard. We have people here but we are not training them to do anything but pick up trash. The Captains and Chiefs get all the training and then they go somewhere else. If we train from within and give our people a chance for these positions then they will stay here. Their children are here, their homes are here, and their families are here and that's why we need some money for training. Councilman Vickers inquired as to what exactly Councilwoman Miller-Cody was saying about creating a Board to assist the City Manager. Councilwoman Miller-Cody stated that the Board is already created. They are asking for two positions from Council be allowed to be a part of that Board so they can have input and make decisions as to who is going to be hired because we are going outside and hiring people from other towns. They come in here and get all the training and then they leave so we have to start back over again. Councilwoman Tooley stated that Councilwoman Miller-Cody wants two Council Members to sit on the Board as well as the City Manager to sit on the Board. She thinks that is a good idea and she supports it. Councilwoman Miller-Cody stated that if they have to take it to GMA to get it approved they may need to research it and see if there is a way to changing the procedure from how it is done now. Mayor Gayle stated that the way our City is run is for the Council to make policy and not get involved in the hiring process because that gets politics involved and it can cause problems down the road. We cannot make it changes unless we change the City Charter and we would have to vote on it and bring it up to the Legislature during the next session.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Gayle entertained a motion for adjournment.

A MOTION by Councilman Vickers, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to adjourn the May 23, 2019 Meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:21 p.m. to meet again in Regular Session on Thursday, June 6, 2019.