

MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL
5:30 P.M., THURSDAY, AUGUST 9, 2018
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, Ben Norton, Sandra Tooley, Eric Howard, Andy Gibbs, and Vivian Miller-Cody. Councilman Tim Carroll was absent. The invocation was given by Pastor Martin Collins, Image of God Ministries, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

AWARDS AND PRESENTATIONS

EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH AWARD

Consideration of the August, 2018 Employee of the Month Award (Firefighter Mark Schulte, Valdosta Fire Department).

Fire Chief Freddie Broome stated that Mark Schulte began his employment with the City of Valdosta Fire Department in July of 2017 and presently holds the position of Firefighter. Firefighters are responsible for responding to emergency incidents and providing fire, rescue, medical, hazmat, and special rescue services to the citizens and community while upholding the City and Fire Department's mission, vision, and core values. On the morning of May 11, 2018 at approximately 7:30 a.m., Lieutenant Miller and Firefighter Schulte were sitting in the bay talking. A young lady passed by in front of the bay as if she were searching for something. Instead, she walked back around the front of Engine 2 and asked if they could help her because she fell in a hole. Valdosta Fire Department personnel quickly figured out that the hole was actually the ditch located on the west side of the station. Firefighter Schulte provided a towel to help dry herself off and then Firefighter A.D. Williams and Firefighter Schulte grabbed some newspapers to help dry out her shoes. They also offered to call her parents or make arrangements to get her home to change her clothes; however, she insisted that she would be fine and needed to go to school. While putting her shoes back on, Firefighter Schulte found out her name was Jada and she was in the 5th grade. Before leaving, Jada hugged each Firefighter and tried to return the towel to Firefighter Schulte; however, he insisted that she keep it in case she needed it. After Jada left, Lieutenant Miller asked Firefighter Schulte if that towel was just an extra one left in the laundry room and he stated that it was his clean towel. Firefighter Schulte then inquired if the convenience store next door sold clothing items and if he could purchase some for her to wear to school. Firefighter Schulte's actions on that morning demonstrate his commitment to serving the public. Donating his towel to a citizen in need and even thinking to procure clothing for that same citizen at his own expense exemplifies his service-oriented nature which goes above and beyond his job description as a Firefighter for the City of Valdosta. It is for those reasons and many others that the Employee Relations Committee nominated Firefighter Mark Schulte as Employee of the Month.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the July 19, 2018 Regular Meeting were approved by unanimous consent (6-0) of the Council.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

ORDINANCE NO. 2018-16, AN ORDINANCE FOR A CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT FOR A BLOOD BANK FACILITY IN A RESIDENTIAL-PROFESSIONAL (R-P) ZONING DISTRICT

Consideration of an Ordinance for a Conditional Use Permit for a Blood Bank Facility in a Residential-Professional (R-P) Zoning District as requested by LifeSouth Community Blood Centers, Inc. (File No. CU-2018-05). The property is located at 301 Woodrow Wilson Drive. The Greater Lowndes Planning Commission reviewed this request at their July Regular Meeting and recommended approval (7-0 Vote).

Matt Martin, Planning & Zoning Administrator, stated that LifeSouth Community Blood Centers, Inc. is requesting a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) for a Blood Bank Facility in a Residential-Professional (R-P) Zoning

District. The property consists of 0.40 acres and is located at 301 Woodrow Wilson Drive. This is at the southeast corner of Woodrow Wilson Drive and Fleming Street. The property contains an existing office building (1,962 square feet) which was previously used as a bank, but has been vacant during the past few years. The applicant recently acquired the property and is proposing to immediately renovate the existing building into a Blood Bank facility. There are no proposed changes to the site plan or the building footprint. The property is located within an Institutional Activity Center (IAC) Character Area on the Future Development Map of the Comprehensive Plan. The existing R-P Zoning is compliant with this Character Area designation. The property is part of the well-established institutional area that is associated with South Georgia Medical Center (SGMC) that is to the north of the property across Woodrow Wilson Drive. All of these properties along the south side of Woodrow Wilson consist of offices, most of them medical-related, and the proposed use is a very natural and logical fit within this existing land use pattern and proximity to SGMC. There are virtually no residential uses along this corridor, despite all of the properties being zoned R-P. In many ways this is more of an Office-Professional (O-P) type of corridor than R-P. If the property was zoned O-P instead, the proposed Blood Bank would be a "permitted use" and no CUP would be required. In this particular case, the applicant had a simple choice of either requesting the CUP, or rezoning the property to O-P (same fees and same public hearing process). Because there is no existing O-P zoning anywhere else in the area, Staff recommended the CUP process instead. Staff found the request consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the Conditional Use Review Criteria, and recommended approval subject to the following three conditions: (1) Approval shall be granted for a Blood Bank Facility or other form of Medical Clinic in R-P Zoning. (2) Maintain the existing solid hedge of vegetation along the south property line to fully screen the view from the adjacent property. (3) Conditional Use approval shall expire after one year from the date of approval if no Business License application for this use has been submitted by that date. The Planning Commission reviewed this at their July 30, 2018 Regular Meeting, found it consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the Conditional Use Review Criteria, and recommended approval subject to the same conditions as recommended by Staff (7-0 vote). Councilwoman Tooley inquired as to whether this would be an office and a place where they will process the blood. Matt Martin stated that they will be able to take donations there and will have approximately three or four donors a day. It is mainly going to be used for office space and coordinating their efforts with the hospital. They will be collecting blood donations for human use only at the hospital across the street.

Rob Plumb, Attorney, 1007 North Patterson Street, spoke in favor of the request. Mr. Plumb stated that he represented LifeSouth Community Blood Centers, Inc. which is a non-profit organization that has been providing blood to South Georgia Medical Center since 2016. They have been operating out of a temporary facility at the hospital and they would like to make this location their permanent operation center for this area. It will be primarily administrative offices and they will have a Donor Center where citizens will donate blood and platelets. The blood collected there will stay here in the community and will go to South Georgia Medical Center. They are not a plasma center and the donors are not paid. J. B. Bowles, Senior Vice President of Operations, is here and will be glad to answer any questions about the operation. They anticipate the traffic at the Donor Center to be very light with three to four donors a day. Mr. Plumb asked for Council's consideration in approving the Conditional Use Permit.

Councilwoman Tooley inquired about the processing of the blood and whether they would keep it there or send it directly to South Georgia Medical Center.

J. B. Bowles, 5071 Cumberland Lane, Springhill, Florida, stated that they would not process the blood at the office. They will collect the blood there, take it to Gainesville, Florida for processing, and then bring it back. When they bring it back here it will go directly to the hospital. They will not have storage facilities on site to hold it.

No one spoke in opposition to the request.

A MOTION by Councilman Norton, seconded by Councilwoman Tooley, was adopted (6-0) to enact Ordinance No. 2018-16, an Ordinance for a Conditional Use Permit for a Blood Bank Facility in a Residential-Professional (R-P) Zoning District as requested by LifeSouth Community Blood Centers, Inc., the complete text of which will be found in Ordinance Book XIV.

AN ORDINANCE FOR A REDEVELOPMENT TAX FOR THE CITY OF VALDOSTA (FIRST READING)

Consideration of an Ordinance for a Redevelopment Tax for the City of Valdosta. (First Reading)

Vanassa Flucas, Neighborhood Development & Community Protection Manager, stated that during the Mayor and Council Strategic Initiative Summit this year, one of the items presented was the creation of a Redevelopment Tax which is also known as the Blight Tax. This would allow the City to impose an increased rate of Ad Valorem taxation to both commercial and residential properties which have been deemed by the Courts to be in an extended period of blight. The institution of this Ordinance will give our municipality an additional tool in our toolbox to use in our community to eliminate slum and blight. Each blighted property costs the City additional resources to maintain it. We are looking at increased services through our Public Works Department, Community Development Department, Fire Department, and Police Department which often remains unplanned in the City Budget. Property owners will be given the opportunity to remediate the blighted property through rehabilitation or demolition. Once the blighted status is deemed satisfied by the Courts, the increased rate of taxation will be decreased to the tax rate collected before the court-imposed blighted status. The rate that we are proposing is seven times the current Ad Valorem rate for each property and parcel. The proceeds received from the increased tax collected for such properties can only be used to assist in community revitalization or redevelopment in the City. The checklist they will be using is from the International Property Maintenance Code which is the standard that the City Marshals and the Court will use to deem properties as blighted. A Redevelopment Tax Ordinance has been prepared for review by the Council.

Mayor Gayle stated that this is the First Reading so no action will need to be taken. Councilman Norton inquired as to whether it was up to the City to bear the burden of proving blight to the Court. Vanassa Flucas stated that the checklist is almost the same process that the Code Enforcement currently uses. They will go out and take pictures and then submit those and the checklist to the Court. Councilman Gibbs inquired as to whether all the items on the checklist had to be checked off. Vanassa Flucas stated that it is all dependent on each situation. For example, if they would go to a commercial property and you see it has no roof so the main reason why it could be deemed blighted is the structural roof.

BIDS, CONTRACTS, AGREEMENTS, AND EXPENDITURES

Consideration of an Intergovernmental Contract between Lowndes County and the City of Valdosta to amend the Valdosta-Lowndes County Land Bank Authority based on the 2012 Georgia Land Bank Act.

Vanassa Flucas, Neighborhood Development & Community Protection Manager, stated that in October of 2015, a Resolution was presented to both the Valdosta City Council and the Lowndes County Board of Commissioners for permission to convert the governing policies of the Valdosta-Lowndes County Land Bank Authority to Senate Bill 284 (the 2012 Georgia Land Bank Act), where each governing body granted the request and signed the Resolution. By signing the Resolution, each governing body gave the Valdosta-Lowndes County Land Bank Authority permission to revise and submit for approval an amended Intergovernmental Contract based on the 2012 State of Georgia Land Bank Act. The amended Intergovernmental Contract between Lowndes County and City of Valdosta is being submitted to conclude the process of transitioning to the 2012 Georgia Land Bank Act. So far in this process, the Land Bank Authority has negotiated the ability to self-finance Land Bank operations with a 50% tax recapture from the Lowndes County Tax Office and has increased the number of members to the Authority to seven members with staggered appointments. Once the amended Intergovernmental Contract has been approved, possible delinquent property tax abatement discussions will continue with the local School District. Vanassa Flucas recommended that Council approve the Intergovernmental Contract between Lowndes County and the City of Valdosta to amend the Valdosta-Lowndes County Land Bank Authority based on the 2012 Georgia Land Bank Act.

A MOTION by Councilwoman Miller-Cody, seconded by Councilman Gibbs, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve an Intergovernmental Contract between Lowndes County and the City of Valdosta to amend the Valdosta-Lowndes County Land Bank Authority based on the 2012 Georgia Land Bank Act.

Consideration of appointments to the Valdosta Housing Board of Adjustments & Appeals.

Mayor Gayle stated that the Valdosta Housing Board of Adjustments & Appeals had two members, Clinton Anselm and Thaddeus Blue, whose terms expired on August 6, 2016. Mr. Anselm and Mr. Blue did not express 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. David Bonner was the only person who applied for this Board.

Mayor Gayle entertained a motion to appoint David Bonner to the Valdosta Housing Board of Adjustments and Appeals.

A MOTION by Councilman Vickers, seconded by Councilman Norton, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve the appointment of David Bonner to serve a term of three years on the Valdosta Housing Board of Adjustments and Appeals.

Consideration of appointments to the Valdosta Tree Commission.

Mayor Gayle stated that the Valdosta Tree Commission has two members, Robert Harrison and Stacey Griffin, whose terms will expire on September 6, 2018. Mr. Harrison and Mr. Griffin have not 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 applicants are as follows: (1) Jacob Eckwahl - Owner of a Commercial Landscape Company (Southern Exteriors, Inc.), and (2) Tyler Tucker - Community Service Coordinator (Valdosta State University).

Mayor Gayle entertained a motion to appoint Jacob Eckwahl and Tyler Tucker to the Valdosta Tree Commission to serve a term of four years.

A MOTION by Councilman Norton, seconded by Councilwoman Tooley, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve the appointment of Jacob Eckwahl and Tyler Tucker to the Valdosta Tree Commission to serve a term of four years.

CITIZENS TO BE HEARD

George Boston Rhynes, 5004 Oak Drive, stated that he received a telephone call concerning the renaming of Forrest Street and the negativity that Reverend Floyd Rose was receiving. He did some research and heard the venom that was directed toward Reverend Rose, who has stood the test of time and worked to bring about change in Valdosta. It was in the Valdosta Daily Times newspaper that Forrest Street was named after Elbert Forrest, a black man who was a slave and had been freed. He heard the Valdosta Daily Times give many words, some positive and some negative, and they also shared some comments from Ms. Lindsay. They talked about the former President Barrack Obama not being about family values and keeping the traditional marriage between a man and a woman as people expect. If we reflect back to the days of Mr. Nathan Forrest, who was a slave owner and founder of the Klu Klux Klan, we do not find family values tied into his movement. Mr. Rhynes stated that he does not understand how people in Valdosta in 2018 and the Valdosta Daily Times can be so off track. Those people in the black community understand what it is like to fight for everything they want. They had to fight to use the bathroom, fight to go to war to fight for this Nation, and fight to rename Barber Park. They have not received anything without a fight so they are used to fighting. Mr. Rhynes asked Council's consideration in following the laws that they have put in place. He believes that if the street is not renamed then God will allow the voters to elect officials to get it done. He has a record of things they thought would never be approved but they were. It is all because time has come for Valdosta to change and it will and must change. He read in Ecclesiastes that "No man hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit." That means that Heaven and Earth will pass away but my truth and my righteousness will shine forever.

CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that he wanted to commend Vanassa Flucas, Neighborhood Development & Community Protection Manager, her entire Staff, and all of the volunteers who helped with the

Back to School Bash that was held on Saturday, August 4, 2018 at Drexel Park. This was the first time attempting this and it was very organized and well attended.

The 100 Black Men Bar-B-Que Cook-off was held on August 4, 2018 at the Lowndes County Courthouse square. That event was also well attended.

The City of Valdosta has received a \$61,422 grant from the Georgia Department of Transportation as part of their Gateway Beautification Program. We will be able to use these funds to place some signage and beautification landscaping at Exits 16 and 18. Tim Golden, Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) Board Member, has been instrumental in helping us get the funding.

The City has advertised for a tentative property tax increase for this year. We are a little late with the numbers because there was a mistake in the City of Valdosta's numbers and the Lowndes County Tax Assessor's Office had to make some changes. We have some very short timeframes to meet the reporting requirements so we have to get this done by the end of August. We are not increasing the millage rate and it will remain at 8.001. We are selecting to not rollback the reassessment growth. The State requires Public Hearings to be held at various times throughout the day to give opportunities for citizens to attend. Our first Public Hearing will be held on August 16, 2018 at noon, the second one will be held on August 21, 2018 at 6:00 p.m., and August 23, 2018 at 5:30 p.m. A vote will then be taken at the August 23, 2018 Regular Council Meeting. A home with a fair market value of \$100,000 would see an increase of \$2.39.

The first day of school for the new Valdosta High School located on Inner Perimeter Road was not as bad as we anticipated. It does need a few improvements such as a traffic light adjustment when vehicles turn onto Park Avenue. The GDOT will be in Valdosta next week to see the traffic that was at the light. Pat Collins, City Engineer, and Larry Ogden, Traffic Maintenance Manager, were there taking notes and videos to share with GDOT.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilman Vickers stated he thought it would be nice to send a thank you note to Tim Golden for all his efforts in getting sidewalks on St. Augustine, Griffin Avenue, and Troup Street. These were all worthwhile Projects and every time he goes down St. Augustine Road and there are individuals walking on the sidewalks instead of the grass it is very nice. Councilman Vickers also stated that they need to have the sidewalks on Park Avenue connected to the new Valdosta High School because sooner or later students will be walking down that road.

Councilman Howard stated that he wanted to thank the Mayor and Council, Police Chief Brian Childress, Fire Chief Freddie Broome, and George Page, Executive Director for the Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks and Recreation Authority, for their support of the Basketball Program that they had this summer to help keep the children out of trouble. There were 50 children who participated and they want to get the entire community involved. They would like to have a camp for girls next year as well. Councilman Howard presented Mayor Gayle with the City Council trophy for First Place. Mayor Gayle thanked Councilman Howard and stated that he would have it placed in the trophy case at City Hall.

Councilwoman Miller-Cody stated that she reached out to some local barbers about providing haircuts at no charge for children who were going back to school. We need to commend those two young barbers for giving back to their community. She also thanked Ashlyn Becton, Public Information Officer, for coming to the event to take some photos.

Councilwoman Tooley stated that we have people in the community who give back and Council had previously discussed the idea of giving them some type of award. She also thanked the City Staff for their work in getting Troup Street between Hill Avenue and Central Avenue paved. There are so many residents in that area who have noticed it and it is very nice.

Mayor Gayle entertained a motion for adjournment.

A **MOTION** by Councilman Vickers, seconded by Councilman Norton, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to adjourn the August 9, 2018 Meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:14 p.m. to meet again in Regular Session on Thursday, August 23, 2018.

City Clerk, City of Valdosta

Mayor, City of Valdosta