

MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL
5:30 P.M., THURSDAY, MAY 7, 2020
COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY HALL

OPENING CEREMONIES

Mayor Scott James Matheson 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 Councilman Tim Carroll, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the April 28, 2020 Regular Meeting were approved by unanimous consent (7-0) of the Council.

ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS

RESOLUTION NO. 2020-2, A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE FILING OF A SECTION 5307 GRANT APPLICATION WITH THE U. S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND THE GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Consideration of a Resolution authorizing the filing of a Section 5307 Grant Application with the U. S. Department of Transportation and the Georgia Department of Transportation.

Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that the City of Valdosta has unmet public transportation needs that are eligible for funding under 49 USC 5307 (Urbanized Area Formula Grants). These needs include but are not limited to reliable wheelchair accessible transportation services and on-demand transportation. The City would be best served by contracting with a third-party provider for a turnkey transit system initially. The City plans to apply for funding for a third-party operated transit system to provide public transportation in the City. The Southern Georgia Regional Commission has provided significant amounts of data from surveys, a Pilot Shuttle Program, and a 2016 Transit Implementation Study which has greatly assisted with preparation for the application process. The plan prepared in preparation for this process calls for a third-party contractor to be used for the initial three years. This would eliminate the need for additional infrastructure or maintenance of additional vehicles. It would also allow the City to make use of lessons learned during the early stages of the Program without incurring significant additional costs related to infrastructure. The 5307 Program would provide ongoing funding of up to 80% of eligible costs; however, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act has removed the local match requirement for FY 2021 and allowed the funding to be used for both operational needs and minor capital. Rolling stock would not be eligible but the City would not be purchasing rolling stock under the model planned. This means the entire Program would be eligible for 100% funding up to the approved maximum of \$1,433,836. Future years would require a 10% local match under the existing Program. With public transportation, though, we will have to find some way to fund the deficit that will occur. The deficit on the Application is approximately \$350,000 per year. They discussed the on-demand system with a third-party at the Strategic Initiatives Summit. This works well with that type of model because it can all go to operations for that first year. It does not affect the model that they finally end up with. The company that we have talked to is willing to do a fixed route system and none of this prohibits any of what they may want to do in the future. We will just finally have some money that we can put toward operations of the public transit system.

Councilwoman Tooley inquired as to whether they will start with on-demand for the first year. Mark Barber stated that was correct. Councilwoman Tooley stated that she thought they were going to do a model where you have a third-party come in, but it was not for on-demand transportation. Mark Barber stated that what they discussed at the Retreat was an on-demand system, but they told the third-party company that we may be interested in a fixed route system in certain areas. People are steering away from a fixed route system because it cannot pay for itself. Councilwoman Tooley stated that the public transportation is not going to pay for itself with a profit; however, it was her understanding that they were applying for a Grant and telling them that we want it with a third-party was something different. Mark Barber stated that we are not telling them what we are doing. The filing of

the Application is to obtain some funding so that we can do something with the funds. They do not care about the model that we are going to use. We are just trying to get our foot in the door to get funding to operate a public transit system. That is what we are doing with the Resolution which authorizes the City to apply for 5307 Grant Funds to meet these needs. If Council approves the plan and the Resolution, the City will publish a public notice allowing 14 days for any interested parties to request a public hearing. After a 30-day comment period, the Mayor would be authorized to sign the Resolution to apply for the Grant. Councilwoman Tooley inquired about the reference of Title 6, Civil Rights Act in the Resolution. Mark Barber stated that they would have to adhere to all of that because it is Federal money. We do that with any Federal Grant Funding that we receive. Councilwoman Tooley inquired as to whether we would consider using minority women for the route. Mark Barber stated that they apply that is part of the process; however, there is a lot of the other stuff such as who will be working on the vehicles. You have to look beyond who is going to supply the actual transportation. Mark Barber recommended that Council approve the Resolution so that we can proceed with putting out a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) to see what type of interest we get. Councilwoman Tooley inquired as to whether the 5307 Grant had been awarded to Lowndes County before. Mark Barber stated that they used a 5311 Grant Funding source. Because we are urbanized, the County was not supposed to be funding urbanized transportation from the 5311 Grant Funding source. Councilwoman Tooley stated that she met with Corey Hull, MPO Coordinator, and he showed her records where they received funds from 5307. Mark Barber stated that they received a little money at first, but the majority of their routes was in an urbanized area. They did that for approximately one year and the U. S. Department of Transportation told Lowndes County that they could continue with public transportation; however, they could not do a Valdosta-to-Valdosta route because it is the wrong pot of money. Valdosta must apply for 5307 Funds. We want 5307 Fund because there are so many more restrictions in 5311. We also have a third aspect of public transportation that the Southern Georgia Regional Commission runs and that is with the Department of Human Services for people who can ride with no fare or if they have medical conditions.

A MOTION by Councilman Gibbs, seconded by Councilman Norton, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to approve Resolution No. 2020-2, a Resolution authorizing the filing of a Section 5307 Grant Application with the U. S. Department of Transportation and the Georgia Department of Transportation, the complete text of which will be found in Resolution Book VI.

BIDS, CONTRACTS, AGREEMENTS, AND EXPENDITURES

Consideration of bids for four Stationary Industrial Generators for the Utilities Department (Bid No. 32-19-20).

Darryl Muse, Utilities Director, stated that the Utilities Department needs to purchase four stationary generators to supply power in case of outages to the elevated drinking water tanks and software. Three generators will be placed at the elevated water supply tanks around town. The remaining generator will be installed to assure power is available for the City's software to allow for Internet connectivity which monitors water levels at each tank in case of power outages. These generators are in the current year approved Mayor/Council Fiscal Year Budget. Sealed bids were received on February 18, 2020 with the low bid submitted by Powerhouse Diesel Generators in the amount of \$55,504.12. Several other companies were sent the invitation to bid and it was advertised as required. Darryl Muse, Utilities Director, recommended that Council approve the low bid submitted by Powerhouse Diesel Generators in the amount of \$55,504.12 for four Stationary Industrial Generators for the Utilities Department.

A MOTION by Councilwoman Miller-Cody, seconded by Councilman Gibbs, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to approve the low bid submitted by Powerhouse Diesel Generators in the amount of \$55,504.12 for four Stationary Industrial Generators for the Utilities Department.

Consideration of bids for a 250 KW Diesel Powered Generator for the Utilities Department (Bid No. 33-19-20).

Darryl Muse, Utilities Director, stated that the Utilities Department needs to purchase a mobile 250 KW generator to assist during power outages. This generator will be responsible for providing power at the headworks stage at the Withlacoochee Wastewater Treatment Plant if a power outage occurs. The headworks is the beginning

stage in the purifying process of wastewater that flows in from City customers. This generator is in the current approved Mayor/Council Fiscal Year Budget. Sealed bids were received on February 18, 2020 with the low bid submitted by Powerhouse Diesel Generators in the amount of \$60,590.24. Several other vendors did not respond to the invitation to bid. The bid was also advertised as required. Darryl Muse, Utilities Director, recommended that Council approve the low bid submitted by Powerhouse Diesel Generators in the amount of \$60,590.24 for the purchase of a 250 KW Diesel Powered Generator for the Utilities Department.

A MOTION by Councilman Vickers, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to approve the low bid submitted by Powerhouse Diesel Generators in the amount of \$60,590.24 for the purchase of a 250 KW Diesel Powered Generator for the Utilities Department.

BOARDS, COMMISSIONS, AUTHORITIES, AND ADVISORY COMMITTEES

Mayor Matheson stated that if Council had no objection, he would like to move Agenda Item 5(c) – Consideration of an appointment to the Valdosta Housing Authority to be the first appointment. He makes this appointment and may need to leave the Council Meeting afterward to present a Proclamation for National Prayer Day. There was no objection from Council.

Consideration of an appointment to the Valdosta Housing Authority (Resident Appointment).

Mayor Matheson stated that the Valdosta Housing Authority has a Resident Member, DeShonda Jenkins, whose term will expire on July 1, 2020. Ms. Jenkins has expressed an interest in serving again. This appointment was advertised according to the Boards, Commissions, Authorities, and Advisory Committees Policy that was adopted by Mayor and Council. The only applicant applying for this position was Ms. Jenkins. Mayor Matheson stated that he would like to reappoint DeShonda Jenkins to serve a one-year term as the Resident Appointment on the Valdosta Housing Authority.

Mayor Matheson stated that since there were no contested slots for the remaining Boards, Commissions, Authorities, and Advisory Committee appointments, he would like for these to be considered under a Consent Agenda. There was no objection from Council.

Consideration of an appointment to the Greater Lowndes Planning Commission.

Mayor Matheson stated that the Greater Lowndes Planning Commission has a member, Chip Wildes, Jr., whose term will expire on July 8, 2020. Mr. Wildes 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. Mr. Wildes was the only applicant to apply.

Consideration of appointments to the Public Art Advisory Committee.

Mayor Matheson stated that the Public Art Advisory Committee has three members, Robin Fretti (LVAC Member at Large), Sarah Lowe (Community at Large), and Angela Crance (Community at Large) whose terms will expire on June 1, 2020. Robin Fretti and Angela Crance have expressed an interest in being reappointed and Sarah Lowe has not 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 are as follows: (1) LVAC Member at Large - Robin Fretti, CFO of All States Moving & Storage, (2) Community at Large - Angela Crance, Owner of Art and Soul, and (3) Community At Large - Cheryl Oliver, Retired Executive Director of the Turner Center for the Arts.

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

Mayor Matheson stated that the Valdosta-Lowndes County Construction Board has a member, Michael G. Miller (Mike's Electric Service) whose term will expire on June 30, 2020. Mr. Miller 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. Mr. Miller was the only applicant to apply.

Consideration of an appointment to the Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks & Recreation Authority.

Mayor Matheson stated that the Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks and Recreation Authority has a member, Vincent Miller, whose term will expire on June 30, 2020. Mr. Miller 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. Miller.

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

Mayor Matheson stated that the Valdosta-Lowndes County Zoning Board of Appeals has a member, Allan Strickland, whose term will expire on May 7, 2020. Mr. Strickland 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 for this position was Mr. Strickland.

Mayor Matheson entertained a motion for the Boards, Commissions, Authorities, and Advisory Committees appointments for Agenda Items 5(a), 5(b), and 5(d) through 5 (f) as a Consent Agenda.

A MOTION by Councilman Norton, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to approve the following appointments for Agenda Items 5(a), 5(b), and 5(d) through 5(f) under a Consent Agenda: Greater Lowndes Planning Commission - Chip Wildes, Jr. to serve a five-year term, Public Art Advisory Committee - Robin Fretti (LVAC Member at Large), Angela Crance (Community at Large), and Cheryl Oliver (Community At Large) to serve three-year terms, Valdosta-Lowndes County Construction Board of Adjustments and Appeals - Michael G. Miller to serve a three-year term, Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks & Recreation Authority - Vincent Miller to serve a three-year term, and Valdosta-Lowndes County Zoning Board of Appeals - Allan Strickland to serve a three-year term.

CITIZENS TO BE HEARD

Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that we received an E-mail from Roger Budd, III and he is asking for the City to review our Sign Ordinance. The E-mail from Mr. Budd stated the following: I would like to ask the City Council to vote to roll back the existing regulations on development of digital billboards and outdoor advertising within the City of Valdosta. These are bad times in the USA and the City of Valdosta. We have the Coronavirus pandemic and the economic crash associated with it. Our country has over 30 million new unemployment claims in the past month and more on the way. Most businesses are not open. Those that are open are barely making it, and there is currently no telling how bad the local economy will get before it turns around. The Valdosta Daily Times is in such dire financial straits that they have just cut service to four days a week. Who knows if they will even be in existence this time next year? With all this in mind, Roger Budd would like to help stimulate the local economy by investing in digital outdoor advertising. We would like the option to convert any existing traditional billboard to a digital. We would like to roll back the existing billboard Ordinance to align with the State of Georgia Ordinance. This would allow us to help support the local economy. Digital billboards allow us to drop the production cost on new advertising to zero - just the cost of a digital file. So, we could advertise for our local businesses that are struggling to let people know they are open for business, what their hours of operation are, and what their new Coronavirus policies are. This would also allow us to invest in the local economy and raise the tax value on each of billboard we upgrade from a few thousand dollars to a hundred thousand dollars each or more. Digital billboards will also help all members of our community. Roger Budd supports our City. We will be happy to give the City and local government advertising time for City events, public notices, amber alerts, hurricane shelter, employees of the month, teacher of the year, or anything else the City would like display to the public. In conclusion, help us support Valdosta in this difficult time for business. Let's make Valdosta business friendly, allow digital billboards, grow local advertising ,and help the economy. Mark Barber stated that the Mayor and Council received an E-mail from Mr. Budd a couple of weeks ago concerning the same thing. He is already working on a response to Mr. Budd and he will copy the Mayor and Council on it. He also distributed the guidelines from the Land Development Regulations regarding Mr. Budd's request to give them an idea of what we currently have in place.

Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that last week he sent an E-mail to the Mayor and Council regarding the Consent Order from the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD). He and Darryl Muse, Utilities Director, are planning a meeting with EMC and they will make the determination as to what EMC's financial responsibility will be. The \$122,000 fine is on the table immediately and he did not think EMC would have any trouble paying 100% of the fine. We are also going to ask for other things such as a year's worth of testing. We had already begun additional third-party testing before the Consent Order to try to take care of the contamination that is happening below us that has nothing to do with the City of Valdosta. It does, though, affect our North Florida neighbors and we want to be a good neighbor. We want to determine where the contamination is coming from and what type of contamination it is. We are also going to pay for a scientist to do DNA testing. We are going to ask for financial support from EMC to provide those tests. The testing that we currently do at Okapilco Creek, Knights Ferry, and the Georgia/Florida line is \$10,000 per month. Since the December, 2019 sewage spill, the City of Valdosta has been posting the test results on-line as well as the Lowndes County results because they have been very helpful to us with the testing. We have had several conversations with EMC since the spill and they have been very cooperative and understanding. This Consent Order is under a 30-day public comment period on the EPD website so the document that everyone is reviewing now may not be the final document depending on the comments the EPD receives from the public. The 30-day period ends May 27, 2020. Mark Barber stated that there is nothing in the Consent Order that he was not expecting. He and Darryl Muse met with the EPD in February after the Bird Supper and the fine was much greater than what it actually turned out to be. We did ask for the EPD to continue the Consent Order that we were under because we want to remain transparent and accountable. Our current Consent Order was set to expire and we did not want to stop the work so the next five years will show the effort that we are putting forth. Councilman Vickers inquired as to where the discharge line was located. Mark Barber stated that it was at the U. S. Highway 84 bridge. Councilman Vickers inquired as to whether we were doing any testing north of us to see what was getting into our territory. Mark Barber stated that we test at North Valdosta Road and the Highway 133 ramp. The water is contaminated when it comes into the North Valdosta Road bridge, it then goes through some cattle farms, and by the time it gets to Highway 133 ramp, the contamination levels are high. When you go to the discharge line on Highway 84, that is the cleanest water in the river. Our North Florida neighbors do not like for us to say it, but they can look at the facts of the water testing results. It clearly shows that the cleanest water is right past our discharge line back into the Withlacoochee River. We had a meeting on January 8, 2020 with North Florida residents and it had been 30 days since the spill occurred. Those spikes happening on the Georgia/Florida line could not be us, but we could not say that at the meeting because we did not have proof. Prior to the meeting, he received an anonymous phone call saying that it was not Valdosta and the contamination was coming from a lower portion of the Withlacoochee River than us. Since that point in time, we hired a third-party and that is what it is clearly showing. You can look at the chart on the City's website and you will see that the Withlacoochee River is contaminated almost every day even when we have not had anything to do with it. We need to be part of the solution for our North Florida neighbors though and help determine where the contamination is coming from. Councilwoman Tooley stated that when the water comes down from north of us we treat it and make sure we have good water for our area. They need to look at how to treat their water to make it good water too. Mark Barber stated that a lot of the things that are in the Consent Order are the things that we are already doing such as the Equalization Basin. We have already started that and it should be completed in October. That will give us additional holding capacity, but we will continue to take care of the inflow and infiltration problem which is truly the cause of the spills in a heavy rain event. He did want to report that during the last two heavy rain events that we had in Valdosta where we received four inches of rain, we had nothing to go wrong.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilman Carroll stated that Mayor Matheson needed to leave to attend the National Day of Prayer event and asked if Council could wrap up their comments. Councilman Vickers stated that the Mayor could go ahead and leave and the Mayor Pro Tem could run the Council Meeting. Mayor Matheson left the Council Meeting at 6:16 p.m. to attend the National Day of Prayer event at Five Points.

Councilman Vickers stated that roll-offs have been placed on Hill Avenue for recycling, but citizens do not know what they are for. Mark Barber stated that they are going to put some signs up. They are trying to place the roll-offs on property that the City owns. They have also added some steps to make it easier for citizens. Councilman Vickers inquired as to whether the City would separate the recycled items. Mark Barber stated that is what we do now. It is single-stream recycling where everything is mixed together and that is a problem because the market no longer wants contaminated material. We want to continue recycling for our citizens, but eventually our

goal is to get those individual containers that can be used to separate the items. We are currently having to pay people to take our recycling because it is contaminated using the single-stream process. Councilman Gibbs inquired about the cost of recycling. Mark Barber stated that we currently lose approximately \$803,000 and that pulls from the other services in Public Works. If we decide to continue the drop off of recyclables, there will be a cost, but we do not feel it will be \$803,000. One of our other thoughts is to open it up to residents of Lowndes County. If you live in the unincorporated area and you want to recycle, then they could bring it in and drop it off at one of our sites. We would then get more people to recycle. Councilman Gibbs inquired as to when the curbside recycling would start resume. Mark Barber stated that he did not think it would start back for another 60 days or more. When the contaminated recyclables get to our recycling center site, an employee has to touch every piece of that contaminated material to separate it where it needs to go. It is a health hazard to our employees. They do have adequate equipment to protect them, but we saw no reason to continue to put them in harms way. Councilman Vickers inquired about the cost of purchasing individual containers for recyclables. Mark Barber stated that it is a mobile unit and we could make it eight or ten bins. Councilman Vickers stated that they need to reach out to the other cities that are currently using that mobile unit and find out how it is working for them and what their costs are. Mark Barber stated that they have been in touch with the City of Thomasville about this type of recycling model.

Councilman Howard stated that citizens need to do more physical distancing than social distancing. They still need to reach out to their neighbors and the elderly people in our community to see if they need any help. A lot of these people are lonely because no one has reached out to them. Those of us who are still fortunate enough to be working could purchase a meal or do something for them because there are a lot of people in our community who are hurting right now. Also, the U. S. Census deadline has been extended to October 31, 2020 and we need to encourage the citizens to complete the Census. Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that the recycling bin located near our Customer Service Center was full the first day because some young men went around to elderly citizens' homes and collected their recyclables and brought it here to be disposed of. We need more of that happening in our community.

Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that we had approximately 300 employees sheltering in place at their homes due to the Coronavirus and they came back to work on May 1, 2020. Our buildings will remain locked until May 14, 2020 depending on the spikes of the Coronavirus and if we want them to remain closed until June 12, 2020 which is when the Governor's emergency declaration is over. We have been truly blessed because we have 650 employees and have had a few in quarantine, but we have had no positive cases. Councilman Vickers inquired as to whether citizens could get masks from the City. Mark Barber stated that Darryl Muse, Utilities Director, told him today that we do have access to some masks that we could possibly give to citizens who are unable to obtain a mask.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Pro Tem Carroll entertained a motion for adjournment.

A MOTION by Councilman Vickers, seconded by Councilman Norton, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to adjourn the May 7, 2020 Meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:30 p.m. to meet again in Regular Session on Thursday, May 21, 2020.

City Clerk, City of Valdosta

Mayor, City of Valdosta