

MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL
5:30 P.M., THURSDAY, JUNE 11, 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 Councilwoman Vivian Miller-Cody, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the May 21, 2020 Regular Meeting were approved by unanimous consent (7-0) of the Council.

ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS

ORDINANCE NO. 2020-8, AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND THE CITY OF VALDOSTA’S PURCHASING POLICY FOR ALLOWANCE OF THE FEDERAL TRANSIT ADMINISTRATION (FTA) PROCUREMENT POLICY WHEN EXPENDING 5307 GRANT FUNDS

Consideration of an Ordinance to amend the City of Valdosta's Purchasing Policy for allowance of the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Procurement Policy when expending 5307 Grant Funds.

Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that the Purchasing procedures at the City of Valdosta are governed by the City’s Purchasing Ordinance and a detailed Purchasing Policy. This Policy sets purchasing procedures based on the nature and amount of the purchase in question. It was last updated on September 6, 2018. The City is currently preparing to apply for a 5307 Transit Grant and needs to ensure that specialized requirements for purchasing related to this Grant are satisfied in its Policy. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) administers 5307 Grants. The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) receives these and passes them through to the cities and counties in the State that provide transit service to urbanized areas. The FTA has certain requirements for purchasing that the City needs to adhere to for expending 5307 Federal dollars. The proposed FTA Addendum which will change as FTA updates its Policy. An Amendment to the Ordinance will allow the City to append GDOT’s model FTA Procurement Policy to the existing Purchasing Policy while retaining current practices for non-Federal dollars. Mark Barber, City Manager, recommended that Council approve the Ordinance to amend the City of Valdosta's Purchasing Policy for allowance of the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Procurement Policy when expending 5307 Grant Funds.

A **MOTION** by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Vickers, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to approve Ordinance No. 2020-8, an Ordinance to amend the City of Valdosta's Purchasing Policy for allowance of the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Procurement Policy when expending 5307 Grant Funds, the complete text of which will be found in Ordinance Book XIV.

BIDS, CONTRACTS, AGREEMENTS, AND EXPENDITURES

Consideration of bids for the replacement of storm drainage pipe on Woodlawn Drive.

Pat Collins, City Engineer, stated that portions of the City near Woodlawn Drive are within the 100-year flood zone. Approximately 350 feet east of the flood zone is Woodlawn Drive. Although the block is outside of the flood zone, during major rainfall events, the connecting storm pipes reach capacity which causes flooding south of Woodlawn Drive. The Stormwater Division has been closely observing a 68-foot long corrugated metal pipe (CMP) on Woodlawn Drive, east of Lullwater Circle. CMP was a popular material choice for storm pipes in the 1960’s due to its low cost and ease of construction. CMP is no longer used nor recommended by the City and because of the pipe’s roughness. The bottom of the pipes on Woodlawn Drive have retained rainwater and rusted out. Holes within the CMP have caused the ground above it to create voids which need backfilling regularly by

Staff. In 2018, the Stormwater Division implemented an ongoing program to replace deteriorating CMP annually throughout the City. The cost for replacement of all identified CMP failures will take 15 years or longer to achieve. The City advertised the Project and a pre-bid conference was held on March 10, 2020. Sealed bids were received on May 15, 2020 with the low bid submitted by Southland Contractors in the amount of \$74,593. Pat Collins, City Engineer, recommended that Council approve the low bid submitted by Southland Contractors in the amount of \$74,593.00 plus a 10% contingency of \$7,459.30 for a total Project cost of \$82,052.30.

A MOTION by Councilman Gibbs, seconded by Councilman Norton, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to approve the low bid submitted by Southland Contractors in the amount of \$74,593.00 plus a 10% contingency of \$7,459.30 for a total Project cost of \$82,052.30 for the replacement of storm drainage pipe on Woodlawn Drive.

Consideration of an Agreement for governmental affairs representation for the City of Valdosta.

Mark Barber, 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 Brian Kemp and Staff, Lt. Government Geoff Duncan 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 current Agreement expires June 30, 2020 with the current payment being \$4,000 per month. The proposed Agreement will begin on July 1, 2020 and end on June 30, 2021 with no change to the monthly payment. Also, either party can reserve the right to terminate the Agreement without cause by a 30-day notice. Mark Barber, City Manager, recommended that Council approve the Agreement with Government Solutions, LLC for governmental affairs representation for the City of Valdosta.

A MOTION by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilwoman Miller-Cody, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to approve the Agreement with Government Solutions, LLC for governmental affairs representation for the City of Valdosta.

LOCAL FUNDING AND REQUESTS

Consideration of a request to authorize the City of Valdosta Engineering Department to apply for a Georgia Smart Community Challenge Grant and purchase equipment for upgrades to the Traffic Management Center.

Pat Collins, City Engineer, stated that the City of Valdosta has been working continuously to improve the traffic flow throughout the City of Valdosta. The Traffic Management Center (TMC) continually monitors and makes timing changes throughout the City on a regular basis. The goal of the TMC is to ensure safe travel for all the citizens and visitors to our area. In the past few years, the City has been looking into ways to increase the safety of the travelling public and the citizens of Valdosta. Part of this was accomplished by the purchase of the Temple Intelligent Monitoring Module (TIMMS) by Applied Information and the new conflict monitors. The City of Valdosta, in conjunction with Valdosta State University and Georgia Tech University, will be applying for the Georgia Smart Community Challenge Grant to further improve the capabilities of the City of Valdosta's TMC. This Grant will allow the City to continue to upgrade the TMC and at the same time save a significant amount of money. As part of the Grant, in-vehicle pre-emption hardware and software, which communicates with the traffic intersection, will be installed in ten of the City's fire trucks during the first phase of the Project. The City's emergency vehicles will receive preempted green lights upon approaching an intersection which will significantly reduce emergency response times. Applied Information and Temple are cooperating with the City of Valdosta and Valdosta State University on this Grant. Their contribution, in recognition of the marketing value and use of their equipment, has substantially discounted the per unit cost of the transponders from \$4,512.34 to \$2,914.00 each.

This discount amounts to a \$20,975.40 cost savings. The City's total contribution will be \$170,808.24, which includes a \$25,000 in kind match. If awarded the Grant, VSU will receive 35% (\$35,000) and the City of Valdosta will receive 65% (\$65,000). With the \$20,975.40 discount from Applied Information and Temple and \$65,000 in Grant proceeds, the City would normally have to pay \$85,975.40 more for this same Project. The Grant will simultaneously transform Valdosta into one of Georgia's first Smart Cities outside the metro Atlanta area, where 100% of its 128 major traffic intersections will be connected to a smart traffic system, as well as TravelSafely App, a connected vehicle mobile application for smartphone devices. Downloading the TravelSafely App allows the Glance System to establish vehicle-to-vehicle (V2V) and vehicle-to-infrastructure (V2I) communication and data sharing that significantly enhances the safety and effectiveness of all travel movement within the City. Introduction of the phone application establishes greater awareness City-wide and promotes safety for all users in the community no matter what mode of travel a citizen is using such as a motorcycle, a bicycle, a scooter, a skateboard, walking, or jogging. Pat Collins, City Engineer, recommended that Council authorize the Engineering Department to apply for Grant Funding and approve the purchase of equipment from Temple for a total Project cost of \$145,882.24 for upgrades to the Traffic Management Center.

A MOTION by Councilman Norton, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to approve the request to authorize the City of Valdosta Engineering Department to apply for a Georgia Smart Community Challenge Grant and purchase equipment from Temple for a total Project cost of \$145,882.24 for upgrades to the Traffic Management Center.

CITIZENS TO BE HEARD

Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that we received two E-mails for Citizens to be Heard. They will receive a letter addressing all of their issues and concerns. The first E-mail is from Lisa Baptiste which was received on June 8, 2020. Ms. Baptiste stated that she was a concerned citizen and inquired as to what measures are in place to prevent what happened to George Floyd from happening here in Valdosta. Mark Bark stated that he would expand a little more on that in his City Manager's Report. The second E-mail which was received on June 11, 2020 was from Ariel Jones. Ms. Jones stated that she was writing to see about these concerns being addressed during the Commissioners Meeting. What local policing policies are being reviewed for reform to protect Black people from being killed? Unnecessary Force like the choke hold/strangulation tactic, knee on neck, duty to act when Force becomes unnecessary, and no knock warrants should be looked at. Are these on your radar? Will the education budget be revised to include more pay for educators, considering they will be doing more work to accommodate for the increased workload due to the COVID pandemic? Raise the minimum wage. What is being done to reopen Kendrick Johnson's case? When will the Confederate monument on the old courthouse be taken down? Mark Barber stated that most of Ms. Jones' concerns would not be City responses as they are not ours to respond to.

CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that we have been doing drop off recycling and there has been some traffic congestion in the Customer Service parking lot due to the current setup for drive-thru traffic. They moved the roll offs to a lot that is owned by the City at North Lee Street and Savannah Avenue behind Miller Hardware. The drop off recycling is going very well, and we have a lot of citizens participating. There are some citizens who still want the curbside recycling to come back, but for now that is not a consideration especially since we have had an increase in COVID-19 cases. Councilman Carroll stated that a citizen had gotten hurt on the railing on the steps at the roll off at Five Points and asked if something could be done to prevent future accidents. Mark Barber stated that he would have Public Works look into that. They have also placed signs at all three locations so people will know that is where they should drop off their recyclables.

The 30-day public comment period for the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) ends on Friday, June 12, 2020. If anyone would like to respond there is still time. We have not had a lot of response from the community. Councilman Vickers stated that we have gone to technology, but we have a lot of citizens in our community who do not have access to technology. We need to use a combination of things to get the message out. Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that he agreed, and they did use it for the 30-day public comment period; however, citizens could have come by in person to make a comment. The COVID-19 virus has limited some of the

participation by citizens and that is why they decided to use technology. There were also paper copies that were available. Councilman Vickers stated that he was talking about when they notify the community about a certain issue. We need to use a variety of things to let them know about it. Mark Barber stated that you use to be able to depend on the newspaper, but their circulation has dwindled, and a lot of people do not subscribe to it. The newspaper delivery time is now different and sometimes it is difficult trying to notify everyone in one group because you do not know what they are looking at. Councilman Vickers suggested that we use the radio because we have approximately 10-12 radio stations. Mark Barber stated that we do use the radio to advertise Public Hearings.

The Makers Market will be held this Saturday, June 13, 2020 from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. and it has been moved to the City lot where the Food Truck event is held. The vendors will have to be spaced out for social distancing.

Council has received a copy of the proposed Budget this week and we can set up meetings if there are any questions. The Budget Hearing will be held on Wednesday, June 17, 2020 at 3:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers.

There was a Public Hearing on the Transit System and there was no public comment within the 14-day comment period which ended on Tuesday, June 9, 2020. The Georgia Department of Transportation has asked us not to distribute the RFQ for the Transit Service until July 1, 2020. That is the date that the Contract became effective, so we have agreed to do that.

Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that he wanted to discuss some of the events that have happened in our community and nationwide within the last few weeks. We are not perfect and there is always room for improvement. He has been working with Police Chief Leslie Manahan to provide a consistent message of what we are giving the public. It does not need to be a one-on-one conversation. They are working on a book that says, "Here is How You Become a Police Officer in the City of Valdosta, Georgia." This will be what someone would have to go through which will include psychological training. It will be published on-line, and hard copies will be distributed. He and Chief Manahan are trying to condense the book and they will expedite the process to get it distributed. That way everyone will be receiving the same message and there will be no rumors about it. They are also planning to continue the community walks which we have had approximately five to date. We have had great reviews about the walks. Something that came out of that is for the City to put together a group of citizens. We do not want the same group of citizens who are on other Committees on this new Committee. They do not want politicians on the Committee. They want the down-to-earth people that Chief Manahan meets while going to their door and shaking their hand. The Council members will make the selection of citizens from their District. We want this group to help us with distribution of materials. They may call it a Citizen Advocacy Group. We want to make it a working group. Councilwoman Miller-Cody inquired as to how many members would be on the Committee. Mark Barber stated that there would be one person from each Council District. They want to keep it small because you lose effectiveness of the Committee when it grows.

Councilman Vickers stated that when we look at what has happened in our country, he was thankful that it had not happened here in Valdosta. We ask the Police Department to be all things and they are trained to enforce the law. You have to remind them on how to de-escalate a situation because some of these incidents can really be bad. They have to know how to be patient and not respond negatively. We need to make sure that we are consistent in training the Police Officers on how to handle a situation. Mark Barber stated that he felt this would be the first step. We are an accredited CALEA organization and that is another whole level of training. Our training cannot stop even if you wanted it to. They have to do go to training because we would lose our accreditation. The majority of our Training Budget City-wide is the Police Department. Councilman Vickers stated that we use to know the Police Officers by their name and badge, and the Police Officers knew the community. We have had some great ambassadors in the Police Department from the Black community, and very rarely do you see a Black Police Officer now. That concerns him and one of the best things we can do is to have a good cross section of our community. He does not know what the pay is for a Police Officer, but the former Police Chief had worked on that along with the former City Manager Larry Hanson and they made it a priority. Over time, Police Officers retire or pass away and we need to make sure our Police Department is doing the very best they can. Mark Barber stated that was an ongoing process and last year they ramped up their recruiting and tried to make it a little more appealing. We have tried to recruit at all of the African-American colleges. We have never had a retention rate of

96% for people that stay at the Police Department and this past year we had that. We are continuing to make the Police Department as diverse as possible. Unfortunately, this year we had some people who did not move up in the ranks and they are no longer with the Police Department so that was disappointing.

Councilwoman Miller-Cody stated that she has had some citizens to ask her about the Lowndes County Jail which has over 400 inmates. Over half of those inmates are African-American. It is if our people are being targeted and arrested. Councilwoman Miller-Cody stated that she was not knocking Police Chief Manahan, but she inquired as to how they could negotiate on this and whether they were targeting one area over another. Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that was a natural assumption just based on the numbers; however, that is not the case with the Valdosta Police Department. Approximately two or three years ago, they took some of the smaller crimes that were committed and did not incarcerate those people. That has helped a lot and they are trying to keep people from having a record that haunts them for the rest of their life.

Councilman Carroll stated that last week, Councilman Howard came out in support of the Valdosta Police Department on social media. We are proud of what Police Chief Manahan is doing. Councilwoman Miller-Cody stated that she did not say that we were not proud of what Chief Manahan was doing because she is our superstar. She is the greatest Chief we could have, and she proved that Saturday at the Protest. Chief Manahan came in the rain and spoke to our people. We are not knocking Chief Manahan. Councilman Carroll stated that he knew Councilwoman Miller-Cody was not knocking Chief Manahan, but he felt like it was time for us to say that we are 100% behind Chief Manahan and the Valdosta Police Department and what they do. It is a difficult job. Councilwoman Miller-Cody stated that Chief Manahan interacted with every person at the Protest and she did not leave until the last person left. She went beyond her call of duty because she could have assigned other Officers to be there.

Councilwoman Tooley stated that we have a 96% retention rate of our Police Department, but she was looking at the ratio as well. She has observed a few incidents and there has always been White Police Officers who come to a situation in a Black area. Everything went fine, but if we have a 96% retention rate and every time, we have had an incident in the Black areas and the Police Officers who responded are White, then we have a 96% White Police Department. Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that was not true. That is not the ratio and he will get that information for Councilwoman Tooley. We are at a 96% retention rate regardless of race. We have a problem recruiting African-American males, especially in the Valdosta Police Department. We have worked on that for years and we will continue to work on it, but it is difficult when you have an emergency to ask for a certain gender or ethnic route Police Officer to respond. We have to send who is closest to the incident. We had a good recruiting class last year on the gender and race side. You will start seeing it, but it does not happen over night when people start going up the ladder of succession. Councilwoman Tooley stated that the Officers have to have certain standards and one thing she would like to see is the requirements that we have for them. When you do a survey, you want to get certain information so you go to a certain area and if you have certain criteria, then you will get certain people. Mark Barber stated that is the information that will be in the book he mentioned earlier.

Councilwoman Miller-Cody stated that she went through training in Forsyth and got top-of-the-line training, but they also did in-house training. That way they knew how to de-escalate a situation and how to get an Officer out of the way if he was too hyper. Councilwoman Miller-Cody inquired as to whether we were doing that locally. Mark Barber stated that we do not just train once, and we do not just go to Forsyth or Tifton and the training is done. The Police Officer training is continual. We do have an in-house Training Division, but it is best to combine the two. We are also getting the benefit of the CALEA accreditation. It is a constant training. Councilwoman Miller-Cody stated that there are some Officers who, once they get the badge and the adrenalin gets going, they forget they are Officers and they become human. That is why she was asking the question. Councilwoman Miller-Cody stated that every time she observes a Police Officer in her District, they are very respectful. Mark Barber stated that our message to the community is that we are not perfect, and we know that, but we are not going to stop working. We have had very peaceful protests in our community and that is how it should be. Had it been otherwise with looting and rioting, you might have seen a different story. That is a testament to our entire community and the Valdosta Police Department. Councilwoman Miller-Cody stated that Chief Manahan has gone door-to-door and the people have gotten to see Chief Manahan and gotten know and trust her.

Mayor Matheson welcomed all of the Department Heads back to the Council Meetings in person and stated that citizens will be welcome to attend the Council Meetings in July as well as the Budget Hearing next week.

Councilman Vickers inquired as to where we are at with opening City facilities to the public. When he went to Customer Service the other day to drop off his payment, there were 18 cars in line. It is time for us to open that back up. Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that we are waiting until June 15, 2020. You can go inside right now, but you can also put your payment in the drop box in the parking lot. We have had a surge of people paying on-line and the next step is the two-lane drive-thru. Councilman Vickers stated that we also need to open up Mathis Auditorium. Mark Barber stated that we had a phasing-in approach to opening up. You can go in the Customer Service building to disconnect an account, open an account, and purchase a business license. We will be opening the doors to the public and do some social distancing.

Councilwoman Miller-Cody inquired as to when the doors to City Hall would be open. Mark Barber stated that the City Hall doors are open right now. Councilwoman Miller-Cody stated that people cannot tell because of the papers on the doors and we need to take them down because she even thought the doors were still locked. She also inquired as to whether the citizens would be able to attend the Budget Hearing. Mark Barber stated that citizens would be able to attend the Budget Hearing. We have not had a Public Hearing for any zoning matters and the Budget Hearing is a Public Hearing and citizens will be able to attend. We will space out accordingly and if we have a large number of citizens attending, we might have to limit the number due to social distancing. Beginning in July, we will phase back in to have everything open. There will be no zoning cases for July or August, but we can go back to having Work Sessions.

Councilwoman Tooley stated that she had seen a situation in the Customer Service parking lot where a citizen was walking up the steps to the recycling roll off with two bags and inquired as to whether we could put some signs up. Mark Barber stated that is why they put the roll offs on City property so that we could handle an incident if something should happen. Councilwoman Tooley also inquired as to whether there could be an extension of the public comment period for the CDBG Grant. Mark Barber stated that there was not; however, if someone wanted to give us some input at a later date, then we can always talk to our HUD Representative. It would not go into the actual documents of Public Hearings though.

Councilwoman Miller-Cody stated that we cannot run our City Council Meetings like the County Commission Meetings. It is like when we are sitting up here everyone is in such a hurry. When it is time for people to knock on doors and go vote, they are not in a hurry. When they are sitting up here, you can see them looking at their watch; however, we have got to stop doing that. This is not the County and a two-minute session. This is the City.

Councilman Vickers stated that the Juneteenth Committee had asked to have an event on the City's lot across from City Hall and inquired as to whether the City Manager had responded to Dr. Beverly Richardson-Blake. Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that he forwarded the E-Mail from Dr. Blake to the Council as well as his response. He is concerned about the rise of COVID-19 cases in our community; however, we are going to let her hold the event there. She indicated that there will be approximately 200 people at the event and the City will mow the lot and place trash cans around the lot. They are planning to show an outdoor movie and they will socially distance themselves. The event will be held on Friday, June 19, 2020 from 6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.

Councilwoman Miller-Cody thanked Chief Manahan for participating in the March last weekend. Everyone is talking about what a tremendous person she is and what a great presentation she gave to the public. She thanked Chief Manahan for a job well done.

Councilman Howard stated Council needs to pay attention to the proposed Budget because there may have to be some cuts. Also, citizens are encouraged to complete the Census paperwork because it will help our community. The last day to complete the Census is October 30, 2020.

ADJOURNMENT

06/11/20 CONTINUED

Mayor Matheson entertained a motion for adjournment.

A MOTION by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Vickers, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to adjourn the June 11, 2020 Meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:34 p.m. to meet again in Regular Session on Thursday, June 25, 2020.

City Clerk, City of Valdosta

Mayor, City of Valdosta