

MINUTES
SPECIAL CALLED MEETING OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL
5:30 P.M., WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 26, 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 Andy Gibbs, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS

ORDINANCE NO. 2020-11, AN ORDINANCE TO ESTABLISH THE 2020 MILLAGE RATE FOR THE CITY OF VALDOSTA

Consideration of an Ordinance to establish the 2020 Millage Rate for the City of Valdosta.

Chuck Dinkins, Finance Director, stated that they are proposing a millage rate is 7.974 which is the rate computed to fund the FY 21 Budget based on the 2020 digest. The rollback rate leaves the Budget in the General Fund short approximately \$280,000. The existing rate is approximately a \$240,000 shortfall, and the recommended rate leaves us \$353 short. The computed impact across several property values on the difference between the recommended rate of 7.974 and the rollback rate of 7.781 is as follows: (1) for a \$50,000 Gross Valuation, the increase would cost \$.17 per month, (2) for a \$100,000 Gross Valuation, the increase would cost \$.50 per month, (3) for a \$150,000 Gross Valuation, the increase would cost \$.92 per month, and (4) for a \$200,000 Gross Valuation, the increase would cost \$1.17. Assuming that we take the recommended rate, the Valdosta City School System would receive 47%, Lowndes County would get 24.2%, the City of Valdosta would receive 22.5%, the Recreation Authority would receive 3.5%, and the Development Authority would receive \$2.8%.

Mayor Matheson stated that they have had three Public Hearing on the Millage Rate and entertained a motion.

A **MOTION** was made by Councilman Carroll to approve the Millage Rate of 7.974 mills for the City of Valdosta, 16.691 mills for the Valdosta School System, and 5.0 mills for the operations and maintenance of the Central Valdosta Development Authority. Councilman Gibbs seconded the motion. The motion was adopted (5-2) with Councilwoman Tooley and Councilwoman Miller-Cody voting in opposition to enact Ordinance No. 2020-11, the complete text of which will be found in Ordinance Book XIV.

ORDINANCE NO. 2020-12, AN ORDINANCE FOR A LOCAL OPTION FACE COVERING REQUIREMENT TO IMPOSE FACE MASK REQUIREMENTS IN PUBLIC AND ON GOVERNMENT PROPERTY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Consideration of an Ordinance for a Local Option Face Covering Requirement to impose face mask requirements in public and on government property during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that on August 15, 2020, Governor Brian Kemp issued Executive Order 08.15.20.01 which extends most of the already applicable rules that have been enacted by the Governor until August 31, 2020. More importantly, it adds provisions concerning local mask mandates and face covering mandates. There was great detail in the Executive Order regarding provisions to govern the ongoing Public Health State of Emergency. In the Order, there were two definitions added which were as follows: (1) Local Option Face Covering Requirement – A requirement imposed by municipal, county, or other government entity that individuals wear face masks or face coverings when not able to maintain social distancing from non-cohabitating persons. It will be permitted according to this Order. (2) Threshold Requirement – The prevalence in a county of confirmed cases of COVID-19 over the previous 14 days is equal to or greater than 100 cases per 100,000 according to the Georgia Department of Health. This means that you will have to look at the total population in Lowndes County which is 117,000. Then you will look at the cumulative 14-day total number of positive cases. If you look at the

date of July 23, 2020, we went back 14 days to July 10, 2020 and every day the new cases are a cumulated total. There were 693 new positive cases from July 10, 2020 to July 23, 2020. Then you look at the per capita basis and take the 693 new positive cases and divide that by the Lowndes County population of 117,000. That gives you a percent of how many positive cases there are in Lowndes County. At that point in time, that number was .59% which is slightly over half of Lowndes County residents who were positive with COVID-19 on July 23, 2020. Then you take .59% and multiply it by 100,000 which gives you 592 per capita. The threshold is 1% of the population of Lowndes County which is 117 cases and we have never been under our threshold yet. That is what allows us to have a discussion about a mandated Mask Ordinance because we have not dipped below the threshold. That also means that if the Ordinance is passed, we will have to check the threshold every day to determine whether or not we can enforce the Ordinance. The 14-day number from August 12, 2020 to August 25, 2020 was 306 additional positive cases. The per capita number is 262 and that is generated by taking 306 positive cases and dividing it by the County's population which would be .2%. The 306 positive cases must drop below 117 to be under our threshold.

Councilman Carroll stated, just to be clear, that we have people who have tested positive for COVID-19 who live outside of Lowndes County, but they come here for care. He inquired as to whether this number was strictly Lowndes County residents. Mark Barber stated that was correct. It is based on total County population, and he was getting the numbers from Lowndes County. Councilman Gibbs stated that according to the numbers today from the Georgia Department of Health, we were at 221 as of 2:50 p.m. and as far as the last two weeks, cases per 100,000 was 187 so we are actually still dropping dramatically. Mark Barber stated that we were dropping but we still do not meet the threshold with those numbers. Councilman Gibbs stated that he understood that but just wanted to make that note that we are getting closer. Councilman Howard stated that a lot of people have stopped getting tested because the results do not come back until 7 to 14 days later, so we want to make that point as well. Mark Barber stated that if Council decides to adopt some type of mandatory facial covering, then each day we will get the numbers as they drop down from the State and calculate the number for us. Mayor Matheson inquired as to whether the Governor left this door open only until August 31, 2020. Mark Barber stated that this part of the mandate goes through August 31, 2020 and he did not know whether there would be an extension or not. There are other communities that are discussing the adoption of an Ordinance. The Governor has issued specific provisions in the Order concerning local face covering requirements and local governments may impose the following: (1) Local governments which had met the threshold requirement are allowed to impose a Local Option Face Covering Requirement but are not required to do so. (2) If a local government does decide to impose a face covering requirement, it has to comply with the following: (a) The requirement cannot be applied to people who are eating or drinking, who have difficulty putting on or taking off a face covering without assistance, those who have a religious objection, and those who have a medical reason for not wearing a face cover. (b) Penalties (criminal or otherwise) cannot be imposed on any private business, establishment, corporation, non-profit corporation, or organization. (c) The maximum penalty cannot be larger than \$50 per offense and that would be after a second violation. (d) Enforcement can only be against individuals and people who operate businesses and the businesses themselves cannot be held liable for failures of their customers to comply. Mark Barber stated that a business would have the option of opting out of the Ordinance, but they have to make it plain to their customers before they enter the establishment whether or not they are going along with the City's mandate. If they do not go along, then they will have to place a sign on their business door letting citizens know. If a business does go along with the Ordinance and does not opt out and an Enforcement Office goes into the business and sees people in there not wearing a mask, then the individuals not wearing the mask would be cited and not the business owner. (e) The requirement cannot be enforced at any Polling Place. (f) The requirement cannot be enforced against individuals on residential property. (g) The requirement can be enforced against people on private property when the owner or occupant of the private party consents to enforcement. Such businesses can be required to post a reasonable public notice stating whether they consent to enforcement or does not consent to enforcement on its property. (3) Local governments imposing a face covering requirement must warn non-compliant individuals about the health risks of not wearing a face covering prior to issuing a citation and shall make good faith efforts to distribute free masks to those who cannot afford a mask. If an individual is found in violation and cannot afford a mask, the local government must provide them with a mask at the local government's expense. (4) Local governments have the authority to control the terms of entry onto property owned or leased by the local government regardless of whether the threshold requirement is met.

Mayor Matheson stated that this Special Called Meeting does not allow for public comment; however, he did not think that was right on an issue like this, so he entertained a motion to open up the floor for public comment.

A **MOTION** was made by Councilman Howard to open up this mandate issue to the public and give 15 minutes to those in opposition first, 15 minutes to those in support of it, and then go forward with a vote. Councilman Vickers seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously adopted (7-0). Councilman Vickers asked for a Point of Order and inquired as to whether that was 15 minutes per person. Mayor Matheson stated that it was 15 minutes cumulative for each side. Councilman Vickers stated that one person could get up there and talk for 15 minutes. Mayor Matheson stated that was correct.

Ken Register, 2515 Pebblewood Drive, stated that he is a Chiropractor in Valdosta and he thanked the Council for providing an opportunity to attend a meeting where it is opened up with a prayer so we could pray to our Lord and Savior. Mr. Register stated that he loves Valdosta and has been here for 23 years. He is originally from Adel and has been a part of Mink Chiropractic Center for those 23 years. He is speaking on behalf of business owners. The good news about the numbers is that they are dropping. Regarding the face covering, he wanted to address two things. The first thing was that health is his business and he loves health. He loves being a Chiropractor and he wants to help people as much as possible to improve their immune system. Secondly, he wanted to speak on how this can affect our business owners because they do not need the struggle as it is already hard enough. One thing that we know for sure that is a fact and scientifically based, it is not good to breathe in Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) so wearing a face mask all day, especially for our children attending school right now, is not a good thing. It is not a good thing because it lowers the immune system. The things that we know will improve the immune system is getting enough sleep at night, eating healthy foods such as fruits, vegetables, nuts, and lean meat, staying away from sugar, drinking plenty of water, taking vitamins and supplements, exercising, and getting adjusted. All those things boost the immune system. There is no way possible that we are ever going to get a vaccination to get rid of every single virus out there. If we did, then why are we still having the common cold and the flu. There are billions of strands. All we can do to fight this is to have a healthy immune system and wearing a mask decreases the immune system. If someone wants to wear a mask, he is not opposed to that because that should be their choice. Business owners have it hard enough. If you put a penalty on that person coming into that business, whether they require a mask or not, is not good. There are friends of his, colleagues, and family members who are not going to businesses that require a mask and they are shopping on-line. That is taking money from Valdosta and Lowndes County. It is taking money out of that business owner's pocket and that is not a good idea. If you want to wear a mask, wear a mask. If you do not want to wear a mask, then don't.

Gina Arnold, 3986 Highland Creek Road, stated that she is a lifelong resident of Lowndes County and is an educator in the Lowndes County School System. She wanted to speak on behalf of those people who are medically exempt. She has a medical exemption and she carries a note from her doctor. She personally feels discriminated against when she goes in pretty much every business in Valdosta because she is questioned each time, she goes somewhere about why she does not have a mask on. She wanted to urge Council to think about the hardship that this puts on people who are medically exempt, especially with the numbers going down. If this is enforced, then how will she prove a medical exemption other than handing them a note. She sent Councilman Norton an E-mail today that contained a link to an article from the Washington Post that was posted yesterday. The article stated that the Center for Disease Control (CDC) came out and said that cloth face coverings do not really change the rate of transmission between people. The CDC is not even sure. Her concern with that is about the children she works with children every day and they are in masks. Like Dr. Register said, they are breathing in their own CO₂ every day all day. The vast population in Lowndes County, and probably the United States of America, does not really understand the cleanliness issue. The masks are not being cleaned and children just put the masks on non-sterile surfaces. She is worried about that aspect of it. Children and adults are getting sick because they are wearing a mask that could have the COVID virus or even some other virus on it. On behalf of those medically exempt, Ms. Arnold asked Council to really think about their choice and the fact that our numbers are going down and whether they could wait and see. She wants the best for the children, and she wants to make sure that we do the right thing. Ms. Arnold also inquired about churches and whether they would have a choice to decide if there would be masks worn in their services because she would not want to limit her ability to go to church.

Alvin Payton, Jr., 3211 Tyndall Drive, stated that it was not his intention to speak in favor or against tonight but sometimes when the voices are not heard then the Council does not know. He is definitely in favor of Council supporting wearing a mask. He listened to the other comments and they can agree to disagree. He does think it is a protective device that we can use, and it is the mindset of people who also have to adapt to what is happening to us. The numbers to him speak very strong that masks do make a difference and he hoped that Council would support this issue.

Tyler Tucker, 1014 North Oak Street, Apt. A, stated that he wanted to address the issue with Council and as the youngest person in the room, he was in favor of the mask mandate. Mr. Tucker also stated that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. While the numbers are decreasing, in March they increased too much for Valdosta. The eyes are on the Mayor and City Council. He stands here tonight not only for himself but for 108 signatories that are on a Petition that was published on social media. This is Valdosta, a City Without Limits, but there is a limitation here and that is political interference. Valdosta is in southern Georgia and there are other communities looking at us. If we make the right decision here, then other communities will follow suit. Mr. Tucker encouraged Council to vote in favor of the mask mandate.

Kylie Mathis, 5658 Barber Circle, stated that she did not know numbers or statistics, so she was going to speak from her heart. She and her family had the Coronavirus and it was the worst thing that she has ever been through. She is in good shape, exercises, and walks two miles a day, but the virus took her off her feet. She was in the bed and could not get up. If we can prevent others from going what she went through, then she wants to do that. She is in support of the mask mandate because she loves this town just like the people who are for this. If this can help stop the spread of the virus, that would be great. The numbers are decreasing but that does not mean that they cannot increase in the future. This is very important, and she asked Council's consideration in passing the mandate.

Jennifer Tooley, 2318 Glynn Circle, stated that she has been wearing a mask for approximately three years due to health issues. She wears a mask not because she wants to, but she wears one in order to live. The mask has been very helpful, and we need to consider people with health issues when we go around them in order to protect them as well. She is in agreement with the mask mandate. She was diagnosed with an incurable disease and because she wears a mask, it is saving her life. Ms. Tooley stated that she was in agreement with wearing a mask.

Kaylon Day, 404 ½ East College Street, stated that she is a lifelong resident of Valdosta. Some people may feel that the mask is a political agenda, but it is more than that. The City of Valdosta has so much to lose. We have already lost over 100 residents and that is enough to say that we can wear a mask. It might be uncomfortable or not feel great, but if that means that her 80-year old grandparents can go to Winn Dixie and pick up some milk and bread then she does not have to worry about them. Everyone should be doing their part. She loves Valdosta and the people who are here. She attends Valdosta State University and she knows that the Remerton bars are full every night. She knows that people are not working in the best interest of others, but if she can help by wearing a mask regardless of whether it really does anything or not, then that is what she is going to do. She is only 24 years old and this is not rocket science. It is caring about other people and it should not be such a political agenda. If you care about Valdosta, then you care about the citizens. She personally knows someone who lost their life to COVID-19 a few weeks ago. This man, who was in his 50's, was recently married and he leaves behind five children. She could not help but think what if that was her father. She would wonder for the rest of her life if he went into Walmart and was next to someone who was not wearing a mask. Maybe wearing a mask is inconvenient, but these are simple acts of good faith. She could be inconvenienced to save your life.

George Boston Rhynes, 5004 Oak Drive, stated that he speaks as a member of the press and he has interviewed three people from New York. One woman lost her sister and he watched her go through pain and suffering. He also interviewed another lady who had a more severe strand of this virus than we know about. She highly recommended that people wear a mask and keep our immune systems strong in order to avoid being placed on a respirator. He spent 21 years in the military and when he was in Okinawa, Japan in 1974, the all thought it was very strange for the little kids to all wear a mask when they sneezed or had a cold; however, when it hit the military base, they thought maybe they had something in making them wear a mask. He listened to other people and he saw people not respect the distances or wearing a mask. He recorded these people on his You Tube Channel at "Bostongbr." The first person he interviewed had three million views in four days because she spoke from her heart and cried out. Even if you do not want to wear a mask, he would wear it for his children, his neighbor, and for his enemies.

Mayor Matheson entertained a motion from Council.

A **MOTION** was made by Councilman Howard to vote on the mask mandate that was presented by the City Manager. Councilman Vickers inquired as to whether the motion was for them to approve it. Councilman Howard inquired as to whether he could amend the motion. Mayor Matheson stated that he could amend the motion.

AN AMENDED MOTION was made by Councilman Howard to approve the discussion of a mask mandate that was presented by the City Manager. Mayor Matheson stated that we now have a motion before us for discussion by Council. Tim Tanner, City Attorney, stated that there has to be a Main Motion on the floor and then Council can discuss the Main Motion on the floor. The Main Motion that Council could possibly entertain, and he is not suggesting this, but it would be to approve the mask mandate as presented. Council Gibbs inquired as to whether they could then discuss it. Councilman Norton stated that was what Councilman Howard just said. Mayor Matheson stated that was what he just said. Tim Tanner stated that he thought Councilman Howard had said a motion to discuss it. Councilman Vickers inquired as to what the motion was. Mayor Matheson stated that the motion was to accept the mandate as presented by the Georgia Municipal Association as a model mandate. Councilman Vickers seconded the motion. Mayor Matheson asked if there was any discussion on the motion.

Councilman Gibbs stated that he wanted to thank all of the citizens who spoke in favor and those who spoke in opposition. They pretty much have all of this already in place. Our businesses, such as Home Depot, Lowe's, and Walmart, already mandate wearing a mask. He wears a mask wherever he goes. He wears it at Winn Dixie because it is mandated. Every store he goes into he wears a mask and whenever he is out in public, he wears it. He does it for the fact that he respects others. At the same time, though, he does not feel that we need to mandate it and make it where everybody does not have a choice. We already have local schools that have mandated it. The Lowndes County School System has mandated it, Valdosta State University has 11,000 students and they have mandated it, and the Valdosta City School System just mandated it last night. He believes that Valwood might have it mandated, and Scintilla Charter School has mandated it. His point is that if the whole discussion is that we are concerned about people not wearing masks, then he does not think that should be your concern. There are several stores here that mandate it. He went shopping last Thursday and there was a sign on the door that said you must wear a mask. Even if it does pass, the businesses still have the option to not mandate it. Our numbers are decreasing, and he is only concerned about the numbers in Lowndes County. If you do not believe that the numbers are going down, then you do not believe the Georgia Department of Health, the CDC, or South Georgia Medical Center. Also, if this does pass, to be able to enforce it and hand out \$50 tickets to everyone after the first warning is going to cause chaos. It will not be a good turnout for us and our Police Officers. They already handle 72,000 calls as it is. The last thing they need on their plate is to go around and mandate adults doing what they feel they should do for themselves. He has a 76-year old father whose left lung failed on him a few years ago. Fortunately, it is 100% back and whenever he is around his father he is concerned. At the same time, though, it is within our rights to make the decisions that we need to make and to follow the rules that are in place. We should not impose a mandate that requires everybody to wear a mask no matter what. He believes in our citizens and that they are doing everything they are supposed to be doing now. They have been doing it or our numbers would not be decreasing. He hopes that his fellow Council members understand the impact that this will have on our economy and our businesses. We are doing what we should be doing, and he wished that they could trust our citizens to continue to do what they are doing.

Councilwoman Miller-Cody stated that she has a 93-year old sister who is afraid to go out the door. She has worked all her life and she is afraid of this virus. Councilwoman Miller-Cody stated that she does not even go to her house because she wants to protect her sister at 93-years old. Her sister had 17 children, and she deserves for us to protect her by wearing a mask. She has served her time here and the last part of her life should be lived in a peaceful manner. She will not even go outside, and it is like she is confined in a jail. A woman who lived back in a time where there was a black/white water fountain. She lived through all that. She has now gotten a chance to see the first African American President. Now she is going through COVID-19. That is a disgrace to a person who has lived this long and is confined to their home like an inmate. That is unfair. They just buried a couple, a mother and a father, who was afraid to go out the door due to COVID-19. Their only daughter saw her mother and father die from COVID-19. How do you think that young lady feels? Do you think that she feels that the City or that we did not do what we should have done? Does she feel that nobody cares that she lost both of her parents to COVID-19?

Councilman Howard stated that what they do not want to do here today is to make this a political argument or a black or white argument. All we know is that COVID-19 is here, and we do not have a vaccine. All of the top scientists and medical experts have said that all we have is a mask, social distancing, and hygiene. In the City of Valdosta, we know that last night it was voted on and mandated that our children wear a mask. Lowndes County Schools System voted to mandate that our children wear a mask. What type of example are we going to set for our children if we ask them to do it and we as adults cannot do it? It is not because we do not want to do it, but it is because we have to do it in order to show our children that it is alright for them to put on a mask and sit in school because that is what the teacher says you should do. You should see me walk outside and set an example for you when I go into a grocery store. Most of the people who work at the grocery stores do not have any insurance, they are paid low wages, and if they do not go work then they do not get unemployment. We need to protect them so that we can go to the grocery store and buy our food and all the things that we need for our homes. They are doing that for us. Forget about whether or not it is comfortable or uncomfortable. We are just going to do this because we want to have the comforts of our home. We take the businesses out of it because if you say the City mandated it, then you do not have to tell them if you want a mask or not. No business has to abide by this Ordinance. If you do not want to abide by it then you can put your sign up saying a mask is not required; however, for the ones who do not want to have to deal with the politics of it, we can put the mask mandate in place and now we have something enforceable. Councilman Howard stated that he knows most businesses are doing it, but there is nothing enforceable behind it stating that a grown man such as himself can argue with a 19-year old or a 20-year old cashier and bring her to tears because of not wearing a mask. The time he spent arguing with the teenage he could have gone ahead and done his shopping and gotten out of the store. Let us think about someone besides ourselves for one time. Let's think about our neighbors, our grandparents, our sisters, our brothers, and someone who does not look like us.

Councilwoman Tooley stated, as an example, that Lowndes County may have admitted two patients with COVID-19 who had a Lowndes County address, but 20 people came in that were COVID positive and were from Nashville, Tifton, Camilla, or Madison, Florida. They were positive and they were there, but we will only announce the two that had a Lowndes County address. That says the numbers are low and they might have reported two, but it was actually a lot more. Another example would be if there was a gathering at Grassy Pond and they can have 50 people because it is a big open place. One person falls out, gets tested, and they are positive for the virus. That one person lives in Lowndes County but there are two people with a Lowndes County address. They are going to say we had two people at Grassy Pond who tested positive. There were 50 people and all 50 were out there. The numbers are low, but you actually had that many people in Lowndes County moving from place to place. We are not saying that it is false news, but we have to watch the numbers that we are getting. She can tell you from experience that so many people are coming in that were positive and they had higher numbers. There are people who do not all live in Valdosta but work at a lot of the businesses. They live in other counties. If they are positive with the virus, are we going to report them? They do not have a Lowndes County address so their numbers are not going to get reported. The businesses do not have the people working because the people are sick. Some of them have to shut down because they do not have enough help. Our numbers are not always true, and you have to look at that too. A lot of people have different immune systems, so it affects people differently. A case in point, she took care of a patient who had shingles and he was telling her about when he went into a restaurant. A pregnant lady was in there and she noticed something on him. He had to leave. Was that right for him to leave because he had shingles? He felt like he was discriminated against. Someone may say that they have to wear a mask or they will be discriminated against. People are discriminated against a lot of times for a lot of things but that happens. You either go back to that restaurant or you find somewhere else to go. The numbers are there, and it spreads. Councilwoman Tooley stated that people do not know who has the virus or who does not; however, she can tell you about wearing a mask. Wearing a mask may not stop the virus but it will help slow it down. Wearing a mask is a good thing while we are going through this phase of the virus. It will help slow down a lot of the sickness which will keep people from having to stay out of work and slow down the deaths of our elderly. Many of the elderly have to die by themselves and that is very painful to watch. We need to find ways to slow the virus down and if wearing a mask helps then we need to do it. We need to use common sense and if wearing a mask bothers you for a while then take it off, but you should put it back on. If there is a law in place, then people will respect it and use it more.

Councilman Norton stated that one thing we are missing here is that we are in America. He loves his neighbor and he does wear a mask when he goes out as many of us do. Sometimes it is because a store requires it

and sometimes it is because he considers the health of his fellow citizens or whoever happens to be shopping at that store. He does not think, though, that we need to delegate to the free citizens of Valdosta that they have to wear a mask. He can make that decision on his own as he was quoted in the newspaper. We have intelligent people in this City obviously because you see the trend that shows the numbers are going down. It is not just the masks. If you look at research, you will find some people who support the mask and some who do not support a mask because germs can still get through it. If you sneeze, cough, or talk loudly then you have more particles come through so you are going to infect people; however, there are some other things we can do. We can wash our hands and use sanitizers. There are many people who now have problems with their skin now because they use so much sanitizer. That is a great thing and we need to do it for everybody. If you are employee or employer and you are wiping down doorknobs or something of that nature, we need to do that for each other and not just for ourselves. We should also social distance ourselves because if we are talking to someone face-to-face and we have particles still coming through our mask, then we still need to do all three. A mandate in and of itself is not going to work all by itself. It is going to have to be all three things that will reduce our numbers and continue to do so. Above and beyond, he does not want to step on someone's freedom to make that decision, to make that intelligent choice, that caring choice, which he makes every time he goes to church because there are a lot of elderly people who sit in the area where he is. He trusts that it helps. His mother is 83 years old and he does not want her to die in a hospital by herself so when she is around, he socially distances himself from her. She is careful where she goes, and she wears a mask. When she came over to his house today, she had a mask on. They sat across the room from each other and talked. That is the responsible thing and we can do that. We do not have to be told that and he does not want to be a part of that group that does. Also, how we will enforce this? Is there a way that we will be able to keep up with the first citation (the warning), the second citation (fine), and then the third time? Are all of our Police Officers going to carry hand-held computers? Our Police Department is already so stretched in just trying to keep us safe. We have a great City with great caring people. He rode through town this past weekend and there were people having a great time and he saw lots and lots of masks. Some people did not have masks on and that was their choice and that is really a beautiful thing. It is a beautiful thing when we can make a decision about wearing a mask. He hopes that we can do the right thing and love one another, be respectful of one another, but yet allow us all to have the freedom to make the choice to wear a mask or not.

Councilman Carroll stated that everyone on Council has made some great points and comments and he certainly is proud that they have looked at this, made a decision, and given a sense of which direction they want to go. The one thing that he has not totally heard said is that we really do not have a mandate here. The reason why we do not have a mandate here is that businesses get to choose whether this Ordinance is enforced in their business. The operative word there is that businesses get to choose, and he inquired as to why the citizens cannot choose. If he goes to a place and there are people in there not wearing masks and he is concerned, then he can make the personal choice not to go in there. There are people who have come here tonight with the health concerns and he has witnessed a couple of incidents in a local grocery store where it was the same kind of thing. Somebody was trying to go in and they did not want to put on a mask for health reasons. It was embarrassing for them. They were eventually let in, but it was embarrassing. He also wondered if it would be in violation of HIPAA laws when asking those kinds of questions. His most important point, though, is enforcement like many have talked about. The second thing is that this is really not a mandate because businesses can choose to not require a mask be worn in their business and citizens should be able to choose for themselves.

Councilman Vickers stated that everyone who has spoken has made a point. Today was his third time in the three months of getting a COVID-19 test. He has some underlying health issues and he does not mind being in discomfort because he feels like he is doing something to help others. We are not going to get the economy back until we get this virus under control. Wearing a mask is inconvenient and people do not like it. He does not like it, but there are only four things that we can do. As long as he can remember, doctors and nurses have used a mask and he has heard that a mask does not do any good. He feels that the mask has played a part in this and he does not disrespect anything that anybody has said, but he wears his mask to help in not spreading the virus. He would like for you to wear your mask in order to keep the virus from him and to help him live. He is 78 years old and he knows that if we can keep one single person from dying or getting sick, then that is what we need to do. He is in support of wearing a mask. Councilman Vickers stated that if Council had no other comments then he would like to call for the question. Mayor Matheson stated that he would like to make a comment or two. Councilman Vickers rescinded his call for the question.

Mayor Matheson stated that every day we receive Department of Public Health (DPH) reports and we either meet in person or by phone with South Georgia Medical Center and even Moody Air Force Base. As we watched the numbers climb and get to an alarming situation where the capacity of beds was threatened, we launched the "Mask Up Valdosta" Campaign. Every single Council person offered their support to that and did the exact same thing. We were very proud that seven television stations, multiple media outlets, the Valdosta Daily Times, and others helped us push it. We asked four things in the "Mask Up Valdosta" Campaign: (1) to socially distance yourself, (2) mask up if you cannot maintain six feet, (3) wash your hands, and (4) sanitize highly touched surfaces. Everyone sitting here was proud to watch the trend and they told us that if we had 85% compliance then we could cut this thing in half. We have done that and then some. We are proud of the movement and downward motion and we think that is going to continue. Mayor Matheson stated that his only fear is that the local option face covering requirement is absolutely and completely, as they passed it down from the State, worthless. As you have heard them say, opt in or opt out. It does not matter. It is absolutely the most ineffective Order that he has seen put before him in his eight months on the job. If Council passes the Ordinance, he only fears the backlash. He is doing his part and he sees many others doing their part. He celebrates that and he celebrates his fellow citizens doing their part, but he just does not want backlash. No matter how the vote goes, please do not view this as a win or lose situation. Please just accept what the Council puts forth, accept the vote, and we will move forward together as we have been doing.

Mayor Matheson stated that he would now yield to anybody who wants to push the motion forward. Councilman Carroll called for the vote. The motion was adopted (4-3) with Councilman Carroll, Councilman Norton, and Councilman Gibbs voting in opposition to enact Ordinance No. 2020-12, the complete text of which will be found in Ordinance Book XIV.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Matheson entertained a motion for adjournment.

A MOTION by Councilman Vickers, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to adjourn August 26, 2020 Special Called Meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:46 p.m. to meet again in a Regular Called Meeting on Thursday, September 10, 2020.

City Clerk, City of Valdosta

Mayor, City of Valdosta