

**MINUTES**  
**REGULAR MEETING OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL**  
**5:30 P.M., THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 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, Sandra Tooley, Eric Howard, Andy Gibbs, and Vivian Miller-Cody. Councilman Ben Norton was absent. The invocation was given by Ricardo Velmas, The Biz, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag which was led by the First Christian Church Boy Scout Troop 410.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The minutes of the August 26, 2020 Special Called Meeting and the September 10, 2020 Regular Meeting were approved by unanimous consent (6-0) of the Council.

**BIDS, CONTRACTS, AGREEMENTS AND EXPENDITURES**

Consideration of bids for repairs to the sanitary sewer system in various locations throughout the City of Valdosta.

Darryl Muse, Utilities Director, stated that the sanitary sewer system has a history of stormwater inflow and infiltration (I & I) issues. To evaluate the sanitary sewer system, identify sources of I & I, and schedule repairs, the Utilities Department regularly inspects suspect areas using smoke testing and Closed-Circuit Television Camera (CCTV) inspection. During a recent inspection phase, 12 locations were identified that indicated numerous fractured lines throughout each collection system. Repair methods were limited to two options. The first option was to excavate the sewer lines to access the damaged sewer pipe and then make necessary repairs. Option one was not considered the best option due to numerous residences, traffic flow, and costs related to excavation and repair of roads, driveways, and stormwater systems. Option two was to utilize Cured-In-Place-Pipe (CIPP) lining technology to rehabilitate the failed pipe. This option will be the most cost-effective, quickest, and least intrusive method of repair. The Project to line a combined total of 3,795 linear feet of 8, 10, and 15-inch sewer pipe, which includes re-instating 50 service laterals, was advertised for bid on August 6, 2020. Six companies submitted proposals on September 10, 2020. The lowest responsive bidder was American Infrastructure Technologies Corporation (AITC) at \$157,100. Darryl Muse, Utilities Director, recommended that Council approve the bid submitted by AITC in the amount of \$157,100 plus an additional 20% contingency (\$31,420) to be used to handle any unforeseen circumstances for a total amount of \$188,520 for repairs to the sanitary sewer system in various locations throughout the City of Valdosta.

**A MOTION** by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Gibbs, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve the bid submitted by American Infrastructure Technologies Corporation (AITC) in the amount of \$157,100 plus an additional 20% contingency (\$31,420) to handle any unforeseen circumstances for a total amount of \$188,520 for repairs to the sanitary sewer system in various locations throughout the City of Valdosta.

Consideration of bids for replacement of equipment at the City of Valdosta Water Treatment Plant.

Darryl Muse, Utilities Director, stated that the Water Treatment Plant, wellfield, and water treatment facilities were originally constructed in 1991. The Water Treatment Plant was upgraded in 2007, which included the expansion of the treatment capacity from 15 million gallons per day (MGD) to 22.5 million gallons per day with improvements to the mechanical, civil, and ancillary components of the existing facility. The power from the 12.47 thousand-volt Georgia Power feeder is distributed to the wellfield and the Treatment Plant step-down transformers by means of a Westinghouse 15 thousand-volt load break switchgear line-up that is located in the main electrical room. This Project consisted of design services, project management, formal solicitation, and commissioning for the main switchgear replacement at the Water Treatment Plant. The switchgear was installed in 1991 and has reached the end of its useful life. Parts are now obsolete, and the electrical and mechanical components have become unreliable. CDM Engineering, the Water Treatment Plant Engineer of record, began review and conceptual design of the Project in FY 2018; however, funding and project prioritization postponed additional

discovery. As a result of previous investigation and discovery, the Project is approximately 20% conceptualized. Under this Project, the switchgear will be replaced with a new automatic service entrance rated at 15 thousand-volt metal-clad, draw-out circuit breaker switchgear that will include closed-transition connection for both generators as well as distribution circuits for the Plant and wellfield feeds. This Project was approved in the FY 21 Budget adopted by City Council. Daryl Muse, Utilities Director, recommended that Council authorize contract award to CDM Engineering in the amount of \$128,810 for replacement of equipment at the City of Valdosta Water Treatment Plant.

**A MOTION** by Councilman Gibbs, seconded by Councilman Vickers, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve the bid submitted by CDM Engineering in the amount of \$128,810 for replacement of equipment at the City of Valdosta Water Treatment Plant.

Consideration of bids for improvements to various Parks located in the City of Valdosta.

Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that Greer Park, Scott Park, Saunders Park, and Vallotton Park have experienced many citizens over the years. The parks have picnic facilities, softball fields, basketball courts, track and field areas, and many other things for family activities. Over the course of time, some of the facilities have either deteriorated or have become outdated. The City of Valdosta has instituted a plan to replace many of these facilities over the upcoming years. Greer Park has a wooden pavilion which has significantly weathered over the years and needs to be replaced. The proposed work includes a new and larger pavilion. Scott Park has three basketball courts which are constructed of concrete at the present time. In addition, the basketball goals are steel and obsolete. The track and field surface is weathered and the striping has faded. The proposed work replaces the court surface with asphalt, which is less harmful to players, replaces the basketball goals with contemporary goals, and re-stripes the track and field surface. Saunders Park has basketball goals that are steel and obsolete, the basketball court surface is weathered, and the striping has faded. The proposed work replaces the basketball goals with contemporary goals and the court surface will be re-striped. Vallotton Park is a currently a grass field. There are plans to construct a new basketball court at this location. The proposed work constructs a court surface with asphalt and basketball goals. Bids were received and opened publicly on September 11, 2020 at 10:00 a.m. Bidders were Artesian Contracting Company, Inc. and Standard Contractors, Inc. The low bid was submitted by Artesian Contracting Company, Inc. in the amount of \$371,568. Mark Barber, City Manager, recommended that Council approve the low bid submitted by Artesian Contracting Company, Inc. in the amount of \$371,568 plus a 10% contingency (\$37,156.80) to handle any unforeseen circumstances for a total of \$408,724.80 for improvements to various Parks located in the City of Valdosta.

**A MOTION** by Councilwoman Miller-Cody, seconded by Councilman Gibbs, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve the bid submitted by Artesian Contracting Company, Inc. in the amount of \$371,568 plus a 10% contingency (\$37,156.80) to handle any unforeseen circumstances for a total of \$408,724.80 for improvements to various Parks located in the City of Valdosta.

## LOCAL FUNDING AND REQUESTS

Consideration of a request to discuss a possible proposal to amend the official map of the Residential Parking Overlay District (RPOD) as contained in the City of Valdosta Land Development Regulations.

Matt Martin, Planning & Zoning Administrator, stated that Chapter 222 - Off Street Parking Standards of the Land Development Regulations (LDR) contains the main parking standards for all private parking in the City. It includes two separate Sections that govern parking in residential areas. Section 222-11 - Parking Vehicles in Residential Districts contains rules for parking in all residential areas of the City. Section 222-12 - Residential Parking Overlay District (RPOD) is a special set of supplementary requirements for parking in residential areas that are identified on an official map. This identified area covers most of the northwest neighborhoods of the City that are mainly west of Ashley Street and north of Baytree Road. The main purpose of adoption the RPOD approximately 12 years ago was to address an ongoing problem of "too many cars" parked in front yards of mainly college rental housing, which had a detrimental effect on the aesthetics of established neighborhoods. In general, these special requirements only pertain to regular single-family residential and townhouse-type development and does not apply to other forms of development (such as apartments, or office/commercial) where a standard parking lot is required because of the use. The main requirements of the RPOD are that all parking, regardless of location

on the property, must be on pavement or other surface that is approved by the City Engineer. In the front yard, this parking is further limited to no more than five cars (on pavement) and provided that no more than 25% of the front yard is paved. All of the provisions of the RPOD are enforced by the City Marshals who patrol this special area on a regular basis with particular attention being paid in August and September which corresponds to the start of the Valdosta State University (VSU) fall semester when there is an influx of new college students who might not be readily aware of these rules. When this District was first adopted, most of these residential parking problems were found to be in neighborhoods in proximity to the west side of VSU where there was a predominance of college student housing; however, other neighborhoods of the City might also be experiencing similar issues and this might be one tool that could help. The proposed expansion area of the RPOD includes the neighborhood areas east of North Ashley Street, south of East Park Avenue, and northward of Two Mile Branch. This particular area contains approximately 260 homes and is physically isolated from other neighborhoods of the City. It has been experiencing some problems of too many vehicles parked in front yard grassed areas, and it could be a convenient expansion of the existing RPOD area; however, some of the drawbacks include potential confusion on the part of the City Marshals and the citizenry for changing the geography of the RPOD which has existed for 12 straight years. This also includes approximately 250 plus residents of the area who would be unaware of these changes unless we did a separate notification process for them. Even then, some might have difficulty comprehending the new requirements that are being imposed upon them. The first step would be to have a discussion about the proposed map amendment to include this new area, along with some of its pros and cons. Then if City Council wants to pursue this further, they could make a motion and vote to "initiate the Public Hearing process" for the applicable amendments to the LDR. The proposed amendments would then be advertised with the October review cycle for Zoning Cases, go to the Greater Lowndes Planning Commission (GLPC) for recommendation at their meeting on October 26, 2020, and then come back to the City Council for a final decision at the Regular Council Meeting on November 5, 2020. Matt Martin stated that Council has three options: (1) Discuss the idea of a proposed map amendment, then make motion to simply "initiate the Public Hearing process" for an LDR amendment, which would be properly advertised for Public Hearings and brought back to City Council for a final decision at the November 5, 2020 meeting. (2) Discuss the idea of a proposed map amendment and determine that this idea will not be pursued any further at this time. (3) Discuss the idea of a proposed map amendment, and then continue the discussion at a future City Council meeting after further research is conducted regarding alternative ideas, and/or neighborhood property impacts. He stated that no decision has to be made tonight except whether Council wants to proceed further and discuss it again later, which is his recommendation, or go ahead and initiate the Public Hearing process. You may recall that last year with Councilman Gibbs, we had a rezoning request that was initiated by City Council for property on Pine Tree Road near VSU where the City became the applicant and it was processed as any other rezoning case as if it were a private property owner. It would then get reviewed, be advertised, and then brought back to Council a month later. In this case, if Council initiates an amendment process this evening, it goes in the October cycle and it would come back to Council for a Public Hearing at the first Council Meeting in November. This would be the earliest cycle that we could get it in to.

Councilman Vickers stated that he remembered the reason they did this years ago and he does not support this in his District. It would be a nightmare in his District. Councilman Vickers stated that with the low-income homeowners, you have to really think about what you are doing when you implement new Ordinances because you could have some unintended consequences from the action.

Councilman Howard stated that his only concern is that a lot of these properties are rentals and a lot of these landlords have taken a hit during the COVID-19 Pandemic because no one is paying rent. With the added construction costs, it will probably be something added onto them or the renters. With people not paying rent for six months, where will the landlord get his money? He understands what it is trying to do; however, he just wants to make sure that we understand that the landlord and business owners will pass the cost along to the renters if they have to go out and do the construction.

Councilman Gibbs inquired as to whether this would force someone to have to put in a driveway. Matt Martin, Planning & Zoning Administrator, stated that it does not. If you are able to keep within what your driveway should be then you are fine. Councilman Gibbs stated that all this is intended to do is to stop five or six vehicles from parking in the front yard or to keep it from looking like a dirt lot which it is not intended to be. Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that it is more than just parking. It is also parking on an improved surface. Councilman Gibbs stated that the improved surface could be some type of rock, pebble rock, or pine straw as long as it shows where people are parking. Matt Martin stated that the City Engineer could address the details a lot

better but the general rule with improved surfaces is that it has to be something that can be maintained. One of the things that has been looked at in the past with gravel is that it could be tracked out into a City street where it becomes a problem. There have been cases where that has been approved, but it just depended on the frequency of use and how it was designed. Sometimes trees play an important role as well because putting in pavement could destroy the roots and cause problems. It has been looked at case-by-case, but the default is standard pavement. It does not have to be a certain driveway design. You can have up to five vehicles, but they all have to be on a surface if you want that many. If you only have two vehicles, then you just provide enough room for two.

Councilwoman Tooley stated that she has looked at this situation, the area, and everything that is going on right now and she is trying to build the area up. On Lee Street where the nice sidewalks were installed, the residents went and purchased new mailboxes. It looks nice and it gave them an incentive to do things. Also, in those residential areas, a lot of the people already have their driveway. You can tell where they are driving up and they can park more than one car on the side. There are also a lot of cars that are just sitting in the yard with lots of plant growth around them and it makes the area look bad. If they can get rid of some of that then they can build the area up. Right now is a wonderful time to do it. The CARES Act is helping so many people with housing, food, and other things. There are a lot of grants available and if a resident would have to do some construction, they could look around at different ways to get help. They have a lot of construction businesses in the City and they could donate some things. The Homebuilders Association might be willing to donate something. Some people say it might be a hardship and it could be, but it is the way you look at it. This will help to build the neighborhood up. They are trying to build up the park on Vallotton and we need to build it up as much as we can while we have this going. The new sidewalk on Lee Street incited a lot of people to do better and they did. All it takes is an effort to start something. She does not see where this will be bad. We will make the residents aware of it and we can educate them on why we are doing this and how it will help them. We can build, improve, and make it better and get rid of a lot of crime.

Councilman Carroll stated that having been on Council when they first put this in Councilman Gibbs' District due to the problems they were having with VSU students living in single-family homes, and there was some uproar when they first starting enforcing this. He has not heard a thing in the last six to eight years from citizens complaining about it. This will be a learning process like a lot of things and if done properly and implemented properly, we can easily overcome any hardship situations or things of that nature. One of the constant issues in our City is the poor areas of our City. They are located in the Designated Revitalization Area and they are always an area that we are looking to find tools to improve and enhance them. If you go into a neighborhood that has a bunch of cars parked out front all the time that tear up the landscaping versus a neighborhood that has reasonably well maintained landscaping and designated parking that makes sense, you are going to have the quality of life and the value of those properties will go up. If we ever want to do this in other parts of the City, we need to start looking at tools to help make this happen. This is a potential tool and though it may not be the perfect tool or the only tool, it is a tool that can help to improve neighborhoods in our City.

Mayor Matheson stated that Council has been presented with three options and the recommended option is Option (3) which is to discuss the idea of a proposed map amendment and to continue that discussion at a future Council Meeting after further research is conducted regarding alternative ideas and/or the neighborhood property impacts plus education as well. Mayor Matheson entertained a motion.

**A MOTION** was made by Councilwoman Tooley to move forward with the amendment to the Land Development Regulations and have the Public Hearings. Councilman Carroll seconded the motion. The motion was tied (3-3) with Councilwoman Tooley, Councilman Carroll, and Councilman Gibbs voting in favor and Councilman Vickers, Councilman Howard, and Councilwoman Miller-Cody voting in opposition. Mayor Matheson broke the tie and voted in favor of the motion. The motion was adopted (4-3).

## **CITIZENS TO BE HEARD**

Doug Robinson, 921 Lasuane Drive, stated that he wanted to know why there are no basketball courts on the east side of town. There are a lot of children who live on the east side who have basketball goals beside the road which could be a problem because they could run out in front of cars. Mr. Robinson inquired as to how they could improve that area with basketball courts.

Sara Bell, 712 Holly Drive, stated that her 89-year old mother was laying in bed when the door to the house was kicked in by the Police. Her mother has lived here all her life and has lived on Holly Drive for 17 years. Someone called the Police and told them there was going to be a drug bust at 6:00 p.m. They kicked in the front door as well as her mother's bedroom door. Her mother could have had a heart attack. She has five children and over 36 grandchildren. Ms. Bell stated that someone needs to do something to the people who are calling the Police. They did not find drugs in the house. Something needs to be done to the people doing the calling.

Adolphe Gatewood, 711 Holly Drive, stated that there were allegations made against him on August 20, 2020 and he has gone through a lot of review with the Police Department and other agencies because of the accusations being made. He used to live next door to one particular neighbor and he got calls in the middle of the night. He had teenagers at that time and had put a trailer out back for all the children to come to his backyard to play instead of them being in the street. He got accused of having prostitutes which is pretty ridiculous. He worked with former Police Chief Frank Simons who had investigated him for 90 days because of certain accusations. Chief Simons came to him and said that they were unfounded and asked Mr. Gatewood's neighbor to back off of him. That particular neighbor has created so many inconveniences and started more rumors. He has worked with the City Marshals on all of the problems on his properties. His neighbor has an issue with people owning more than one property, but he does not own this property. His sister lives in one that she actually rents. He had a business in Florida that he closed down four years ago. He owned a 7,000 square foot store and his partner died. During the time of liquidation, the coronavirus hit. He was in the limousine business before, so he has always been pretty well known around the City. He lives with his 89-year mother and his son. He has raised his son and his daughter. His daughter got burned out and she lost her house. They moved into the house and his grandmother's house is the house where everybody comes and brings baggage and they leave their baggage when they are gone. He is the oldest so he takes care of most of that. There have been a lot of allegations made and he is not sure how to deal with it except to keep doing the right thing. Some of the allegations have really interfered with his life so much that it has taken a serious toll. If you go back to the City Council Meeting on August 20, 2020, some of the things that were said were plain ridiculous. He was born in the church and most people in the neighborhood knows his family. His mother has never smoked a cigarette or taken a drink of liquor. She has fed the whole community. Anybody can come to his house and get something to eat 24 hours a day which is something she started a long time ago. Sara Bell is his sister and they are pretty upset. His baby sister is a pediatrician here in Valdosta and they have all been successful. He graduated in 1981 from UCLA and one of his sisters writes computer programs. He has another brother who retired from the Air Force. The whole thing is that they are just trying to live.

Willie C. Simon, 303 Hampton Lane, stated that he was concerned about the water delivery system and especially the pipes that take the water to their homes. At one time, the source was inspected by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and they said that the heavy metals were at acceptable limits. His concern is about the pipes that bring the water to the houses. These pipes are rusty and corroded and they have had several pipes on Wisenbaker Lane, Hampton Lane, and Crawford Lane that have burst. They are emitting heavy metals. He came to speak to the City Manager concerning this matter and about the replacement of the pipes. He wanted to know what the schedule was and how the City was prioritizing the replacement of pipes. Was it based off of population? Was it based off of the age of the communities? What is the City using as a measuring stick to come and replace those pipes? A lot of the water is not drinkable due to the pipes. He is concerned about the human beings who are in these places. He is not worried about the City's Parks. He is worried about the people who are alive. He is sure that the City has a map showing sewer and water services, when the dates those pipes were replaced, and how long they have been there. Galvanized pipes have a problem with breaking down after 15 years. He asked the City for a schedule that shows when they are going to replace those pipes and what they are doing to determine which ones are replaced first.

Bruce Francis, 909 Williamsburg Drive, stated that he is the President of the Concerned Clergy of Valdosta and wanted to bring before the Council their collective concern in regard to the manner in which Mr. Antonio Smith was detained and brutally handled by Officer Billy Wheeler several months ago. The majority of the audience has probably seen the video by now as it has been broadcast on local and national news with the consensus from the national media, as well as many citizens, being that the manner in which the detainment by the original detaining Officers who, based on the video, were not in any manner being threatened by Mr. Smith. Also, the subsequent actions by Officer Wheeler, who arrived on the scene later, were unwarranted, potentially dangerous, and as the video shows, harmful to the detainee. Their concerns, which they want to bring before the City Council are: (1) Why was the public not made aware of the situation when it first happened? It did not

become public knowledge until a lawsuit was filed by Attorney Haugabrook. (2) How can the Valdosta Police Department justify promoting Officer Wheeler from Sergeant to Lieutenant while an investigation is ongoing by the Department of Justice? (3) While he self-reported the incident and while the Police Department views his actions as well within Departmental Policy, why was Officer Wheeler not reprimanded? Mr. Francis stated that he stands before the Council to state that they have posted on their Facebook page an article from a Savannah, Georgia newspaper where Mayor Van Johnson, the City Manager, and the Chief of Police took swift action to reprimand and to even dismiss Officers who were involved in a similar incident of detaining and doing bodily harm to the wrong individual. There comes a time where we must place priority on what is right morally and socially over and against outdated policy and procedure. They implore you, the members of the Valdosta City Council who are serving as the governing body of the City, along with the Mayor who represents the citizens of this City, not just for certain segments, but to serve everyone, to move to action and demand from the Mayor and the Chief of Police that until the decision is rendered by the Department of Justice that Officer Wheeler be placed on administrative leave. If that is not possible, he should be demoted from Lieutenant to his previous position and salary of Sergeant. With everything that we are seeing going on in this nation, it is imperative that justice takes off its blinders when it comes to the treatment of African American men and women and other minorities. We implore you to encourage our City governmental leadership to do the right thing and begin the healing and improve the relationship between Law Enforcement and the community in which they serve.

Gracie Bacon, 708 Holly Drive, stated that she has complained about the situation on Holly Drive and met with the City Manager Mark Barber. She has also met with Councilwoman Miller-Cody. She does not necessarily want anyone to move off of Holly Drive, but she just does not like their behavior. She received her tax statement the other day and her property value has dropped \$10,000. That really hurt her because even though you pay more money for the more land you have, she would rather pay the money than lose the value. She has lost the value. She was used to paying \$1,000 in taxes and now it has dropped to \$700. She wished that when people come into their neighborhood that they would look at her house, say that it is a nice house, and that they would like to buy a house in that neighborhood. That is not the way it works. Real estate says that everything around you counts and if one house messes up then every house on that street has messed up. She is not a real estate manager and that is just common sense to her that if you do not keep up your property, then you are going to lose value. She heard Mr. Howard say the other day that he can take these people into neighborhoods and say, "why don't you all build your businesses here?" They do not build their businesses because they are looking at the neighborhood. That is just common sense because if she owned a business, she would not build it on Holly Drive. If you look around and see the property value dropping, you would think about it too. That is just everyday business and anyone who owns a business understands that. You know that everyone looks at what is around there. Ms. Bacon stated that when she spoke with Mr. Barber, she was not aware that he was the City Manager, but when he came to her neighborhood, he got things started. He was very respectful, and she appreciated his help. This has been going on for many, many years. All she wants to do is to clean up the neighborhood and get it back to what it was 30 years ago when it was so beautiful. That is why she bought her house because it was so beautiful. It is not beautiful anymore. She owns her home and when you pay for something you want to keep it up. She does not want to hurt anybody.

Elizabeth Hawkins, 1601 Norman Drive, stated that her sister is Gracie Bacon and she knows what she is going through because she is a witness. She has spent a lot of time at her sister's house, not just as a visitor, but as a person who lives there. She has seen what is going on in the neighborhood and her sister is the only one on this street who speaks up and speaks to all the necessary people to let them know what is going on. Things have gotten a little better in the last few days but that has been a deterrent. What has proceeded in front of her house has now gone around the block in another direction. She prays that things will change because she has seen some strange things going on. Unfortunately, she saw a Police Officer parked in front of the house across the street from her sister's house and he was standing up and leaning on the car having a good time with the neighbors. There were approximately 10-15 cars parked right directly at this person's house. There was a lot of activity going on and that is not the first time. That is why she knows somebody is giving certain people certain privilege to operate there illegally. She does not know what is going on there and how long it has been going on, but she has seen some strange things. She lives at Spring Chase Apartments and has been in Georgia now for six years. In those six years, she has been at her sister's house on and off and she knows what is going on. She feels for some of the people who live on the street because where she comes from, when you see strange things going on, disaster is on its way.

John Robinson, 3227 San Juline Circle, Lake Park, stated that everything you have just heard the lady say is the result of economic oppression. We have a problem here in the City because we do not have any money circulating in our community and neighborhoods. We are working on a project right now that is an international model and he is speaking to a Federal body. He is trying to get some funds that can circulate on the southside for a project that he is working on. He needs to get support from the City Council Members in this endeavor and get money that we can utilize here in the City. He represents the black businesses and small contractors in Lowndes County, and they are trying to put something together right now. He is dealing with the U. S. Federal Reserve and they have scheduled a meeting to discuss getting funds in the area to support some of the projects they are working on. The community reinvestment act is not working for everyone. It works for privileged people but not for people with low incomes. He does not have time to get into the logistics of it all, but the bottom line is that we are suffering from economic oppression from being excluded for years and years. It is time for it to end and the only way it is going to end is to get some money circulating in the neighborhoods. For the people who were talking about the driveways, it is going to be a burden to the people because they do not have any money. You might as well face the facts because you have seen the reality. We have got to try to put something together that works for everybody and not just for the elected few. Mr. Robinson asked Council's consideration in helping to support his efforts to get some money in the neighborhoods.

George Boston Rhynes, 5004 Oak Drive, stated that he travels around the State of Georgia and though he may tell the truth about the City of Valdosta, he still says that the City Council here is among the top three cities when it comes to City Council Meetings, respecting each other on the Council, and respecting the people who address the Council. When he comes before Council, he is mostly coming on behalf of other people just like he has done in 40 or 50 other cities across the State of Georgia. When he came, he did not know anything about Holly Street and today all he is going to say about the problems there is that he had the opportunity last week to talk to both sides. He has to admit that it enlightened him on some issues. Let us do what is written in the law. If vehicles are without a registration or there is no tag or there are too many vehicles in the yard based upon what the City Marshal has cited others for, then someone needs to take notice of that. Often in the State of Georgia, people continue to think they have to reinvent the wheel. You do not have to reinvent the wheel but just follow what you have written. If you do not have an Ordinance to cover it then create one because most cities have the same problems and when they find the problems, they resolve them. There is something in every city. He has witnessed this and when someone gets an Attorney and the Attorney is willing to send out a Private Investigator to investigate, it will cost the taxpayers some money. He is under a seven-year criminal trespass from Lowndes County High School Superintendent and he violated no law following the death of Kendrick Johnson. He had three lawyers who wanted him to sue them, but he does not run around here suing people. For him to sue someone in the City or the County, it is like he is suing his own relatives and the people that he loves. Mr. Rhynes asked Council to take action before someone gets hurt or the taxpayers have to pay out extra money because someone failed in their responsibility.

## **CITY MANAGER'S REPORT**

Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that the Bay Meadows Sidewalk Project is complete, and it looks fantastic. We hope that it will to spark a fire in that neighborhood and they will continue to get better.

Georgia Cities Week will be held October 4-10, 2020 this year. It is usually held in April of every year, but because of the COVID-19 Pandemic they pushed it to October. The theme this year is "Building the 20-20 Vision."

The Valdosta Police Department and the Fire Department, along with the Sustainability Coordinator, had a successful neighborhood walk in District 6 yesterday. They visited with residents, knocked on doors, and gave out information. They took a break due to the Pandemic, but they will start back on a regular schedule and next month and will be in District 4.

Fire Prevention Week will be held October 4-10, 2020 and the Fire Department has several virtual events planned for that.

We have created a Citizens to be Heard Action Summary and this will be given to the Mayor and Council at each Council Meeting so you can see what has been done for the citizens who speak at the Council Meetings.

Mark Barber, City Manager, thanked Police Chief Leslie Manahan and the Valdosta Police Department for handling the three large events that took place in our City this past weekend.

## COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilman Howard thanked everyone who was in attendance at the Council Meeting tonight. It shows the beauty of our community and that there are a lot of people in this City who care about what is going on in our community. It also lets us know one other thing and that is that he would rather live in a society with Police than one without. Right now is an easy time to beat up on our Police Officers and our Elected Officials. They signed up for it and they understand it, but he wanted to take the opportunity to think about the perception that we put out from our City. People are watching us. Businesses that are interested in coming to our area they look at the graduation rate, our educated workforce, and our infrastructure. Since he has been on Council the last three years, they have put at least \$500,000 million to \$600,000 million in infrastructure. Everything comes down to money and there is only so much money that we have to go around. He does not want citizens to think that they are neglecting anyone because everyone and everything is important. He wants citizens to realize that they have an approachable Council, Mayor, and City Manager. If you have any issues, he would like for citizens to reach out to them because that is why they have public phone numbers. It is easy to complain to your neighbor, but your neighbor probably cannot get things done. If you talk to the people who are in the elected positions, they will work hard to help you get it done. We are fortunate in Valdosta because we do not have problems like a lot of the major cities have. We need to be careful about what we say and what we project about our community because it could turn out to be a lot worse than what it is. We do have issues, but we like to solve them in-house. We do not need a lot of outside people coming to Valdosta to try and tell us how to fix our problems when they have more problems than we do. Let's continue to work together as a community and to make our City what we would like for it to be.

Councilwoman Tooley thanked the Council Members who supported her motion to rehabilitate some of the areas in the City that really need it. One reason she is looking at this is to start a domino effect. When she heard some citizens speak tonight about there being no money in some areas of the City, she thought about an initiative to start making some improvements in these areas. She is saying that from prior experience. When she worked with getting Troup Street fixed up, that was an area that really needed rehabilitation. They got some of the infrastructure fixed. Once they started with one area that has had no rehabilitation in years, it was a domino effect. Then the citizens started taking care of the area even more. You have to start somewhere. She also heard one citizen ask about basketball courts. No one is going to put in basketball courts when you do not see anything worthwhile or anything to do. You have to start building it up yourself and that is why she wanted to thank the Council Members who supported this. You cannot leave everything the same way if you want to build something and make it better. At least she is making an effort rather than doing nothing and letting things stay the same. The City will get better. Councilwoman Tooley thanked Council again for their support.

Councilman Gibbs stated that the Transformation Unity Movement will have an event on Saturday, September 26, 2020 from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. at the historic Lowndes County Courthouse. We would like to see everyone come and worship together and praise our Lord and Savior.

Councilwoman Miller-Cody stated that she was honored to see so many Clergy at the Council Meeting and she asked them to stand so they could be recognized for making a difference in our City.

## ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Matheson entertained a motion for adjournment.

**A MOTION** by Councilman Vickers, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to adjourn the September 24, 2020 Regular Meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:46 p.m. to meet again on Thursday, October 8, 2020.