

MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL
5:30 P.M., THURSDAY, MARCH 11, 2021
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, Sandra Tooley, Ben Norton, Tim Carroll, Andy Gibbs, Eric Howard, 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 February 25, 2021 Regular Meeting were approved by unanimous consent (7-0) of the Council.

BIDS, CONTRACTS, AGREEMENTS, AND EXPENDITURES

Consideration of bids for ten emergency standby generators for the Utilities Department.

Darryl Muse, Utilities Director, stated that to ensure continued sewage lift station operations during power outages and to satisfy Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) requirements, the Utilities Department developed a scope of work to purchase ten emergency standby generators. These generators are needed to prevent lift station failures as a result of power outages from storms or other unexpected causes. Several years ago, the City initiated a program to purchase standby generators or emergency standby diesel pumps for all of its existing sewage lift stations. These are ten of the final thirteen generators needed to complete the program. Once they are installed, 34 of our 37 City lift stations will have some form of dedicated emergency backup capability from generators and/or backup diesel pumps. Additionally, this is Condition 18 of the EPD Consent Order which requires the installation of fixed generators and/or backup pumps at all lift stations by September, 2023. Moving forward, all new City lift stations will include a dedicated emergency backup capability as part of their construction. This item was included in the FY 21 Budget approved and funded by Council at \$285,000. If approved, the recommended purchase would realize a cost savings of approximately \$42,000. In January, 2021 the City advertised for bids for the purchase and installation of ten emergency standby generators with automatic transfer switches for ten of its lift stations. The Utilities Department’s Central Maintenance Division would provide the final electrical work needed for connection. Bidders were offered the option to submit an alternate bid to provide turnkey installation which included the electrical work. A pre-bid conference was held on February 2, 2021. Bids were received from eight bidders and opened on February 16, 2021. One bidder was disqualified for not supplying the required documentation. The lowest responsive and eligible bidder for the base bid was Powerhouse Diesel Generators, Inc. in the amount of \$243,167.78. The lowest bidder for the alternate bid was Anderson Power in the amount of \$324,293.00. Staff determined that the alternate bid for turnkey installation was not cost effective and recommends approval of the base bid submitted by Powerhouse Diesel Generators, Inc. in the amount of \$243,167.78 along with a 10% contingency (\$24,316.78) to handle any unforeseen circumstances for a total cost of \$267,484.56. Darryl Muse, Utilities Director, recommended that Council approve the base bid submitted by Powerhouse Diesel Generators, Inc. in the amount of \$243,167.78 along with a 10% contingency (\$24,316.78) to handle any unforeseen circumstances for a total cost of \$267,484.56 for the purchase of ten emergency standby generators for the Utilities Department.

A MOTION by Councilwoman Tooley, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to approve the base bid submitted by Powerhouse Diesel Generators, Inc. in the amount of \$243,167.78 plus a 10% contingency (\$24,316.78) to handle any unforeseen circumstances for a total cost of \$267,484.56 for the purchase of ten emergency standby generators for the Utilities Department.

Consideration of a quote for the inspection, cleaning, and replacement of the media packing in three degasifiers at the City of Valdosta Water Treatment Plant.

Darryl Muse, Utilities Director, stated that the primary components for hydrogen sulfide (H₂S) removal from the City's drinking water are the packed-tower stripping aerators. Also known as degasifiers, these cylindrical towers contain packed media within that is key to the H₂S removal process. Installed in 2003, the current packed media for degasifiers 1, 2, and 3 has reached its end-life. Over time, the media breaks down, deteriorates, and loses its treatment efficiency. The result is higher H₂S levels, increased chlorine demand, and decreased water quality. The media must be replaced to ensure proper H₂S removal, improve disinfection, and ensure a safe high-quality drinking water. The existing degasifier system was designed and installed by Indusco Environmental Services (IES). They are the sole representative for the purchase of new products, OEM replacement parts, repairs, and maintenance for these systems. In January, 2021, Staff requested a quote from IES for the inspection, cleaning, and replacement of the packing in three of its degasifiers at the Water Treatment Plant. The cost to inspect, clean, and replace the media is \$104,200. The cost also includes delivery, removal and disposal of existing media, and external pressure washing of the three degasifiers. Funding for this Project was included in the Water Treatment Plant's Maintenance and Repair Budget. Darryl Muse, Utilities Director, recommended that Council approve the quote from IES in the amount of \$104,200 to repack the three degasifiers at the Water Treatment Plant.

A MOTION by Councilman Vickers, seconded by Councilwoman Miller-Cody, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to approve the quote from IES in the amount of \$104,200 for the inspection, cleaning, and replacement of the media packing in three degasifiers at the City of Valdosta Water Treatment Plant.

Consideration of bids for the extension of the Sanitary Sewer System on Inner Perimeter Road at North Forrest Street.

Darryl Muse, Utilities Director, stated that there is currently a gap in public sewer services for multiple properties near the intersection of Inner Perimeter Road and North Forrest Street. Owners of several of these properties, some currently using private septic systems, have expressed interest in connecting to City sewer services should they become available. A number of these properties have septic systems on the verge of failure. Other vacant properties in the area have no sewer system. In an effort to close the gap in the sewer system and provide services to those properties, the City will need to install new manholes and sewer main along the north side of Inner Perimeter at North Forrest Street and connect to the existing system on the south side of Inner Perimeter on North Forrest Street. The new sewer extension would not only serve current developed properties along Inner Perimeter Road, it would also ensure that the City is well prepared for future development. This is part of the City's Annual Sewer System Expansion funded at \$500,000 for FY 21 Budget. The affected properties are in the Lowndes County service area, but there is no County sewer service available. The County has agreed to allow the City to construct the sewer system in order to serve those properties. The project to install approximately 2,115 linear feet of 12-inch sewer main, 1,054 linear feet of 8-inch sewer main, and associated sanitary sewer manholes was advertised for bids on January 29, 2021. A pre-bid conference was held on February 16, 2021 to review the expectations and requirements of this work and to answer pertinent questions from the prospective bidders. Bids were received on March 2, 2021 from three bidders, RPI Underground, Inc., Standard Contractors, Inc., and James Warren & Associates, Inc. The low bid was submitted by James Warren & Associates in the amount of \$400,256.00. A 20% contingency (\$80,051.20) is requested on this Project due to potential unknown issues for a total amount of \$480,307.20. Darryl Muse, Utilities Director, recommended that Council approve the low bid submitted by James Warren & Associates, Inc. in the amount of \$400,256.00 plus a 20% contingency (\$80,051.20) to handle any unforeseen circumstances for a total amount of \$480,307.20.

A MOTION by Councilman Gibbs, seconded by Councilman Norton, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to approve the low bid submitted by James Warren & Associates, Inc. in the amount of \$400,256.00 plus a 20% contingency (\$80,051.20) to handle any unforeseen circumstances for a total amount of \$480,307.20 for the extension of the Sanitary Sewer System on Inner Perimeter Road at North Forrest Street.

Consideration of bids for a new fire safety training trailer for the Valdosta Fire Department (Bid No. 37-20-21).

Fire Chief Brian Boutwell stated that the Fire Prevention Division of the Valdosta Fire Department currently has a fire safety training trailer. The trailer is used to educate the general public, especially school aged children (pre-K to 12th grade) in multiple fire safety techniques such as smoke alarms, cooking safety, escape

planning, how to escape their homes if it were on fire, and other safety features. The current trailer is over 20 years old and is past its useful life due to age and usage issues with electrical, air conditioning, and other safety concerns. The new trailer will be towed behind a current Fire Department vehicle to schools and other community events to provide potential lifesaving training to the general public. A few of the modules covered are bedroom, kitchen, and fire escape. The price also includes a handicap ramp for accessibility and ADA compliant internal dimensions. The actual training is an interactive virtual educational environment including touch screen pads, special effect lighting, sounds, and smoke that simulate fire safety issues. The Fire Department currently has \$130,000 approved in the Motor Pool for this purchase. The Fire Department researched different sources for providing a new fire safety trailer and reached out on national networking platforms for peer input. Mobile Concepts provided all specifications that the Fire Department was seeking for the ideal learning environment. The price offered by Mobile Concepts Specialty Vehicles by utilizing a General Services Administration (GSA) Federal Contract is \$102,059 with a one-year warranty. By using the GSA Contract, the City will save approximately \$4,400 from the original pricing. The Purchasing Ordinance allows for utilizing State, Federal, and other consortium Contracts that benefit the City in pricing. Fire Chief Brian Boutwell recommended that Council approve the purchase price from Mobile Concepts Specialty Vehicles in the amount of \$102,059 and allow the Fire Department to proceed with the purchase of a new fire safety training trailer.

A MOTION by Councilman Norton, seconded by Councilwoman Miller-Cody, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to approve the purchase price from Mobile Concepts Specialty Vehicles in the amount of \$102,059 and allow the Fire Department to proceed with the purchase of a new fire safety training trailer.

Consideration of a request to approve a Public Transit Contract between River North Transit, LLC (Via) and the City of Valdosta.

Richard Hardy, Deputy City Manager of Operations, stated that the City of Valdosta utilized the Request for Qualification (RFQ) Competitive Sealed Proposal method to procure transit services for the City of Valdosta. The RFQ was sent out July 10, 2020. The Transit Selection Committee chose River North Transit, LLC, a subsidiary of Via Transportation (New York, NY). On October 8, 2020, City Council approved the City of Valdosta to move forward contractually with Via. Since October 8, 2020, as required by the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) when using Federal funds, the City of Valdosta and Via are required to receive a Notice to Proceed from their office prior to entering into a Contract. During this time, the attached Contract was created with input from the Transit Selection Committee, Via, GDOT, the Office of the Southern Georgia Regional Commission, Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and the City's Attorney. All GDOT requirements have been met; therefore, GDOT has issued the City of Valdosta a Notice to Proceed. The Contract contains the following compliance items required by GDOT in Exhibit C: (1) Title VI adopted plan - Board Adopted, (2) ADA Rider's Guide, (3) Drug and Alcohol Misuse and Abuse Policy, (4) FTA Compliant Procurement Policy, and (5) Written Financial Policy. Richard Hardy, Deputy City Manager of Operations, recommended that Council approve the Contract with Via for public transit services.

A MOTION by Councilwoman Miller-Cody, seconded by Councilwoman Tooley, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to approve a Public Transit Contract between River North Transit, LLC (Via) and the City of Valdosta.

Consideration of an Agreement with Tax Specialists of Georgia for review of sales taxes paid on City of Valdosta Capital Projects.

Chuck Dinkins, Finance Director, stated that the Tax Specialists of Georgia is a consulting firm specializing in Georgia Sales and Use Tax. There is a significant opportunity being missed by cities, counties, and joint governments and water/sewer authorities in determining what items are subject to tax exemption and it is their mission to correct that inequity. The City has engaged this firm before and was able to recover approximately \$632,974.96 net of \$158,243.77 in fees that had been improperly paid on capital projects. The services of Tax Specialists of Georgia have proven to be invaluable to those municipalities, including the City of Valdosta, that have had expansions or building activities at Wastewater, Water Treatment, and Landfill facilities. The two limiting factors are: (1) there must be a general contractor involved in furnishing and installing the equipment, and (2) these purchases cannot have been dated beyond a three-year window prior to the filing of the claim for a refund.

Some municipalities have felt that requesting a refund might place a contractor in harm's way, but the contractor is generally abiding by the law when paying taxes on purchases. The Georgia Department of Revenue (GDOR) would only be interested in reviewing the refundable claims submitted by Tax Specialists of Georgia. The City of Valdosta will be impacted very little by the refund process and the City's only involvement will be to provide all the contractor information to Tax Specialists of Georgia. Tax Specialists of Georgia will travel to all the contractors which may be scattered throughout the State and copy everything relevant to the refund. Their travel expenses will be at their expense. There will be no additional expenses to the City of Valdosta. The firm's fee will be 25% of all recoveries. A Limited Power of Attorney will be required to allow the Department of Revenue to deal directly with Tax Specialists of Georgia and the required document, along with the Agreement, is included in the packet. The Power of Attorney is conveyed via a standardized GDOR form and authorizes action only on sales and use tax for the years 2018 to 2022. Chuck Dinkins, Finance Director recommended that Council approve the Agreement with Tax Specialists of Georgia.

A MOTION by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Norton, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to approve the Agreement with Tax Specialists of Georgia for review of sales taxes paid on City of Valdosta Capital Projects.

BOARDS, COMMISSIONS, AUTHORITIES, AND ADVISORY COMMITTEES

Consideration of appointments to the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Citizens Advisory Committee.

Mayor Matheson stated that the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Citizens Advisory Committee has two members, Councilwoman Vivian Miller-Cody and David Adams whose terms expired on February 24, 2021. Mr. Adams did not express an interest in being reappointed, and Councilwoman Miller-Cody is interested in serving again. These appointments were advertised according to the Boards, Commissions, Authorities, and Advisory Committees Policy that was adopted by Mayor and Council. The applicants are as follows: (1) Vivian Miller-Cody - Valdosta City Councilwoman (District 1), and (2) Sandra J. Tooley - Valdosta City Councilwoman (District 2) and Registered Nurse (South Georgia Medical Center).

Mayor Matheson entertained a motion for appointments to the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Citizens Advisory Committee.

A MOTION by Councilman Howard, seconded by Councilman Norton, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to appoint Councilwoman Vivian Miller-Cody and Councilwoman Sandra Tooley to serve a term of four years on the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Citizens Advisory Committee.

Consideration of appointments to the Valdosta Historic Preservation Commission.

Mayor Matheson stated that the Valdosta Historic Preservation Commission has two members, Sandie Burkett and Celine Gladwin, whose terms expired on February 13, 2021. Ms. Burkett and Ms. Gladwin have expressed an interest in being reappointed. These appointments were advertised according to the Boards, Commissions, Authorities, and Advisory Committees Policy that were adopted by Mayor and Council. The applicants are as follows: (1) Sandie Burkett - Retired Teacher (Berrien County Board of Education), and (2) Celine Gladwin - Architect (Gladwin Vaughn Architecture).

Mayor Matheson entertained a motion for appointments to the Valdosta Historic Preservation Commission.

A MOTION by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilwoman Miller-Cody, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to appoint Sandie Burkett and Celine Gladwin to serve a term of three years on the Valdosta Historic Preservation Commission.

Consideration of the selection of a third Member to serve on the Ethics Complaint Board.

Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that the City of Valdosta Mayor and Council first adopted a Code of Ethics Ordinance in 1995. This Ordinance served as a guide for governing authority and reinforced the basic

principle that elected officials are holders of public trust. The Ordinance, which has been amended several times since its creation, has deemed it essential to the proper creation of democratic government that public officials be, and give the appearance of being independent, impartial, and responsible to the people; that governmental decisions and policies be made in the proper channels of the government structure; and that public office not be used for personal gain. On February 15, 2021, an official Ethics Complaint was issued against Mayor Scott James Matheson by Mark Patrick George (Mary Turner Project Coordinator), Dr. Bruce Francis (Concern Clergies of Valdosta), Rev. Darren Neal (NAACP Lowndes Chapter), and Rev. Jimmy Boyd (Valdosta/ Lowndes Community Alliance). The Ethics Complaint was officially delivered by the City Clerk to Mayor Matheson and to each Council Member electronically on February 16, 2021. At the February 25, 2021 City Council Meeting, Councilman Tim Carroll brought forth the name of Robert Jefferson for consideration to serve on the Ethics Complaint Board. Council unanimously approved the selection of Mr. Jefferson to serve on the Ethics Complaint Board. Mayor Matheson then announced that his selection to serve on the Ethics Complaint Board was Judge Jim Tunison, Jr. Mr. Jefferson and Judge Tunison have since discussed a qualified third member of the Ethics Board, who must be in good standing with the Georgia Bar Association, for consideration to serve on the Ethics Complaint Board. The name of the third member of the Ethics Complaint Board that was presented for Council's consideration was former Judge H. Arthur McLane.

A **MOTION** was made by Councilman Norton to appoint former Judge H. Arthur McLane to serve as the third member of the Ethics Complaint Board. Councilman Carroll seconded the motion. The motion was approved (6-1 vote) with Councilman Eric Howard voting in opposition.

LOCAL FUNDING AND REQUESTS

Consideration of an appointment for a New Municipal Court Judge for the City of Valdosta.

Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that since mid-January, 2021, they have been trying to fill the position of the Municipal Court Judge due to the untimely death of Judge Vernita Bender. The Recommendation Committee, which consisted of Jim Tunison, Jr., Mayor Matheson, Councilman Gibbs, and Councilwoman Sandra Tooley, and the City Manager, has spent many hours meeting and reviewing the applications and conducting interviews during the selection process. There were 13 applications submitted and it was narrowed down to 6 applications for the interview process. At the February 25, 2021 Council Meeting, the Recommendation Committee announced their recommendation for the top three candidates, which were Jeremy Baker, Justin Cabral, and Kari Anne Bowden, for the new Municipal Court Judge position. They did not rank those three candidates as they felt that any one of those three were highly qualified for the Municipal Court Judge position.

Councilman Gibbs placed into consideration the name of Jeremy Baker. Councilwoman Miller-Cody placed into consideration the name of Valerie Bryant. There being no other nominations, Mayor Matheson closed nominations.

Mayor Matheson asked for all those in favor of Jeremy Baker to raise their hands. Jeremy Baker received five votes. Valerie Bryant received three votes. Jeremy Baker was appointed as the new Municipal Court Judge for the City of Valdosta.

CITIZENS TO BE HEARD

Allan Dear, 312 Georgia Avenue, stated that he has been a resident of Valdosta since 1986 and his wife just retired from Valdosta State University after 33 years. He saw something recently that he wanted to present to Main Street. He was in Mount Evan, Pennsylvania, which is west of Pittsburgh, approximately four months ago for a funeral and he had an opportunity to walk the Downtown area. Mount Evan is about the same age and geographic size as Valdosta and they have banners on poles like we have. They had their local military heroes on the banners which were sponsored by the citizens. They complete an application and submit a picture and it is handled by a non-profit. He spoke with Donald Davis at the Lowndes County Historical Society and he thinks the Museum might be able to do the registration if their Board approves. There is no cost to the City because the person who sponsors the banner pays the cost. The company that handled it is called truebanners.com. Harry Munson is a

retired Marine and he put everything together and has done 110 cities in the northeast. He is from Pennsylvania and it is coming this way. It is for every battle from the Revolutionary War to Afghanistan. It does not matter whether they served as a Lt. Col. or as a Private and it does not matter what color they are. It is first come first serve. They could do it for a four-week period. He will provide more details to the Mayor and Council.

John Robinson, 3227 San Juline Circle, Lake Park, stated that he has looked at Barber Park on River Street and would like to rent it for approximately four hours. He was told that it could only accommodate 50 people. He was not certain whether that was just for the stage area or the entire Park. Also, regarding the Analysis of Impediments that the City received a few years back, they have found that there is predatory lending and red-lining with the local banking system in Lowndes County. They have been working with the banks and they have some issues that they are going to confront. There are other issues pertaining to the low income especially when it comes to the minorities and the black community. They call it the black dollar which is understood by IGA in our community. We need to find some method of getting the wealth spread because they do not have anything in the City on the south side pertaining to the recreation for our young children. They do not have any educational facilities for our young children, and we need to do something. It is going to be a challenge between the City and other entities. They are going to try and work something out and if not, they will do something drastic. It will be very important that the Analysis of Impediments be honored and looked into by the Council for the betterment of our community. They are going to make some stands against some issues pertaining to the Analysis of Impediments because it has been a long period of time and nothing seems to have been done that it effective. We are losing our children to gangs and drugs and any other issues pertaining to the downfall of the low-income community.

CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that the South Georgia Health District will host a mass vaccination event on Saturday, March 20, 2021 at 9:00 a.m. at the Lowndes County Civic Center. They will have the one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine. Individuals who do prefer the Moderna or Pfizer vaccine still need to make an appointment to do that. We have come up with a mass mailout to all the citizens of Valdosta concerning who to call for a vaccination. They have reasons on it as to why you need to be vaccinated and who is qualified at this time.

There will be a Hot Spot Clean-up in District 6 the week of March 22-26, 2021. They will be in the neighborhoods along Baytree Road between Melody Lane and Baytree Drive which includes JoRee Street, McArthur Street, Wainwright Drive, Miramar Street, and Ridgeway Drive.

The Food Truck Crawl is back again and will be held on Thursday, March 18, 2021. They will be socially distanced as they did before, and we have some new vendors who will be participating.

The Strategic Initiatives Summit will be held March 19-20, 2021 at The Woman's Building. Breakfast will start at 8:00 a.m. on both Friday and Saturday. There is a full array of topics to discuss and all are focused on the future of our great community. The books will be sent electronically, and a hard copy will also be provided to the Mayor and Council.

The Azalea Festival will be held on March 13-14, 2021 at Drexel Park.

South Medical Center will be hosting a vaccination event on March 13, 2021 for teachers and their support staff.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilman Gibbs stated that he wanted to thank the Public Works Department for their efforts in the cleanup event in his District. Citizens in Old Wood Valley called him and said that there were a lot of people who wanted to get rid of a lot of stuff and asked if the City could provide some roll-offs. Public Works dropped off two, 40-foot roll-offs, one electronics trailer, and brought in a big claw truck to pickup a truckload of appliances. They filled up four roll-off bins in a ten-day span. Now the Westover neighborhood heard about it and they want to do it as well. Also, the Miracle League kicks off on March 23, 2021 at 6:00 p.m. at Freedom Park with kickball games.

Councilwoman Miller-Cody stated that she was in a Georgia Municipal Association virtual COVID-19 class on Tuesday and the State of Georgia is still in the red for vaccinations. We have issued approximately one million doses so far and the second doses administered is approximately 932,000. The number of people in ICU is down in the State of Georgia.

Councilman Norton stated that he wanted to wish his wife a Happy “29th” Birthday today.

Mayor Matheson stated that tomorrow night at the Turner Center Art Park there will be free music from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. The United Way and other agencies will be on display as well as food trucks.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Matheson entertained a motion for adjournment.

A MOTION by Councilman Vickers, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to adjourn the March 11, 2021 Meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:06 p.m. to meet again in Regular Session on Thursday, March 25, 2021.

City Clerk, City of Valdosta

Mayor, City of Valdosta