

**MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL
6:03 P.M., THURSDAY, AUGUST 23, 2018
COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY HALL**

OPENING CEREMONIES

Mayor John Gayle called the Regular Meeting of the Valdosta City Council to order at 6:03 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 Mayor Gayle, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

Mayor Gayle recognized the following volunteers who worked with Vanassa Flucas, Neighborhood Development and Community Protection Manager, on the Back to School Bash: Alonzo Atkins (Project Rescue), Ashlyn Becton (Public Information Officer for the City of Valdosta), Debra Bell and Alma Hampton McCoy, (House of God), Scarlet Brown (Valdosta City Schools), Councilwoman Vivian Miller-Cody (Valdosta City Council - District 1), Keyara Hamilton (Goodwill), Darren Hill (School Liaison for Moody Air Force Base), Clinton and Denise Hopson (BDIM), Eddie Koonce (Kemet Universal Non-Profit Organization), Marsha Lentini (Lowe's Store), Taishi McLeod (Georgia Department of Community Health Amerigroup with Georgia Families), Sahkeena Reeves (Care Source Medical Assistant through Georgia Families), Monica Robinson (Electra Chapter 323), Jennifer Steedley (Valdosta City Schools), and Mamie and Maya Flucas (Daughters of Vanassa Flucas).

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the August 9, 2018 Regular Meeting were approved by unanimous consent (7-0) of the Council.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

ORDINANCE NO. 2018-18, AN ORDINANCE TO ESTABLISH THE 2018 MILLAGE RATE FOR THE CITY OF VALDOSTA

Consideration of an Ordinance to Establish the 2018 Millage Rate for the City of Valdosta.

Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that the millage rate for the City Valdosta had not been increased from 1992 until 2014. The City has increased the millage rate only three times in the last 24 years while the City reduced the millage rate 11 times in that same period. The current millage rate is 8.001. In order to fund the Budget with a deficit of \$165,000, there will have to be some cuts or decreases to the General Fund in the Budget so it will zero out; however, the millage rate would remain at 8.001. If a citizen did not receive a reassessment notice, this will not affect them at all. They will pay the exact same tax bill to the City of Valdosta as they did last year. His recommendation is to maintain the current millage rate of 8.001.

No one spoke in favor of the request.

No one spoke in opposition of the request.

A MOTION was made by Councilman Vickers to keep the millage rate at 8.001. Mayor Gayle stated that he would also need to include in the Valdosta City Schools rate of 16.98 and 5 mills for the Downtown Development in the motion. Councilman Vickers was in agreement to amend the motion as noted by Mayor Gayle. Councilman Gibbs seconded the motion. The motion failed (2-4-1) with Councilman Carroll, Councilman Norton, Councilwoman Tooley, and Councilwoman Miller-Cody voting in opposition and Councilman Howard abstaining.

A MOTION was made by Councilman Carroll to roll back the millage rate to 7.916 and include the 16.98 mills for the Valdosta City Schools and 5 mills for Downtown Development. Councilman Norton seconded the motion. The motion failed (2-4-1) with Councilman Vickers, Councilwoman Tooley, Councilman Gibbs, Councilwoman Miller-Cody voting in opposition and Councilman Howard abstaining.

Councilman Carroll stated that perhaps someone who voted against the two motions could propose a new motion. Mayor Gayle inquired as to whether Councilman Howard would like to make a new motion. Councilman Howard stated that if they are suggesting an increase then why would they go with anything less because they are still going to have a deficit. If they are going to do it then they need to ask the people for it one time and be done with it or leave it like it is. Mayor Gayle inquired as to whether he was suggesting that they raise the millage to 8.116. Councilman Howard inquired as to whether they were going to pass something just to pass it and still have a deficit or pass something to give the City Manager what he needs to do the Budget. Mayor Gayle entertained a motion.

A MOTION was made by Councilman Howard to raise the millage rate to 8.116 and include the 16.98 mills for the Valdosta City Schools and 5 mills for Downtown Development. Councilman Vickers seconded the motion. Councilman Gibbs inquired as to what it would cost for a \$150,000 house that was taxed at \$14,000 and multiplied by 8.116. Chuck Dinkins, Finance Director, stated that the increase would be approximately \$1.60 per year. Councilman Gibbs stated that for one year on a \$250,000 house he would come out of pocket \$.80 per month. Mark Barber stated that was correct. Councilwoman Tooley inquired as to whether the School and Downtown millage rates had to be included. Mayor Gayle stated that we do have to include it and we do that every year. Councilman Howard inquired about the shortfalls and what services would have to be cut if we did not fully fund the Budget. Mark Barber stated that 70% of the General Fund Budget is people. We increased the General Fund Budget this year by \$114,000 and we have been trying to get to the point to add more Police Officers. We added three additional ones this year so we would probably have to look at those positions first. They have the biggest Budget and he would have to bring it back to Council to amend the Budget. If we stayed at the 8.001 millage rate, then we would not hire the three Police Officers until halfway into the year so we still got what everybody wanted. Councilwoman Miller-Cody inquired as to they whether they could roll back the millage rate next year if this was approved today because we would be completed. Mark Barber stated that he could not promise that to anyone. Mayor Gayle stated that it depends on the tax digest. Mark Barber stated that out of the last 16 years, the millage rate has been rolled back 13 times. This year our tax digest did not grow. They do not have enough growth within the City of Valdosta to sustain the Budget. If we had these numbers in April or May then he could give you an exact Budget but they were guessing in the dark and try to get as close as possible. At the Budget Hearing, Council had asked if there would be a millage rate increase and he could not promise that because he did not know about the tax digest. We needed growth at approximately 3.5% to 4% but it only grew 2.72%. We have a past history of rolling back whenever we possibly can. The motion failed (3-4) with Councilman Carroll, Councilman Norton, Councilwoman Tooley, and Councilwoman-Miller Cody voting in opposition.

A MOTION was made by Councilman Carroll to roll back the millage rate to 7.916 and include the 16.98 mills for the Valdosta City Schools and 5 mills for Downtown Development. Councilman Norton seconded the motion. Councilwoman Tooley inquired about the millage rate of 7.916. Mark Barber stated that this would give us a \$285,000 deficit. The motion passed (4-3) with Councilman Vickers, Councilman Gibbs, and Councilman Howard voting in opposition.

ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS

AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND THE CITY OF VALDOSTA'S PURCHASING ORDINANCE TABLED

Consideration of an Ordinance to amend the City of Valdosta's Purchasing Ordinance.

Chuck Dinkins, Finance Director, stated that the Valdosta Purchasing Ordinance has not been updated in several years. Amendments are necessary from time to time to remain in compliance with State and Federal laws and regulations as well as to adapt to changes in City operations. The current Ordinance needs additional language to satisfy new requirements from the Federal grant guidelines. The amended Ordinance will also add language to expressly allow purchases based existing competitively bid contracts or negotiations with public purchasing consortiums (e.g. U.S. communities). In addition, it updates the language pertaining technology purchases to reflect the fact that an external IT Contractor now handles procurements related to the City's IT infrastructure. This was previously the responsibility of the IT Manager. We have now outsourced our IT functions to VC3 so we now have an IT Contractor as opposed to an IT Manager. The next change will be to amend the types of external contracts we can pull in to allow us to go with certain consortiums. We currently allow the City to piggyback on State contracts so if the State of Georgia or some other entity within Georgia comes up with a good contract that

will work for us then we can take the same pricing. Recently, there are groups of cities that may not all be in the same state getting together and if they had a good contract we would be able to piggyback on that as well. Another change has to do with small purchases under \$1,000. Currently it reads that the City Manager must approve all of those and it will be changed to allow the City Manager to formerly delegate that to the Department Heads. The final item refers to the City's Purchasing Manual to comply with future changes to Federal rules that are of a housekeeping nature. The Purchasing Manual will provide a greater level of detail than what you would want to put into an Ordinance. It gives specific procedures for us to follow and it helps Departments with compliance on different types of grants. If approved, this Manual can be updated administratively when the changes are minor in nature. Significant changes, such as purchase limits or bid procedures, will still need to be addressed in an Ordinance, but this allows some flexibility when a State or Federal rule requires specific wording in a policy or procedure without the need to change the underlying procedure.

Councilwoman Tooley inquired about VC3 and if they have a budget where they can spend up to \$50,000. Chuck Dinkins stated that the \$50,000 was for the emergency construction. Mark Barber stated that VC3 would have to go through the City Manager. They are not allowed to purchase anything on behalf of the City unless the City Manager approves it. It would meet the same threshold requirements as any other City purchase. Councilwoman Tooley stated that she thought it should come back to the Council as well. Mark Barber stated that it would if it meets the appropriate threshold. Mayor Gayle stated that if VC3 needs any extra equipment it has to come before the Council. We pay them to furnish services and if they need anything for their own use they pay for that out of what we pay them. That does not come before Council to be approved. Mark Barber stated that a great example of that is the audio/visual for the Council Chambers. VC3 is our consultant on that and we have kept Council abreast on the progress along the way. When we get to the stage where they give us a total cost then that will be brought to Council for approval. Councilman Vickers stated that this is a good bit of recommendations and changes and he thought it would be better to include this in the Work Session in September in order to make sure everyone understands it.

A MOTION was made by Councilman Tooley to table the request to amend the Purchasing Ordinance until the September 6, 2018 Regular Council Meeting. Councilman Vickers seconded the motion. The motion was adopted (6-1) with Councilman Carroll voting in opposition.

RESOLUTION NO. 2018-9, A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE FILING OF AN APPLICATION WITH THE U. S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, BUREAU OF JUSTICE ASSISTANCE TO APPLY FOR GRANT FUNDS

Consideration of a Resolution authorizing the filing of an application with the U. S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance to apply for Grant Funds for improvements to the law enforcement capabilities of the Valdosta Police Department and the Lowndes County Sheriff's Office.

Police Chief Brian Childress stated that the City received funding under the Edward Byrne Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program in 2005 through 2017. Since a disparate situation exists between the City of Valdosta and Lowndes County, the grants were joint projects where both law enforcement agencies teamed together to request Federal grant funds to improve law enforcement services in the City of Valdosta/Lowndes County area. The grant guidelines identify seven purpose areas for which grant funding can be utilized: (1) law enforcement programs, (2) prosecution and court programs, (3) prevention and education programs, (4) corrections and community corrections programs, (5) drug treatment and enforcement programs, (6) planning, evaluation, and technology improvement programs, and (7) crime victims and witness programs. In 2007 and 2009, the City and the County were each awarded allocations for use in one of seven program purpose areas with crime victim and witness programs (other than compensation) being added to the program purpose areas. The funding in 2008 was so low that the County did not request any of the funding allocation. The 2005 through 2017 grants are either complete or nearly complete. For the 2018 Grant Program, a lump sum was again awarded and after previous discussion with the Department of Justice, it was recommended the split of funding be based on FBI Part 1 Crimes in the City and County. A split has been proposed as follows: \$10,760 for the City of Valdosta and \$5,996 for Lowndes County. Since a disparate situation exists with Lowndes County, an agreement must be reached on the allocation of funding between entities. Both the City and the County will use their funding for one of the seven program purpose areas. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been executed with the County pursuant to

the allocation breakdown. The City will file the grant application for the entire amount of \$16,712 and act as the fiscal agent for the funding. No match is required for the grant. Chief Childress recommended that Council approve the Resolution authorizing the filing of an application with the U. S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance to apply for Grant Funds for improvements to the law enforcement capabilities of the Valdosta Police Department and the Lowndes County Sheriff's Office.

A **MOTION** by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilwoman Miller-Cody, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to approve a Resolution authorizing the filing of an application with the U. S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance to apply for Grant Funds for improvements to the law enforcement capabilities of the Valdosta Police Department and the Lowndes County Sheriff's Office.

RESOLUTION NO. 2018-10, A RESOLUTION OF SUPPORT FOR A RIGHT-OF-WAY MOWING AND MAINTENANCE AGREEMENT WITH THE GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION FOR THE NORTH PATTERSON STREETScape PROJECT

Consideration of a Resolution of Support for a Right-of-Way Mowing and Maintenance Agreement with the Georgia Department of Transportation for the North Patterson Streetscape Project.

Pat Collins, City Engineer, stated that in September, 2011, the City of Valdosta succeeded in securing \$250,000.00 in Transportation Enhancement (TE) funds for construction of the North Patterson Streetscape Project from the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT). The overall Project extends from Magnolia Street to Gordon Street and they will be putting in sidewalks, benches, and decorative lighting just like we have in the Downtown area. Prior to us letting that Contract in the Fall, GDOT is asking us to agree to maintain all the improvements we are putting in. North Patterson Street is a State of Georgia route and the Georgia Department of Transportation desires to enter into an Agreement to perform certain services relating to mowing and maintenance within Department's right-of-way. This Agreement is for 50 years and is a requirement for the Project award and the receipt of State funds. Pat Collins recommended that Council approve the Resolution of Support for the Right-of-Way Mowing and Maintenance Agreement with the Georgia Department of Transportation for the North Patterson Streetscape Project. Councilwoman Tooley inquired about the term length of the Agreement. Pat Collins stated that all of the Maintenance Agreements are for 50 years unless something comes along and amends it.

A **MOTION** by Councilwoman Miller-Cody, seconded by Councilman Norton, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to approve a Resolution of Support for a Right-of-Way Mowing and Maintenance Agreement with the Georgia Department of Transportation for the North Patterson Streetscape Project.

RESOLUTION NO. 2018-11, A RESOLUTION FOR THE VALDOSTA-LOWNDES COUNTY AIRPORT AUTHORITY TO AUTHORIZE ACCEPTANCE OF A GRANT FROM THE FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION (FAA) FOR AIRPORT IMPROVEMENTS

Consideration of a request from the Valdosta-Lowndes County Airport Authority to approve a Resolution authorizing acceptance of a grant from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to proceed with acquisition of property located within the Runway 17/35 Protection Zone, design Taxiway M Improvements, design North Ramp Taxi Lane Improvements, and replace the Precision Approach Path Indicators on Runway 17/35 at the Valdosta Regional Airport.

Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that the Valdosta-Lowndes County Airport Authority desires to proceed with the following projects at the Valdosta Regional Airport: (1) acquisition of property located within the Runway 17/35 Protection Zone, (2) design Taxiway M Improvements, (3) design North Ramp Taxi Lane Improvements, and (4) replace the Precision Approach Path Indicators on Runway 17/35 at the Valdosta Regional Airport. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) agreed and has offered to fund 90% of the cost at the Valdosta Regional Airport. The remainder of the funds is expected to come from the Georgia Department of Transportation and Passenger Facility Charges collected from passengers that fly out of the Airport. There will be no City of Valdosta funds required for these Projects. The properties being sought is the Cone/Malone property and a portion of the Edgewood Farms property--both which are located on the south end of the airfield and are contiguous with existing Airport property. A future project will address future use of the properties. Precision Approach Path Indicators are

a light system, at each end of the runway that provides visual glide path guidance to pilots. The FAA is preparing a grant which is expected to be in an amount not to exceed \$575,000 for the Projects. The grant will be delivered to City Hall. The final amount depends upon the negotiated price for the properties being acquired. The Agreement must be executed and returned to the FAA expeditiously. A Resolution has been prepared authorizing Mayor John Gayle to accept the grant in order to process the documents. Mark Barber recommended that Council approve the Resolution authorizing acceptance of a grant from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to proceed with acquisition of property located within the Runway 17/35 Protection Zone, design Taxiway M Improvements, design North Ramp Taxi Lane Improvements, and replace the Precision Approach Path Indicators on Runway 17/35 at the Valdosta Regional Airport.

A MOTION by Councilman Vickers, seconded by Councilman Howard, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to approve the Resolution authorizing acceptance of a grant from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to proceed with acquisition of property located within the Runway 17/35 Protection Zone, design Taxiway M Improvements, design North Ramp Taxi Lane Improvements, and replace the Precision Approach Path Indicators on Runway 17/35 at the Valdosta Regional Airport.

Consideration of an Ordinance for a Redevelopment Tax for the City of Valdosta. (Second Reading)

Vanassa Flucas, Neighborhood Development and Community Protection Manager, stated that this is the second reading of an Ordinance for a Redevelopment (Blight) Tax. During the 2018 Mayor/Council Strategic Initiatives Summit, one of the several items discussed was the creation of a Redevelopment Tax Ordinance. A Redevelopment Tax, also known as a Blight Tax, would allow the City to impose an increased rate of ad valorem taxation to both commercial and residential properties which have been deemed by the Courts to be in an extended period of blight. The institution of this Ordinance will give our municipality an additional tool for use in our community to eliminate slum and blight in the City of Valdosta. Each blighted property costs the City additional resources to maintain through increased services from our Public Works, Community Development, Fire, and Police Departments, which often remains unplanned in the City Budget. Property owners will be given the opportunity to remediate the blighted property through rehabilitation or demolition. Once the blighted status is deemed satisfied by the Courts, the increased rate of taxation will be decreased to the tax rate collected before the court-imposed blighted status. The proceeds received from the increased tax collected for such properties can only be used to assist in community revitalization or redevelopment in the City. Vanassa Flucas recommended that Council approve the Redevelopment Tax Ordinance.

A MOTION by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilwoman Miller-Cody, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to approve the Ordinance for a Redevelopment Tax for the City of Valdosta.

Consideration of a Resolution to authorize a loan to the non-profit organization, Lowndes Associated Ministries for People, Inc. (LAMP), for the purpose of combatting homelessness in the City of Valdosta.

Mayor Gayle stated that we had a problem come up with this Agenda Item late today and he would like to ask that Council make a motion to table this item indefinitely.

A MOTION by Councilman Howard, seconded by Councilman Norton, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to approve table this item indefinitely.

LOCAL FUNDING AND REQUESTS

Consideration of a request to declare three vehicles from the Valdosta Police Department as surplus property.

Police Chief Brian Childress stated that the City of Valdosta Police Department has three Ford Crown Victoria Police Sedans which the Department desires to declare as surplus property and sell to other law enforcement agencies. Each Patrol vehicle's age is either ten years or older or has high mileage and needs to be replaced and removed from service. In the past, dead lined Police vehicles are often sold by government entities to other organizations who may continue to use those vehicles, either in a non-law enforcement capacity or in smaller jurisdictions where the demand on those Police vehicles are not as high. These vehicles are either at least ten years old and/or because of their age and high mileage, the Department requests the vehicles be approved for surplus.

The Atkinson County Board of Education Police Department and Willacoochee Police Department contacted the City and both have expressed an interest in purchasing the vehicles for use at their respective government organizations.

A MOTION by Councilwoman Miller-Cody, seconded by Councilman Norton, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to declare three vehicles from the Valdosta Police Department as surplus property.

CITIZENS TO BE HEARD

Rev. Floyd Rose, 1619 North Lee Street, stated that he wanted to present a petition to the Council for the renaming of Forrest Street. He read the Ordinance of renaming streets and they got more than 60% of the residents on Forrest Street to sign the petition. Mayor Gayle stated that he should give the petition to Pat Collins, City Engineer, and he will proceed according to the Ordinance. Mark Barber inquired as to whether Rev. Rose was the contact person if the City has any questions regarding the petition. Rev. Rose stated that he wanted to know what else they need to do. Mayor Gayle stated that we need to advertise this for 90 days just like we normally do. He had made a previous statement that the City did not always do that. We had one street that no one lived on so it did not involve notifying anyone or changing the address and that was for Ruth Council. Rev. Rose stated that he did not want to argue about that but he did not agree.

Vivian Jones stated that it was her assumption that we have lost a great deal of good Doctors from the hospital. She was under the impression all these years that three members were selected from the City Council to serve on the Hospital Authority and three members were selected from the County. She is in error. In 1992, according to Mr. Wisenbaker it was changed with a Court Order. The hospital now sends three names to the City Council and you select the person who is going to serve on the Hospital Authority. She suggests that we rescind that Order. The hospital is now hiring its own Doctors and now you cannot have your private physician go to see you. You are attended to by the Doctors from the hospital. If the City Council and the County Commissioners selected the people who served on the Hospital Authority we might have better service. Mayor Gayle stated that he has advocated for that process to change since he has been Mayor and it has to be done through the Legislature and the County and City has to be on the same page.

Hazel Gibbs stated that she had some concerns from residents of the Southside of town. They are concerned about directing commercial truck traffic through the neighborhoods, demolition of old buildings that may cause danger, especially during hazardous weather, water drainage issues, restoring small businesses, marketplaces, physician offices, pharmacies, restaurants, banks, auto service stations, create public transportation for the City, upgrade dilapidated housing and inner streets, build hotels for visitors to Wild Adventures including billboard advertisements, restore Dasher High School that was established in 1929 and located at 900 South Troup Street, upgrade recreational centers for youth, and create senior citizens recreation on the Southside of Valdosta. The property owners with diverse opinions have all agreed to alleviate traffic in the Downtown area and route commercial trucks to Inner Perimeter Road, Exits 6, 11, 22, Copeland Road, Georgia Highway 84 East at Hill Avenue crossing Georgia Highway 94 which is Griffin Avenue to I-75 South, use Exit 11 and Madison Highway for commercial distribution and Exit 11 by Copeland Road and St. Augustine Road, and Georgia Highway West of Hill Avenue.

John Robinson, 3227 San Juline Circle, Lake Park, and Associate Pastor of First Antioch Missionary Baptist Church at 517 North Oak Street, stated that he wanted to present a letter to the Mayor and Council from their Pastor and congregation. The letter reads, "To Mayor John Gayle and the Valdosta City Council, on August 22, 2018, the congregation of First Antioch Missionary Baptist Church voted to lend its support to the efforts of the People's Tribunal to rename Forrest Street to Barack Obama Boulevard. This letter stands as the church's endorsement in the renaming of Forrest Street." He was the first black President of the United States of America and he does deserve to have a street named after him in the City of Valdosta. The history has a dark shadow of the City and County as far as racial relations. They feel it would be appropriate to have a street named after Barack Obama Boulevard.

George Boston Rhynes, 5004 Oak Drive, stated that the history of any city is important. He had an article from the Lake Park Post regarding the renaming of Barber Park. There were 15 people who were arrested and he was one of them. The Valdosta Daily Times published lies and misinformation and they ignored the facts in the

case especially when they kept publishing that the Barber Park land was donated by the family and it was not. When he came back from Omaha, Nebraska, he heard many negative comments about Rev. Rose. He asked that the Editor fuels the race problem in this community by saying things that generate hostility. They were saying that in 1800 Forrest Street was perhaps named after a black person who was a former slave. In 1800, it would have been harder for a flea to download an elephant on his hard drive because it is almost impossible. It is time now to let Valdosta move forward. He is asking the Valdosta Daily Times not to do that anymore.

Paul Ransom, 117 Sunnymeade Drive, stated that he supports the renaming of Forrest Street to Barack Obama Boulevard. Nathan Forrest was often described as a military genius. His rule of action was to get there first with the most men which was one of the most quoted statements of the war. His command was responsible for the massacre of African American Union Troops stationed at Fort Pillow in Tennessee. He served as the first Grand Wizard of the Klu Klux Klan in the early years of reconstruction. During the battle of Fort Pillow, Forrest ordered the slaughter of between 277-295 African American Union soldiers who were attempting to surrender. In recent decades Forrest has come to rival the less controversial Robert E. Lee and Thomas Stonewall Jackson as the foremost human symbol of Confederate identity. Consequently, debates have emerged wherever Forrest has been commemorated, which include schools, streets, and buildings, and they have been renamed. Mr. Ransom asked Council's consideration in renaming Forrest Street which is predominately African American.

Linda Battle stated that President Barack Obama was a good President and she did vote for him but it is irrelevant for us to name a street after him in Valdosta because he has no significant ties to Valdosta. To name a street after someone because of their race is being racist. There are more important things to focus on in Valdosta than renaming a street. We should be more concerned about the judicial and criminal systems here.

James Walker, 4060 Boring Pond Road, stated that he grew up here in Valdosta and he lived at 801 Forrest Street. He is a member of the local Sons of Confederate Veterans in Valdosta. He has a problem with what the last gentleman who spoke said about the massacre at Fort Pillow. There was a massacre but they killed everybody, black and white. When the Governor of Tennessee received complaints about what was going on there he asked Forrest to go over there. He would normally travel with 2,000 men but the Governor of Tennessee gave him an extra 10,000 men. They attacked the Fort for about an hour and killed many people. The Commander of the Fort did not want to surrender and Forrest gave him 20 minutes. They stormed the Fort and everyone was massacred. Also, there is no proof that Forrest was the leader of the Klu Klux Klan. Also, Elbert Forrest founded the First Antioch Missionary Baptist Church but there is no record that it was named after Elbert Forrest. If they would like to prove any of the stuff they are saying about Nathan Bedford Forrest, he would like to answer it.

Hiram Dwayne Johnson, 4029 Sandy Run, stated that coming from an education background he is a proponent of getting the details right. If there is data that backs up where the street name comes from then they need to go with that. He has not found any research that supports any narrative that it was named after Nathan Bedford Forrest. If there is documentation that it was named after Elbert Forrest then we need to pursue that. We are just fanning flames when it comes to a sensitive matter and especially someone's name. We need to be pointing in the direction to unify the community.

CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that the Valdosta Youth Council is still accepting applications for the 2018-2019 program year so if you know of any students who are interested please have them contact Teresa Bolden, City Clerk.

The City and County have consolidated the 9-11 Memorial Service this year and it will be held on September 11, 2018 at 10:00 a.m. at the old Lowndes County Courthouse.

The Valdosta Police Department is upgrading their Firearms and K-9 Training Facility on August 24, 2018 at 11:00 a.m. located off of Val Tech Road.

We also need to encourage our citizens to use the SeeClickFix app to report any concerns or issues they see around the City.

This is Police Chief Brian Childress' last City Council Meeting and we thank him for his years of service to the City of Valdosta.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilman Carroll commended Police Chief Brian Childress for his service and thanked him for all he has done to help our community. Also, the millage rate discussion was an interesting process they went through tonight and he is being polite when saying that. He knows there is a lot of heartburn in the decision to roll back the millage rate and create a challenge for the Budget team and our City to balance the Budget with less revenue. We have had two opportunities to raise the millage rate in order to do the right thing with our Budget and he was one of those who did it twice to raise the rate to meet a budgetary need. He did not do it this time because this was different. We have done a great job in managing the Budget but this was one of those instances where our citizens needed us to stand up and say that we are going to have to cut a little more here to make it balance. We should take pride in the fact that those are hard decisions and the most important thing we can do is to understand the process and come prepared to act. It is their job to come to the Council Meeting prepared and act on behalf of the citizens and sometimes that means we all have to do a little bit more homework and we may need to sit down with the City Manager or Department Heads or the City Attorney or the Finance Director to understand the various items before them. They did not do such a great job tonight and they could have done better.

Councilwoman Miller-Cody thanked the citizens for coming out to the City Council Meeting and learn all that you can to help them make a difference in the City of Valdosta.

Councilman Vickers stated that whether Forrest Street was named for Nathan Bedford Forrest or Elbert Forrest makes no difference to him. He is going to make a decision based on the petition and the citizens who live on it.

Councilwoman Tooley stated that Forrest Street is part of her District and one thing that she is looking at is to improve the condition of widening Forrest Street. They have been trying for many years to do that and if there is anything that would hinder that by changing the name then she would rather have the street improved first.

Councilman Gibbs stated that there is a project at Valdosta Middle School and they are building a new STEM Academy for students to learn and be a part of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math. This will be complete in February of 2019 and will be open to all students to utilize it.

Mayor Gayle stated that at the Strategic Initiative Summit, they discussed address the facilities at City Hall. They are cramped for space and there are security issues. There have been items stolen and one of our employees was accosted recently. He has created a Facilities Committee which is composed of Councilman Eric Howard, Mark Barber, City Manager, Teresa Bolden, City Clerk, Richard Hardy, Public Works Director, Demarcus Marshall, Property Superintendent, Rick Mefford, Inspections Manager, Nina McMillan, Customer Service Manager, and James Horton, Historic Preservation Planner. They have met and are in the process of studying the facilities and we will be receiving some reports from them at the Work Session in September.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Gayle entertained a motion for adjournment.

A MOTION by Councilman Vickers, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to adjourn the August 23, 2018 Meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 7:32 p.m. to meet again in Regular Session on Thursday, September 6, 2018.