

MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL
5:30 P.M., THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 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, Tim Carroll, Ben Norton, Vivian Miller-Cody, Eric Howard. Councilman Andy Gibbs was absent. The invocation was given by Pastor Naamen Hooker, Morning Star Missionary Baptist Church, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the September 9, 2021 Regular Meeting were approved by unanimous consent (6-0) of the Council.

ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS

RESOLUTION NO. 2021-12, A RESOLUTION FOR CONDEMNATION OF A PARCEL OF LAND FOR THE JERRY JONES DRIVE STREET WIDENING PROJECT

Consideration of a Resolution for condemnation of a parcel of land for the Jerry Jones Drive Street Widening Project.

Pat Collins, City Engineer, stated that in 2019, Council passed Resolution No. 2019-17 authorizing the execution of a Contract between the City of Valdosta and the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) regarding the Eager Road/Jerry Jones Drive Widening Project. The purpose of that Contract was to allow the City to begin the acquisition of the necessary easements and right-of-ways to widen that road. This has been a large undertaking spread across 150+ parcels. Williams Sims, GIS/Real Property Coordinator in the Engineering Department, has done a phenomenal job in securing the vast majority of needed property for this Project; however, some property owners have not responded. As a result, the City, in compliance with its obligations under the Contract, will be forced to file condemnation proceedings against some of the property owners. At this time, the only property that we will have to engage in condemnation is Parcel 98, owned by Barbara Thomas and Jasmine Henderson located at 2527 Jerry Jones Drive. The plans require that we secure a construction easement for approximately .063 acres of land. The City of Valdosta has obtained an appraiser in accordance with the GDOT guidelines and the property was appraised at \$2,500.00. This money will be paid into the registry of the Court. The property owners will be served and will have the opportunity to contest the sufficiency of that amount. The purpose of this Resolution is to pass of necessary Order that would allow the City Attorney to begin the condemnation in order to acquire this easement. Pat Collins, City Engineer, recommended that Council approve the adoption of the Resolution for condemnation of a parcel of land for the Jerry Jones Drive Street Widening Project.

Tim Tanner, City Attorney, stated that we had lost contact with the property owners and the Georgia Department of Transportation approved a real estate appraiser who appraised the .063-acre parcel at \$2,500. It is for a construction easement and the land will still be used by the individual owners and we will just pay them \$2,500 for the construction easement.

A MOTION by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Norton, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to enact Resolution No. 2021-12, a Resolution for condemnation of a parcel of land for the Jerry Jones Drive Street Widening Project, the complete text of which will be found in Resolution Book VI.

BIDS, CONTRACTS, AGREEMENTS, AND EXPENDITURES

Consideration of bids for the Smith Park Improvements Project.

Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that Smith Park is an existing park on the eastside of the City close to Downtown. It is found at the convergence of East Hill Avenue and East Central Avenue. This location is considered a westbound gateway into Downtown where restaurants, shopping, and government offices are located.

There are also older historic homes and residences on either side of Smith Park and it is most frequented by pedestrians, residents, and citizens who sit and enjoy the tree canopy and local activity at this eastside entrance into Downtown. Within Smith Park, there is vegetation and signage that have served their useful life and were recently removed. Other improvements to Smith Park will be refurbished or upgraded now and in future years. The proposed Smith Park improvements are intended to serve pedestrians, residents, and locals that frequent the Park. They include paver-brick handicap ramps, picnic areas with new benches, and trash receptacles. For continuity and maintenance replacement purposes, the same paver selection will be used in Smith Park as in the new Amphitheatre Park a few blocks down the road. There will also be decorative flowers and plants, and in the future, water will be re-established at the old fountain location. In FY 2021's Budget, funding which totaled \$503,333 was allocated and set aside to un-designated improvements at existing City park locations. Future use of this funding and designation of improvements will be selected at the discretion of Mayor and City Council. The aforementioned improvements and site plan will be funded from this line item if approved. The Project was advertised both in the local newspaper and on the City's website. Three bids were received and opened on September 10, 2021. The low bid was submitted by Chuck Smith and Son in the amount of \$105,800. The bid is considered both reasonable and responsive. Mark Barber, City Manager recommended that Council approve the low bid submitted by Chuck Smith and Son in the amount of \$105,800 plus a 10% contingency (\$10,580) for a total of \$116,380 for the Smith Park Improvements Project.

Councilman Vickers inquired about the parking for Smith Park. Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that most people park across the street in the parking lot of Sam's Bar-B-Que. Councilwoman Tooley stated that she was reading the historical information on Smith Park and inquired as to whether it is part of the National Historic District. Mark Barber stated that they wanted to provide Council with the historical significance of Smith Park.

A MOTION by Councilwoman Tooley, seconded by Councilman Norton, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve the low bid submitted by Chuck Smith and Son in the amount of \$105,800 plus a 10% contingency (\$10,580) for a total of \$116,380 for the Smith Park Improvements Project.

LOCAL FUNDING AND REQUESTS

Consideration of a request for the installation of speed humps on Continental Drive.

Pat Collins, City Engineer, stated that on July 8, 2021, Ms. Wendelin Hodges who lives at 1416 Continental Drive, approached the City Council about speeders on Continental Drive and acquiring speed humps for this street. Speed/traffic count studies were conducted on Wednesday, July 14, 2021 through Thursday, July 15, 2021 on Continental Drive between Bethune Drive and Morningside Drive over a 24-hour period. The studies revealed that the 85th percentile speed limit was 40.0 mph, 10 MPH over the posted speed limit of 30 MPH. This is an indication that speed humps are warranted for this section of Continental Drive. Over the last two months, Ms. Hodges secured signatures from 13 of the 18 property owners or residents on this street meeting the 70% rule of the Speed Hump Policy. All residents have been notified regarding the speed hump petition. Having satisfied that requirement of the process means the matter must go before the City Council for approval. Pat Collins, City Engineer, recommended that Council approve the request for the installation of speed humps on Continental Drive.

A MOTION by Councilwoman Miller-Cody, seconded by Councilman Norton, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve the request for the installation of speed humps on Continental Drive.

CITIZENS TO BE HEARD

Gracie Bacon, 708 Holly Drive, stated that she has been before Council many times about the situation on Holly Drive and it has gotten worse. They have more cars at those three houses and they are everywhere. More cars and people are coming in every day and everyone is wondering why the City is not doing something. Ms. Bacon stated that the City does not care because they have heard her many times. The situation has not improved and has gotten worse. The City gave them a slap on the wrist and told them to go ahead and do what they want to do because they are doing exactly what they want to do. She does not understand why the City is not addressing the issue and the only thing she can figure out is because it is all black. Nobody would want a street to go down as bad as her street is going down. The City keeps saying they are working on it but what she is seeing is that the situation has gone from one house to three houses and from one backyard to three backyards. There are all kinds of

cars being brought in on flatbed trucks and they are working on the cars all times of the day and night. Nothing is being done and no one will explain to her why the City will not do something. She is black and that is not going to change but she has the right as a taxpayer to see a change. She has been coming before Council for too long for there not to be a change. Council would not allow this in just anyone's neighborhood. Holly Drive use to be a nice street but it is not anymore. There is too much going on and she does not understand why it is not being addressed. It just gets worse every day. She hears them talking about speed humps and park improvements and spending hundreds of thousands of dollars but you will not even take care of one little short street with 16 houses on it. No one lives at a park but they do live in a neighborhood.

Nearing Adams, 1004 Charleston Place, stated that it was brought to his attention today that the Craig Center located on Gordon Street was being turned over to Parks and Recreation and there was some discussion that it was going to be torn down. He is the Director of Business Operations for the Lowndes Advocacy Resource Center (LARC) and that facility was originally deeded by them to the City. Mr. Adams stated that on behalf of LARC they would be more than willing to take that property back and use it for the adults they serve who have disabilities.

John Robinson, 3227 San Juline Circle, Lake Park, stated that when he was growing up his mother gave him some advice. She told him that there were two things in this world that he would have to do and that is to stay black and die. She also told him that out of all the things that he becomes out of life to not be dumb and stupid. She said if you are dumb then don't be stupid. If you are stupid then just don't be dumb. He made an Open Records Request with the City for the comparison of projects done on the southside versus the northside and he asked for the amount of money spent on the southside versus the amount of money spent on the northside. They must think he is dumb and stupid because they sent him information with only HUD responses for three Districts. It does not say anything about the DOT or other projects. When he looked at the numbers, HUD had allocated a little over \$4 million and the City of Valdosta spent approximately \$2,688,000. He divided that by 10 years and it came out to \$268,800 a year. In a City with a population of 54,000 people and 51% is black which means that at least 27,000 are black and if we divide it by 12 months it shows where the City spends a little more than \$22,000 a month in these three Districts. When we enter the population and divide the population into that number it yields that less than one cent is spent a month on each one of the citizens. They are proposing to make a partnership with the City and they have attorneys who are working with them. They want to make this a smooth transition where they can do something prosperous for the City and the well being of the City. It is a shame that poverty exists the way it does in the City. It is too one sided and too white-oriented. Change has got to be made and they want to participate in the decisions that are made. He has another Open Records Request that he filed and he is looking forward to receiving that information as well.

CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that on September 27, 2021 to October 1, 2021, City staff will host the "Love Where You Live" Community Hot Spot cleanup in the neighborhoods from Forrest Street to Bemiss Road which includes Highland Heights Drive, Vanelle Drive, Ginny Drive, Third Street, Second Street, First Street, and Gard Street.

On Saturday, October 9, 2021 from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m., Lowndes County, the City of Valdosta, and WWALS Watershed Coalition will be hosting a river cleanup in both the City and County. They will meet at the Troupville Boat Ramp on the Little River, Highway 31 at the Georgia/Florida line on the Withlacoochee River, and two cleanup sites in Valdosta on the One-mile Branch. Volunteers are encouraged to sign up for the event.

The Greater Valdosta Annual Christmas Parade, which is sponsored by the City of Valdosta and the Ossipe Temple, is scheduled for Saturday, December 4, 2021 at 6:00 p.m. This year the theme is "Musical Notes & Holiday Floats." Applications can be submitted on-line through the Valdosta Main Street website.

Also, Lowndes County and the City of Valdosta Public Works Departments will be hosting a free tire recycling event for City and County residents beginning October 11 through October 22, 2021. Residents can drop off tires Monday through Friday from 7:30 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. at the City of Valdosta Public Works Department which is located at 1017 Myrtle Street. Public Works will also hold a Saturday drop off event on October 16, 2021 from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Tires must be regular car/truck size and off rim. No tractor or semi-truck tires will be

accepted and no businesses are permitted to bring their tires to this event. Residents can drop off up to 200 tires per household.

Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that he has spoken with Gracie Bacon over the years and he has tried to help her with her situation. The latest conversation they had was about a Parking Overlay District which was brought forth by Councilwoman Tooley earlier this year. If we want to help the situation, a Parking Overlay District would limit less than five cars in a yard and she would see an immediate effect. We are not ignoring Ms. Bacon's requests but that was the latest conversation. He does not know if Ms. Bacon is for that but he will leave that up to Council to see if they would like to bring that back up. They are being given citations and they are going to Court and paying their fines. Everything that we can possibly do to help Ms. Bacon is being done.

Also, he will get the numbers that Mr. Robinson was speaking about and the HUD that he mentioned was for rehabs and new structures which can only be done in the Revitalization areas. That was predominantly Districts 1, 2, and 3. They also had SPLOST VII and VIII Projects and District 1 was slightly over \$10 million, District 2 was right behind that, and District 3 was right behind that, District 4 was approximately \$5 million, District 5 was \$5 million, and District 6 was approximately \$8 million because of the Woodrow Wilson Project. He will get with Mr. Robinson to make sure that he understands the information that he was given.

Councilman Vickers stated that someone called him about tearing down the Craig Center. Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that we do not use the Craig Center anymore. When we did the Parks and Recreation consolidation several years ago, we gave the Craig Center to them. LARC had previously given it to the City years ago and we used it for our Therapeutic Center. Parks and Recreation now does that in a separate area. The building is in really bad shape so George Page, Executive Director of Parks and Recreation, has talked about demolishing the building and making a nice passive park in that community; however, there has been no final decision on that. It was just a thought and nothing has been done on that.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilwoman Tooley stated that regarding Ms. Bacon's comments, they were trying to do a lot of things to help clean up that area and it was voted down by the Council with the exception of her and Councilman Carroll. It was noted that Council did not feel like they wanted a Parking Overlay District in that area. She has been looking at some other ways and talking with other cities about what they are doing in their communities to alleviate that problem. She was in Ms. Bacon's neighborhood two weeks ago and it was ridiculous. You cannot even walk on the front lawn for all of the cars. They are all on the side and back as well. We are not neglecting the situation and we are still trying to help but we are trying to do whatever we can do without the support of the Council because she does not think they will support a Parking Overlay District. Council was adamant about it and they did not want it. She put a lot of work into that and to show where it was needed. We are still working on it and trying to find another way to help. Mayor Matheson stated that if the City Manager and the City Marshals have exhausted all avenues then he was sure that Council would re-address the Overlay District and at least talk about it. Councilman Vickers stated that if Councilwoman Tooley could come up with a way to show Council that the residents on that street support an Overlay District then maybe that might help. Councilman Howard inquired as to whether an Ordinance could be established instead of making it an Overlay District. The Ordinance could state how many cars you can have on your property and it would be for the entire City. Councilman Carroll stated that the Overlay District has distinct boundaries and all they were looking at doing was to extend that boundary to include Holly Drive. Councilman Howard stated that if they create an Ordinance it would be City-wide. Councilman Carroll stated that he did not know if they should do that.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Matheson entertained a motion to adjourn the Regular Meeting and enter into Executive Session for the purpose of discussing litigation.

A **MOTION** by Councilman Vickers, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to adjourn the September 23, 2021 Meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:04 p.m. to enter into Executive Session for the purpose of discussing litigation.

Mayor Matheson reconvened the September 23, 2021 Meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:15 p.m. and stated that there was discussion of litigation in the Executive Session and no action was taken.

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 23, 2021 Meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:15 p.m. to meet again in Regular Session on Thursday, October 7, 2021.

City Clerk, City of Valdosta

Mayor, City of Valdosta