

MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL
5:30 P.M., THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2022
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, Andy Gibbs, Sandra Tooley, Vivian Miller-Cody, Tim Carroll, Eric Howard, and Ben Norton. The invocation was given by Councilman Andy Gibbs, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the February 10, 2022 Regular Meeting were approved by unanimous consent (7-0) of the Council.

BIDS, CONTRACTS, AGREEMENTS, AND EXPENDITURES

Consideration of an amendment to the Contract with Lovell Engineering Associates for the Old Clyattville Road Widening Project.

Pat Collins, City Engineer, stated on August 8, 2020, the City entered into an Agreement with the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) pursuant to the Transportation Investment Act of 2010 (TIA) which created 12 Special Districts of the State and allowed each District to approve and authorize the imposition of a Transportation Sales and Use Tax to fund transportation projects within the Special District. The 2020 Agreement authorizes and allows the City to deliver all or part of the scope of work for the Old Clyattville Road Widening using TIA proceeds. The GDOT agreed to reimburse the City in an amount not to exceed \$6,217,514.00 in TIA proceeds for preliminary engineering design, right-of-way acquisition, utility adjustments, and construction. On November 19, 2020, the City entered into an Agreement with Lovell Engineering Associates (LEA) for the engineering design of Old Clyattville Road. This work has been on-going and the GDOT just recently approved the right-of-way plans prepared by LEA. The right-of-way phase is estimated by GDOT up to \$220,000; however, the City has been able to acquire lands for considerably less thus far. The Old Clyattville Road Widening Project begins at the current Corporate Limits of the City of Valdosta at Mud Creek and ends north of the Gil Harbin Industrial Boulevard. The Project includes design, right-of-way acquisition, and construction of a 0.62-mile five lane section replacing an existing two-lane section. The bridge crossing Mud Creek was widened some years ago in anticipation of future widening along this section of roadway so no additional bridge work will be needed. The Project includes an upgrade of the Industrial Boulevard intersection. Existing turn lanes will be lengthened, new turn lanes will be constructed, signal improvements will be made. The Project includes closed-drainage piping, curb and gutter upgrades, utility line upsizing, and relocations to accommodate the widened roadway. The estimated roadway construction cost estimated by LEA is \$3,867,491. The cost for overall construction management by LEA during the construction is \$349,320. Again, all these expenses are reimbursable under the TIA agreement with GDOT. Pat Collins, City Engineer, recommended that Council approve an amendment to the Contract with Lovell Engineering Associates (LEA) in the amount of \$349,320 for construction management of the Old Clyattville Road Widening Improvements.

A MOTION by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Norton, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to approve an amendment to the Contract with Lovell Engineering Associates (LEA) in the amount of \$349,320 for construction management of the Old Clyattville Road Widening Improvements.

Consideration of a request to purchase a new Vanguard Belt Screen for the Mud Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant.

David Frost, Utilities Director, stated that the Mud Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant utilizes two Vanguard Belt Screens in its pre-treatment process. Designed and manufactured by Nuove Energie USA, Inc., these mechanical screens are installed at the influent to the Treatment Plant to remove large objects such as rags,

plastics, and other debris from wastewater. The first screen was upgraded in 2021 and has since shown major improvements to the screening process. The second screen currently has a designed capture ratio of approximately 33%, which results in unscreened debris passing through its system. This debris clogs up pumps and basins further along in the Treatment Plant increasing maintenance costs and undermining the treatment process. Given the low capture ratio of debris and related maintenance issues, Staff determined the best option to increase screening efficiency would be to upgrade the old 6mm belt screen to a more effective 3mm belt screen. As with the first screen's upgrade, the second screen's upgrade will increase the capture ratio from 33% to 53% greatly reducing the pass through of larger debris. The result will be much less debris clogging up the downstream components of the Treatment Plant. Based on the results from the new screen, Staff is confident that maintenance and operational costs will be lowered, and the overall treatment efficiency will increase. Nuove Energie USA, Inc. is the sole authorized distributor of Nuove Energie factory replacement parts for the entire State of Georgia. The cost of purchasing the new higher efficiency belt screen will be \$85,500 which includes shipping. David Frost, Utilities Director, recommended that Council approve the purchase of the new belt screen in the amount of \$85,500 from Nuove Energie USA, Inc.

A MOTION by Councilman Norton, seconded by Councilman Gibbs, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to approve the purchase of a new Vanguard Belt Screen in the amount of \$85,500 from Nuove Energie USA, Inc. for the Mud Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant.

CITIZENS TO BE HEARD

John Quarterman, 3338 Country Club Road, stated that he would like to thank the Mayor for participating in the recent Mayor's and Chairman's Paddle. They encountered a lot of trash while paddling on the Withlacoochee River and several of the participants were helping to pick up the trash. People from all over are concerned about the litter issue. A lot of the trash is coming out of Sugar Creek and Three Mile Branch. Bobby McKenzie was paddling down from Langdale Park and before he got to Sugar Creek, his boat was full of trash that came out of Three Mile Branch. There are some solutions and the best part is that fixing this problem compared to the sewer system problem is tiny. He also congratulated the City on receiving \$12 million in ARPA money.

Michelle Girtman, Executive Director of The Haven (Battered Women's Shelter and Rape Crisis Center), stated that they are taking some substantial funding cuts and they are asking the City to look at an ARPA proposal. The Governor's Office is also going to see if they can help but they are in a fix. Washington made a formula error and all of the budgets across the United States were affected. They are going to lose 36% of their funding and for The Haven, that is \$455,000 for two years straight. The formula has been fixed but they cannot replace the money because they work a year in arrears. It will be approximately two to three years before they see the fix and any of that money come back to Valdosta. She was looking at their Budget today and they spent about \$350,000 backing our community in just buying groceries local, relocation of women and children, transportation, utilities, and other things. They have approximately 25 people on staff and they do not want to have to lay anyone off; however, they will if they take a \$500,000 cut. That will reduce services and programs for what they can do. They are required to operate 24 hours a day and during the COVID-19 Pandemic, they never closed their doors. They are at a 141% increase in temporary protection orders and they serve over 800 women and children. They served more women in 2020 in one single year since they opened the doors in 1986. It is very important to keep their program open and they have never been to the City asking for money. Ms. Girtman stated that she has been here for 13 years and has never asked for help; however, she is asking for the City's help with ARPA money. The Haven needs your help and the women and children they serve need your help. Councilman Gibbs inquired as to whether they received any PPP funds. Ms. Girtman stated that they did not because of Federal Regulations. They consider that a duplication of services and supplanting and even though they actually got \$207,000 in PPP, they had to return that to the bank. Councilman Gibbs inquired as to whether they functioned with what was in their Budget during COVID. Ms. Girtman stated that was correct and they have always used Mathis Auditorium for their annual fundraisers; however, Mathis Auditorium was closed down so they could not do their annual fundraisers. They have missed two and a half years of fundraising.

Michael Smith, Executive Director of the Greater Valdosta United Way, stated that they cover 10 counties and partner with 20 local non-profits of which 19 are located here in Lowndes County/Valdosta. Speaking on behalf of The Haven and the Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) and CASA that will see cuts across the State, all

of the agencies that have stepped up and fed, clothed, and sheltered people throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic and they need your support if there are funds available. It has been two years of fundraisers being cut and the United Way tries to support the best they can, but there is no way that local donors/businesses can clear some of the gaps that these agencies have dealt with. The agencies are dealing with staffing issues, mental strain, and compassion fatigue of working 24/7 throughout the Pandemic. If there are funds available, it would be a great way to help people out. There are a lot of good people who are working hard and we are very fortunate to have them in our human service sector.

CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that Council has been given a copy of the Citizens to be Heard Action Items from the last Council Meeting for their review.

The Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce is holding their Annual Awards Banquet today beginning at 5:30 p.m. at the Rainwater Conference.

The Boy Scouts of America Building Leaders Campaign Dinner will be held on Thursday, March 3, 2022 at 6:00 p.m. at the Rainwater Conference Center. The guest speaker will be Malcolm Mitchell. The City of Valdosta is sponsoring a table for this event.

The 6th Annual South Georgia Film Festival will be held at Valdosta State University on Friday, March 4, 2022 through Sunday, March 6, 2022. Tickets can be purchased on-line.

The Valdosta Police Department will have Open Testing beginning on Saturday, March 5, 2022 at 9:00 a.m. at the City Hall Annex Building in the Multi-Purpose Room.

The Strategic Initiatives Summit will be held on Friday, March 18, 2022 through Saturday, March 19, 2022 at The Woman's Building.

The 13th Annual City Government 101 Class begins on Monday, April 11, 2022 at 5:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers with Government Overview and HR Presentations. City Government 101 will run through May 16, 2022 with graduation on that day. Applications will be accepted until Friday, March 18, 2022.

Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that Ellen Hill, Main Street Director, has accepted a new position with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs which is a good progressive next move. He asked that she come forward so that we can congratulate her.

Ellen Hill, Main Street Director, stated that she would like to read a little note that she sent to the Downtown businesses. "For the past 15 years, she has had the privilege of serving the citizens of Valdosta and the Downtown community through her work as Main Street Director. She is and will always be grateful for her journey--the growth completed, the lessons learned, the friendships made, the stories shared, and a change created in Valdosta. As she begins a new chapter in her life, she will take everyone and everything that she has learned with her on this new journey and as she transitions into a new phase of her career, Downtown and the City of Valdosta will remain a guiding light for her. Her proudest moments will always be the smiles and feelings of accomplishment that came from inspiring entrepreneurs that she had the privilege of getting to know and assisting them in achieving their dreams of business ownership, the happy moments from individuals and families as they attended community events and the memories that they made from that experience, knowing that she had a small hand in bringing that to them and the beauty that is our Downtown community. Downtown truly is the heart of Valdosta. As she transitions into a new role, know that you will still see her around. She is not moving and she will always be here to offer assistance and a shoulder to lean on. Thank you all for your support and for the confidence that you had in her all of these years."

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Mayor Matheson stated that the new Valdosta State University (VSU) Head Football Coach Tremaine Jackson will be at the Georgia Beer Company on Friday, February 25, 2022 from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. for a Meet

and Greet. They were all electrified by him at the Press Conference and he lit up the P. E. Complex when he was introduced.

Councilwoman Tooley stated that on Sunday, February 27, 2022, the Black Business Alliance will be having a Black Business Showcase around the Historic Courthouse from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Councilman Gibbs stated that the Miracle League of Valdosta will begin their kickball season on March 8, 2022 for four weeks and then they will roll right into four weeks of baseball. Fortunately, COVID-19 numbers are decreasing which is helping to open up the doors for them to have more players to sign up. They are also trying to work with the VSU Head Football Coach Tremaine Jackson and have a Football Miracle League Night. They want to have all of the VSU football players come out and have an opportunity to meet the Miracle League players and see the Miracle League field.

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 February 24, 2022 Meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 5:56 p.m. to meet again in Regular Session on Thursday, March 10, 2022.

City Clerk, City of Valdosta

Mayor, City of Valdosta