

MINUTES
MEETING OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL
5:30 P.M., THURSDAY, JANUARY 19, 2023
COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY HALL

OPENING CEREMONIES

Mayor Matheson called the regular meeting of the Valdosta City Council to order at 5:30 p.m. Council members present were: Andy Gibbs, Vivian Miller-Cody, Tim Carroll, Ben Norton, and Thomas McIntyre. Councilwoman Sandra Tooley and Councilman Eric Howard were absent. The invocation was given by Councilman Andy Gibbs, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

AWARDS AND PRESENTATIONS

Special Award Presentation for the Valdosta State University Social Media Class.

Mayor Matheson stated that Valdosta State University Professor Dr. David Nelson and students from his Social Media Class have enjoyed a partnership with the City of Valdosta's Public Information Office (PIO) for over seven years, which has led to creative academic assignments and viable ideas for the City to implement. These assignments not only serve as educational projects for the students, but they also provide "real life" work experience. During the Fall semester of 2022, the Valdosta State University (VSU) Social Media students were paired with the PIO Office and were tasked with providing insightful ideas for reaching citizens who use social media as their primary source of communication, and also offering innovative suggestions for revamping the City's Adopt-A-Street Program. The students visited the PIO Staff early in the semester to learn more about the City's current Adopt-A-Street Program which falls under the umbrella of the Public Works Department. They then worked in their groups to develop realistic social media plans that also became a large part of their class grade. The PIO Office reviewed the presentations and selected Group 4 for their presentation of Social Media Management in promoting and enhancing the Adopt-A-Street initiative. Their goal was to re-establish and brand the Program and encourage more young adults and groups to maintain their adopted streets. The winning Group was comprised of Lauren Barringer, Sarah Jane Carpenter, Gracie Griffin, Isaiah Mitchell, and Tamirra Pryor. Their winning presentation features ways of goal setting with social media as well as tracking engagement, becoming more consistent with messaging, as well as implementing incentives for the community to be more engaged in adopting a street. With analytics, Group 4 also addressed the idea of using other social media outlets to target a younger generation such as students at VSU. This continued partnership with VSU demonstrates the City's efforts to provide applicable experiences to VSU students as well as to strengthen our commitment to engage them in their local government. The Mayor and Council congratulated the winners in this Social Media Project and thanked the students for their creative efforts and contributions to our community.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the Regular Meeting of January 5, 2023 were approved by unanimous consent (5-0) of the Council.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

Consideration of a request to close a portion of Miramar Street north of Baytree Drive.

Ben O'Dowd, City Engineer, stated that a Petition had been submitted requesting a portion of Miramar Street north of Baytree Drive to be vacated and closed to facilitate a proposed multi-family development. The initial request was received from Innovate Engineering on December 8, 2022. The proposed closure would accommodate the development of the surrounding property into a multi-family residential development. This developer submitted a similar road closure Petition for a separate portion of Miramar Street in September of 2022 which was approved. As required by the City Ordinance, the applicant submitted a petition signed by a minimum 60% of the property owners abutting the portion of the public street requested to be closed. A Public Notice of the Petition was circulated in the Valdosta Daily Times on January 6, 2023 and January 8, 2023. A Public Hearing Notice sign was posted at the north side of the intersection of Miramar Street and Baytree Drive on January 4,

2023. The Engineering Department received no calls from the public to offer an opinion regarding the closure Petition. The Engineering Department received no calls from the public requesting any additional information regarding the closure Petition. This Petition was circulated to all relevant City Departments as well as area utility providers which may have facilities within the right of way. The portion of Miramar Street which is requested to be closed currently contains power, stormwater, and City of Valdosta utilities. The Engineering Department recommends that a utility easement be retained in place of the existing right-of-way should it be closed. The Engineering Department has notified the developer that they will be responsible for any and all damages done to any utilities during construction. Ben O'Dowd, City Engineer, recommended that Council approve the request to close a portion of Miramar Street north of Baytree Drive.

Jimmy Cone, 1804 Plum Street, spoke in favor of the request. Mr. Cone stated that he represents the owners and the Civil Engineer who was unable to attend the Council Meeting and he would be glad to answer any questions.

No one spoke in opposition to the request.

A MOTION by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Gibbs, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to approve a request to close a portion of Miramar Street north of Baytree Drive and convey to all adjoining landowners as required by law.

ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS

AN ORDINANCE FOR REAPPORTIONMENT OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL DISTRICTS (FIRST READING)

Consideration of an Ordinance for Reapportionment of the Valdosta City Council Districts. (First Reading)

Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that after the publication of each decennial census, most municipalities are required to reapportion election Districts. Over the last six months, the City has been in contact with the Georgia Legislative Redistricting Office to assist them in drafting an Ordinance. The census block information, maps and summaries are directly from their office. While the census information contained in the Ordinance is difficult to understand, the maps demonstrate the proposed Districts (Exhibit A) and the proposed District maps with current District boundaries in black (Exhibit B). Additionally, the population summaries demonstrate the population deviations in each election District due to the change. "Deviation" is the technical term utilized to describe the degree to which a plan fails to apportion population evenly among Districts. Although Districts should ideally be as even as possible, other constraints often make this impossible. Thus, for local governments, a deviation less than 10% has been held to be presumptively valid [*Voinovich v. Quilter*, 507 U.S. 146 (1993); *see also Abate v Mundt*, 403 U.S. 182 (1971)]. One summary is based on population of each new District (Exhibit C). The other summary is based on "Voting Age Population" or "VAP" (Exhibit D). The summaries state that the population deviation range is -1.04% to 0.91%. While this is an Ordinance, it is actually an Ordinance amending our Charter via the Home Rule Reapportionment Statute of O.C.G.A. §36-35-4.1. To accomplish the same, we must adopt (not just read) at two regular consecutive Council Meetings which has been scheduled for January 19, 2023 and February 9, 2023. In addition to this, a notice containing a synopsis of this Ordinance is being published in the Valdosta Daily Times for four weeks beginning on January 15, 2023. The Ordinance is also on file and open for inspection at City Hall and the Lowndes County Superior Clerk's office. Mark Barber, City Manager, recommended that Council approve the First Reading of the Ordinance amending our Charter via the Home Rule Reapportionment Statute of O.C.G.A. §36-35-4.1.

A MOTION by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Gibbs, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to approve the First Reading of an Ordinance for Reapportionment of the Valdosta City Council Districts.

LOCAL FUNDING AND REQUESTS

Consideration of a request for Grant Administration and Engineering Design and Oversight for the Waterline Distribution System Improvements associated with the new Water Treatment Plant No. 2.

Bradley Eyre, Director of Utilities, stated that on October 26, 2022, the City of Valdosta Utilities Department submitted a Georgia American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Grant Application for the Design and Construction of a new Water Treatment Plant to be located on the south side of the City. On February 22, 2022, the City Utilities Department received a notification from the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget (OPB) that we had a preliminary Grant award in the amount of \$12,075,000 pending approval of a final budget. On December 22, 2022, we received a notification that our final budget was approved by OPB. Since such time as the Utilities Department had been notified of the preliminary Grant award, the Utilities Department began the progress of preliminary planning activities to begin Site Acquisition and Plan Design Processes. The City was approved for a Grant Award of \$12,075,000. Along with the City's matching funds of \$4,025,000 (25%), the combined funds budgeted for the new Water Treatment Plant No. 2 total \$16,100,000. Turnipseed (GBT) Engineers was selected by the City Utilities Department (on the City's approved Engineering Consultants list) to provide Grant Administration and Engineering Design and oversight for Waterline Distribution System Improvements associated with the new Water Treatment Plant No. 2. At the Utilities Department request, GBT Engineers has provided a cost proposal for consulting and design fees estimated at \$341,755. Bradley Eyre, Director of Utilities, recommended that Council approve the Design Fee Proposal submitted by Turnipseed (GBT) Engineers in the amount of \$341,755 for Grant Administration and Engineering Design and Oversight for the Waterline Distribution System Improvements associated with the new Water Treatment Plant No. 2.

A MOTION by Councilman Gibbs, seconded by Councilwoman Miller-Cody, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to approve the Design Fee Proposal submitted by Turnipseed (GBT) Engineers in the amount of \$341,755 for Grant Administration and Engineering Design and Oversight for the Waterline Distribution System Improvements associated with the new Water Treatment Plant No. 2.

Consideration of a request to purchase structural firefighting gear for the Valdosta Fire Department.

Fire Chief Brian Boutwell stated that the goal of the Valdosta Fire Department has been for many years to provide members of Operations Division with two sets of structural firefighting gear. Structural firefighting gear is the heavy, protective clothing worn by firefighters while working on incident scenes. This gear provides members with protection against moisture, flames, and heat. Each set is custom fit to each firefighter and must adhere to National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standard 1971. The Standard requires that structural firefighting gear be removed from service when it exceeds ten years of life. After typical use, the gear is thoroughly cleaned to remove smoke, debris, and other carcinogens. The gear is then dried with special machines at the Fire Station before being placed back in service. If another call for service is received before the gear is properly cleaned, firefighters are forced to wear the soiled, wet gear to answer the emergency call. Having clean gear is not only important for the health of our personnel, but also to the customers we serve. This is the reasoning for purchasing gear as a progressive step in providing two sets for each member in the Operations Division. This purchase will not fulfill the goal, but it is the next step in reaching our goal. The Valdosta Fire Department currently has \$62,700 in their current year Budget to purchase structural firefighting gear. The Fire Department tested certain brands that meet the current NFPA standards in the field under real working conditions. Globe was selected as the gear that met our firefighters needs while providing a top tier ten-year warranty. The Fire Department would like to request the purchase of 20 sets of gear (pants \$1,270.48 each and coats \$1,632.49 each) from Ten-8 Fire & Safety Equipment of GA in the amount of \$58,059.40 utilizing the NPP.GOV National Contract that is utilized by government agencies across the nation. The Purchasing Ordinance allows this type of purchase and the pricing offered in the contract is both competitive and fair in the opinion of the Fire Department. The past prices for the firefighting gear was \$2,355.13 in 2022, \$1,947.21 in 2021, and \$1,972.70 in 2020. The vendor has already stated that we should expect another 5% increase in April of 2023. Fire Chief Brian Boutwell recommended that Council approve the purchase of 20 sets of gear (pants \$1,270.48 each and coats \$1,632.49 each) from Ten-8 Fire & Safety Equipment of GA in the amount of \$58,059.40 utilizing the NPP.GOV National Contract.

A MOTION by Councilwoman Miller-Cody, seconded by Councilman Gibbs, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to approve the purchase of 20 sets of gear (pants \$1,270.48 each and coats \$1,632.49 each) from Ten-8 Fire & Safety Equipment of GA in the amount of \$58,059.40 utilizing the NPP.GOV National Contract for the Valdosta Fire Department.

Consideration of a request to approve an Executive Search Firm for the search and selection of a new City Manager for the City of Valdosta.

Mayor Matheson stated that the current City Manager is scheduled to retire on January 31, 2023. As the City prepared to search for the City Manager's replacement, the Georgia Municipal Association provided a list of three Executive Search Firms. Upon the request of the Mayor and City Council at the January 5, 2023 Council meeting, the three identified Executive Search Firms were contacted to submit proposals for the purpose to secure services for the Executive search for a City Manager. On January 8, 2021, the City of Valdosta contacted three Executive Search Firms and requested their assistance in the search for a City Manager. This request included that each provide a proposal for service to include a fee structure. On January 13, 2023, the City of Valdosta received three competitive proposals (included in this package) from the three qualified Consultants/Firms. Mayor/Council was asked to review and evaluate the proposals, and to select the most qualified Consultant. The three Consultants/Firms are as follows: (1) Slavin Management Consultants, Norcross, GA (not to exceed \$24,280.75), (2) Mercer Group and Associates, Athens, GA (not to exceed \$21,500), and (3) Colin Baenziger & Associates, Daytona Beach Shores, FL (\$34,500). Mayor Matheson entertained a motion from Council.

A MOTION by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Norton, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to approve the proposal submitted by the Mercer Group and Associates in the amount not to exceed \$21,500 for the search and selection of a new City Manager for the City of Valdosta.

CITIZENS TO BE HEARD

Alvin Payton, Jr., 3211 Tyndall Drive, stated that he wanted to thank Mark Barber for being a great City Manager for the City of Valdosta. He was on the City Council for 12 years and he and Mark walked about 1½ miles on Forrest Street in 90-degree weather just to make sure the limbs did not fall on Forrest Street. He thanked Mark Barber for his service.

Von Shipman, 3312 Brittan Drive, stated that he found out today that the Safety Projects he had asked about several months ago are in the process of being let. He encouraged Council to put as much pressure as possible on the Georgia Department of Transportation to get the pedestrian crosswalks installed. Also, Mr. Shipman stated that he thinks the world of Mark Barber and when he was the City Engineer in Thomasville in 1996, Mark left Valdosta to come to Thomasville to be their Finance Director. Mr. Shipman stated that when he had the opportunity to come to Valdosta, he asked Mark if this would be a good place to work. Mark told him he would love Valdosta, the City Manager, and the Council and he did. He thanked Mark Barber for his years of service.

CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

Mark Barber, City Manager, stated that he could not believe this day is here. He has spent more than half of his life in this building in different floors and offices. He started working here when he was 26 years old and it has been wonderful. When Council made him the City Manager five years ago, that was the highlight of his career. It has been an honor and privilege to serve in that capacity. He is a cheerleader for this community because there are so many good things happening here. He hopes that he has been a part of that and has helped things to progress. It has been a wonderful opportunity for him and his family and he is leaving his heart in Valdosta. He thanked the Mayor and Council for their support and he is very appreciative of that. The hardest part of this departure is leaving his friends and employees. They are a wonderful and talented group of people and they have worked hard to create a family atmosphere. You are left in wonderful hands and he has nothing but best wishes for his good friend Richard Hardy, the new Interim City Manager.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Mayor Matheson stated that Mark Barber is the only City Manager he has ever known. He had heard about a guy named Larry Hanson before but he only knew Mark Barber. Mark is the only one who ever pushed a project to fruition and he is the only one that he went to time and time again. Mayor Matheson stated that the good news is that he goes to Adel every Wednesday to broadcast so he has invited Mark to be on his program to talk about the City of Adel.

Councilman Carroll stated that he and Mark Barber have been working together now for 16 years and they have not killed each other yet though there may have been a couple of times that Mark may have wanted to strangle him. They have done a lot of good work together and he has done an amazing job as City Manager because coming in behind Larry Hanson was no easy task. Councilman Carroll stated that we will miss you and we wish you all the best.

Councilman Norton thanked Mark Barber for his leadership and for his years of service. He has done a great job as City Manager and we will all miss him. Councilman Norton wished him well in his retirement and as the new City Manager of Adel.

Councilwoman Miller-Cody stated that she wanted to thank Mark Barber for all that he has done for the City of Valdosta. When she came on Council, Mark was coming in as the new City Manager and he nurtured her. He allowed her to come into his office and scream and cry and that stayed in his office. That is what you call a leader. Councilwoman Miller-Cost stated that she will miss him and wished him all the best as the City Manager of Adel.

Councilman Gibbs stated that five years ago he was elected to Council and his first big decision was hiring Mark Barber as the City Manager. That was a great decision. Councilman Gibbs thanked Mark for his mentorship in his early years on the City Council. Mark made sure that he understood how things worked and how it works for everyone in Valdosta and not just certain Districts. The City of Adel is getting not only a great City Manager but a great man. He thanked Mark for his leadership and for everything that he has done for them.

Councilman McIntyre stated that he has been fortunate to work with Mark Barber over the last few years. He would walk into Mark's office with his list of demands and Mark would nod and smile and tell him no. He thanked Mark for his leadership and his service to the City of Valdosta.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Matheson entertained a motion for adjournment.

A **MOTION** by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Norton, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to adjourn the January 19, 2023 Regular Meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:13 p.m. to meet again in Regular Session on Thursday, February 9, 2023.

City Clerk, City of Valdosta

Mayor, City of Valdosta