

**MINUTES**  
**MEETING OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL**  
**5:30 P.M., THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2023**  
**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: Thomas McIntyre, Andy Gibbs, Eric Howard, Sandra Tooley, Tim Carroll, Ben Norton, and Vivian Miller-Cody. The invocation was given by Councilman Ben Norton, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The minutes of the Regular Meeting of August 24, 2023 were approved by unanimous consent (7-0) of the Council.

**BIDS, CONTRACTS, AGREEMENTS, AND EXPENDITURES**

Consideration of bids for new lighting at the Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks & Recreation Authority Main Office Gymnasium. This request was tabled at the August 24, 2023 Regular Council Meeting until the next Regular Scheduled City Council Meeting.

Chuck Dinkins, Finance Director, stated that the current lighting system at the Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks and Recreation Authority (VLPRA) Main Office gymnasium at 1901 Barack Obama Boulevard is 15 years old and is need of updating to accommodate the current level of league and tournament play. The gymnasium at the VLPRA Main Office is in need of new lighting to improve tournament play and reduce energy and repair costs. The VLPRA has obtained a quote for new LED lighting from Musco Sports Lighting in the amount of \$32,000. The quote was obtained under a SourceWell contract (041123-MLS). It includes equipment, design, and layout of the system, and a 10-year warranty with on-site labor. The cost of the system will be partially covered by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) allocation to the VLPRA and the balance will come from SPLOST VIII. Council allocated \$245,000 from ARPA to cover the basketball court floor at Mildred Hunter Center as well as the lighting for the gymnasium at the Main Office. The basketball court floors were approved at the August 10, 2023 City Council Meeting in the amount of \$225,250 leaving \$19,750 to cover the lighting system. This means that \$12,250 will need to come from SPLOST VIII. Chuck Dinkins, Finance Director, recommended that Council approve the Musco Sports Lighting quote in the amount of \$32,000 with \$19,750 funded from ARPA and the balance of \$12,250 funded from SPLOST VIII.

**A MOTION** by Councilman Howard, seconded by Councilman Gibbs, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to approve the Musco Sports Lighting quote in the amount of \$32,000 with \$19,750 funded from ARPA and the balance of \$12,250 funded from SPLOST VIII for new lighting at the Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks & Recreation Authority Main Office Gymnasium.

Consideration of a request to approve the extension of an Agreement with the Exchange Club for placement of benches in the City of Valdosta.

Ben O'Dowd, City Engineer, stated that the Exchange Club has been installing benches at various places in the City for the past 67 years. The revenue received for the advertisements placed on these benches has benefited many community improvement projects throughout the City. The current Agreement states that the number shall not exceed 60 benches on the City right-of-way. On January 7, 2016, Council voted to adopt the current Bench Agreement for two years. The current agreement expired at midnight on January 7, 2018. The bench inventory list was received on November 29, 2017. The list identified the existing locations of 59 benches within the City right-of-way (below the agreement limit of 60 within the right-of-way) with 6 benches on private property and 6 benches in the County jurisdiction. All locations submitted were accurately listed and all of the 59 benches have been verified by the Engineering Staff as to their exact location within the City right-of-way. Please note that locations 8 and 12 were removed. It is noted that the existing bench locations are not currently equally distributed among the 6 City Council Districts. There are no benches in District 1, 10 benches in District 2, 10 benches in District 3, 11

benches in District 4, 15 benches in District 5, and 18 benches in District 6. These District number totals account for the 59 benches in the City right-of-way and 6 benches within the City limits located on private property. On December 10, 2015, this Agreement came up for renewal before the City Council. A candid discussion ensued and several points were brought up which were targeted at the Bench Program itself and not directed to the many good merits of the Exchange Club or charities. Ultimately, a motion was made to table making a final decision for 30 days to allow Staff ample time to research the facts related to the discussion and to provide each City Council member additional time to carefully consider the facts and muster their thoughts before a final vote. Under the current Land Development Regulations (LDR), signs are prohibited on street furniture and all signs, except where specifically otherwise authorized, are to be located on or over private property outside the right-of-way. This Agreement, if authorized, does conflict with Section 230-7 and Section 230-9 of the LDR as follows: (1) LDR Chapter 230, Sign Regulations, Section 230-7, Prohibited Signs - The following signs and devices are found to be unlawful and are prohibited within the City Limits: (L) Signs located on waste containers, or other forms of street furniture. (2) Section 230-9, Sign Standards, (A) Location in General - (1) All signs shall be located only on or over private property and outside any street or railroad right-of-way, except where specifically otherwise authorized by this Chapter 230. The Sign Ordinance was adopted on September 19, 1992 and stated that signs were not allowed on street furniture and where signs could be located. Over the years we have received calls from business owners and citizens to remove and relocate benches for various reasons including crowding or obstruction on the right-of-way, sidewalks or cross walks, blocking sight distances at intersections or driveways, loitering, and safety or aesthetic reasons; however, in each and every case the Exchange Club has been very responsive and has come out and corrected all situations. Ben O'Dowd, City Engineer, recommended that Council approve an extension of the Bench Agreement to expire December 31, 2024 with no additional renewal.

A **MOTION** was made by Councilwoman Tooley that we continue to have the Agreement with the organization without having the extension to expire. Councilwoman Miller-Cody seconded the motion. Councilman Carroll stated that for clarity there would be no time that this Agreement would have to come back before Council for approval again. Councilwoman Tooley stated no. Mayor Matheson stated that we can keep the December 31, 2024. Councilman Carroll stated that would need to be reflected in the motion. Councilwoman Tooley stated that she would revise the motion to say that we approve the extension of the Bench Agreement to expire December 31, 2024 and remove the no additional renewal. Councilwoman Miller-Cody was in agreement. The motion was approved (5-2) with Councilman Norton and Councilman Carroll voting in opposition.

Consideration of bids for removal of debris from the City of Valdosta right-of-ways that was left in the aftermath of Hurricane Idalia.

Chuck Dinkins, Finance Director, stated that Hurricane Idalia hit the City of Valdosta on August 30, 2023 leaving significant damage and widespread debris in its wake. The City is faced with the collection and disposal of approximately 400,000 cubic yards of debris from its right-of-ways. This debris constitutes a hazard to public health and safety and needs to be removed expeditiously. The City lacks the capacity to collect the quantity of debris on the ground and lacks the expertise to document the collection efforts in accordance with FEMA standards. The City will need to engage qualified firms to remove and dispose of the debris on the ground as well as to monitor and document the effort expended in accordance Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Policy. The City solicited bids for debris removal in order to remove the public safety threat posed by the debris fields and piles left by Hurricane Idalia and the efforts to clear public right-of-ways in the storm's aftermath. In addition, this will allow the City to collect debris moved to the right-of-way in the City-wide cleanup effort. The City received compliant bids from the following: (1) KDF, (2) DRC, (3) TFR, (4) Ceres, (5) Crowder Gulf, (6) Ashbritt, (7) CTC, and (8) SDR. The bids were evaluated by a Committee consisting of the City Manager, the Public Works Director, and the Finance Manager. The proposals were evaluated on the proposed fee, the mobilization of crews and machinery, and capacity to perform the removal. After tabulating average scores, two firms scored well above the remaining bidders and were separated from each other by less than 1 point on a hundred point scale. The City Manager requested estimated times of completion from these firms as a tie breaker. Ashbritt provided a more expedited timeline for completion. Based on the Committee's scoring and the estimated timelines for completion, the Committee recommends Ashbritt be awarded a contract for the removal and disposal of debris from the corporate limits of the City of Valdosta. Chuck Dinkins, Finance Director, recommended that Council approve the bid from Ashbritt in the amount of \$7.50/cubic yard for debris removal.

A **MOTION** by Councilman Gibbs, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to approve the bid submitted by Ashbritt in the amount of \$7.50/cubic yard for debris removal from the City of Valdosta right-of-ways that was left in the aftermath of Hurricane Idalia.

Consideration of bids for debris removal monitoring from City of Valdosta right-of-ways due to the aftermath of Hurricane Idalia.

Chuck Dinkins, Finance Director, stated that Hurricane Idalia hit the City of Valdosta on August 30, 2023, leaving significant damage and widespread debris in its wake. The City is faced with the collection and disposal of approximately 400,000 cubic yards of debris from its right-of-ways. This debris constitutes a hazard to public health and safety and needs to be removed expeditiously. The City lacks the capacity to collect the quantity of debris on the ground and lacks the expertise to document the collection efforts in accordance with Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) guidelines. The City will need to engage a qualified firm to remove and dispose of the debris on the ground. In order to fully comply with FEMA standards and documentation requirements, the City will need to monitor and document the effort expended in accordance with FEMA Policy. In order to accomplish this, a qualified Monitoring Firm will need to be retained in conjunction with a debris removal Contractor. The City solicited bids for debris removal monitoring in order to document removal of the debris fields and piles left by Hurricane Idalia and the efforts to clear public right-of-ways in the aftermath of the storm. The chosen firm will be responsible for producing documentation in accordance with FEMA Policy in order to properly apply for reimbursement of expenses incurred for debris removal. The City received bids from the following: (1) GMC, (2) Debris Tech, and Thompson Consulting. A Selection Committee composed of the City Manager, the Finance Director, and the Public Works Director reviewed the responses. The bids were evaluated on firm qualifications, history with similar projects, key project staff and approach, management and reporting systems, utilization of automated debris tracking and reporting, and the proposed fee. The fee for monitoring is based on unit costs per contractor employee. Each firm provided an hourly cost for each type of employee. The total cost would vary with time but is estimated to be 25-30% of the removal cost. All three firms scored highly but the Selection Committee scored Thompson Consulting the highest on the strength of their firm and staff qualifications as well as their history with large projects of this nature. Chuck Dinkins, Finance Director, recommended that Council approve the bid from Thompson Consulting for debris removal monitoring at the proposed rate schedule.

A **MOTION** by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Norton, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to approve the bid submitted by Thompson Consulting in the amount of \$2.5 million for debris removal monitoring from City of Valdosta right-of-ways due to the aftermath of Hurricane Idalia.

## **BOARDS, COMMISSIONS, AUTHORITIES, AND ADVISORY COMMITTEES**

Consideration of appointments to the Valdosta Tree Commission.

Mayor Matheson stated that the Valdosta Tree Commission has three members, David Nelson, Kerry Watts, and Monica Haynes, whose terms expired on September 6, 2023. Mr. Watts and Ms. Haynes have expressed an interest in being reappointed; however, Ms. Haynes missed the Board Application deadline. She will be submitting her Board Application in the near future. Mr. Nelson has not expressed an interest in being reappointed. These appointments were advertised according to the Boards, Commissions, Authorities, and Advisory Committees Policy that was adopted by Mayor and Council. The applicants are Matthew Inman - Civil Engineer, Advanced Engineering Services, and Kerry Watts - Horticulture Instructor, Wiregrass Georgia Technical College.

Mayor Matheson stated that since there are two applicants for three slots and if Council has no objection, Matthew Inman and Kerry Watts will be appointed by acclamation to serve a term of four years on the Valdosta Tree Commission. There were no objections from Council.

Consideration of an appointment to the Valdosta-Lowndes County Airport Authority.

Mayor Matheson stated that the Valdosta-Lowndes County Airport Authority has a member, Ronnie Pierce, who resigned recently due to personal reasons. His term will expire on May 21, 2025. This appointment was advertised according to the Boards, Commissions, Authorities, and Advisory Committees Policy that was adopted

by Mayor and Council. The only person to apply for this slot was Michael Bourgoin, Executive Director of Valdosta-Lowndes County Habitat for Humanity.

Mayor Matheson stated that since there was only one applicant and if Council has no objection, Michael Bourgoin will be appointed by acclamation to serve the unexpired term of Ronnie Pierce on the Valdosta-Lowndes County Airport Authority. There were no objections from Council.

### **CITIZENS TO BE HEARD**

Tauheedah Marteen, Small Business Association, stated that she is here to help FEMA assist with the declaration to provide low interest loans not only to businesses of any size during this disaster but homeowners and renters, non-profit organizations as well. As you know by now, the Disaster Recovery Centers are open and we are waiting for people to come in there to get help with their application. The SBA does have stand-alone business recovery centers as well and you do not have to be a business to get help in those centers. Any SBA applicant can go into anywhere SBA is to get help with their application, upload documents, and help with reconsiderations if they are at that point. Anything they need, the SBA is there to help. They are at the Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce, the Civic Center, and set up with FEMA. They have a homeowner and renter side of SBA and a couple of tables for business owners to come as well. She just wanted to let everyone know that the help and resources are there. She encouraged homeowners and renters to register with FEMA first. If FEMA refers that applicant to the SBA, you will need to go ahead and submit the SBA loan application even if you think you do not want a loan. She cannot stress that enough because if for some reason, they cannot help them with a low interest loan paid over 30 years, they will refer them right back to FEMA for additional grant consideration. If they do not complete the SBA loan, then unfortunately the referral process ends. They will be leaving money on the table and they want to make sure that people get a whole community resource. FEMA is not the only agency and SBA is not the only agency. It really does take a whole community for them to repair and recover. The phone number to call is 1-800-621-2955 if you need to get in touch with SBA. They are trying to get into the underserved communities and that they understand where they can get help.

Lillie Roberts, 8 Lantana Circle, stated that she is here for the elderly and the disabled people in Valdosta. She has an Aunt who needs a roof on her house. She filled out an application for the Community Development Block Grant in January and then again in October and November of last year. She just received a letter dated August 21, 2023 stating that the funds were not there. She currently has a tarp on her house. Ms. Roberts stated that she called the CDBG, which took forever, but finally got someone in the Mayor's Office to transfer her call. She did get to talk to someone but she did not get any satisfaction. She was told that all the money was gone. She asked if there was a way that they could have a line for people who are disabled and cannot stand in line all day to get this stuff. She was told by the Director that they could not do that. Ms. Roberts inquired about all the applications that they have to keep. She was told that they wait until everything is done and then the applications are destroyed so people will have to sign up again in another year. She is concerned that the elderly are being left behind. She does not know who polices this stuff and went to the City's website and it says there is a Board. She inquired as to whether the Board makes a decision as to where all this money goes and how people are getting it. She sees places around town that people have gotten roofs. On her Aunt's house, there is a blue tarp and a black tarp. The rain came and the roof is still messed up. She inquired as to how the Grants work, who polices the people, and how is the money distributed. She was told that it is on a first come first serve basis. She told the Director that she was going to write to HUD. Her remark was that HUD was not going to give her any money. She does not want any money but just wants a roof for her Aunt because she is disabled. She is here for the elderly people who cannot get help on the CDBG funds.

Janice Strickland, 2105 Pin Oak Circle, stated that when Hurricane Idalia came through, she and six of her neighbors on her street were flooded. They had water up to their knees in every room and in the garage. They lost everything. The neighbor who lives in front of her house has been flooded out twice because of the ditch that runs in their neighborhood. She has pictures from four years ago that show how the water comes up when it rains really hard. They would like to know what can be done about it. She thinks the ditch should be bigger and deeper and possibly put some pipes there so the water can run through the pipes.

Mary Moye, 620 Monroe Street, stated that she agrees with Ms. Roberts completely. Her sister has been trying to get this for over ten years. People have come behind her with houses that were not as bad as her house. She is also here to represent Monroe Street about the property on West Street for the apartment. They have not heard anything from anyone concerning that. Their agreement was to lease to own these houses and not apartments. She would like for the City to look into that.

Christina McBride, Family Support Specialist with the Perinatal Health Program at the South Health District Baby Love Healthy Start, stated that she has a dire situation with a lot of her clients and it is the issue of housing. Right now, she has a mother who is seven months pregnant and she is on the brink of homelessness. She has tried every local resource to get her temporary housing until she is able to get a place at Hudson Docket. She would like to know if there are any other resources that she could pass along to the mother in order to make sure that she has a safe and secure place to lay her head at night and deliver her baby safely.

Renee Council, 1202 Lakeland Avenue, Long Leaf Subdivision, they applied to FEMA but they are not getting enough funds to repair their house. She inquired as to whether there was any way the City could help get their houses back together. There are at least six houses that are being gutted out to nothing. She had sewage back up and she lost everything in her house.

Hazel Edgecomb, 2100 Pin Oak Circle, Long Leaf Subdivision, stated that when she moved here from Miami she asked if she was in a flood zone and she was told that she was not. She lives in a four bedroom house with three bathrooms and she lost her entire house. The sewage backed up in house and she had just spent a lot of money remodeling her house. She had to get her grandchildren to help get the rug out. Something needs to be done about the canal in the back. At first, they had prisoners cutting it but now they have private on it. There will be another storm and something will happen again. They knew something was wrong because for the whole week they had men down there. They do not have money and she is going to have to borrow money. She is on a fixed income with her retirement and social security. She has not been in her bed for 23 days because there is nothing in her house. She has to go somewhere to take a shower and eat and that is not fair. When she tried to get a dumpster, the City said she had to pay \$250 down and then \$175 three times. She understands that she has to pay but she should not have had to pay all that. The City said she could not take it out and put it in her yard. They said it has to go into a dumpster.

Kelly Saxton, 8 Baldwin Place, stated that she represented the local Homeless Task Force and thanked Council for their efforts and response to the disaster that we had. We are a community with an emphasis on unity. One of the things that she has been encountering during this time is that we have approximately 100 people who have been displaced. That means that trees have fallen on their houses and they have no where to go. She has seen people living in their vehicles because they have no where to go and they get ready for work. These are working class individuals. We have School Teachers who have had trees fall and damage their furniture but they still show up for work. A lot of people are displaced and she has been calling to see if they can get FEMA here with some trailers for individuals to live in. Some individuals are remaining on their property and staying in their vehicles while some are taking a risk and staying in a structurally damaged house. The shelters are full and there are no beds. She wanted to see if the City has a plan to see what FEMA can come and do. At one time she heard they were in Tallahassee. She is trying to see what we can do to keep individuals who were literally one disaster away from their lives being destroyed. She inquired as to how we can get housing and other things. Temporary is good. Some landlords are still charging rent even though people have not been in the house for 21 days. We need some regulations and stabilization.

Louis Gordon, 2 Shanna Circle, stated that we have all been affected by the storm. Valdosta is not used to weather like that; however, it will not be the last time. These storms are going to get worse. One thing he saw was organizations going door-to-door talking to people and chopping down trees. There is a lot of stuff that we can help with. A lot of people do not know where the resources are so he is coming to Council to make a network. We need some better education on how to handle stuff during a storm. He is always ready to help. Also, he grew up in the area around Vallotton Park and Tom's Corner Park is becoming a hangout for unsavory activities. He has noticed that there are a large number of homes that have been uninhabited for years. He inquired as to whether there was some way that we can enforce the property owners to keep the houses up because it ends up where they have

degraded in quality and makes the neighborhood look bad. If the neighborhood looks worse then you treat it worse. If the neighborhood looks better then we lower the crime. People can take pride in their homes. He would love to work with them.

Warren Lee, 1103 West Magnolia Street, stated that he is the General Manager at 97.5 FM. He had two big Oak trees that had fallen from Hightower Park in his yard during the storm. They missed his house by about five feet. Neither he nor his wife could get out. He notified his City Council person who came around and observed what had happened. His disappointment was that the City Councilman then came back and told him that the City Manager or Assistant City Manager stated that his situation was not an emergency. The two big Oak trees had him and his wife blocked in their home and they could not get out. If an EMS had to come see them they would not be able to get in. Now that we know a storm can hit Valdosta, we need to create a post plan and make sure you have something in place that the citizens of Valdosta can contact you and let you know what is happening in each area. He is not a genius but he believes that the Mayor and Council can get that done. There is a house that sits at the corner of Hightower and Dunwoody that has been barred up for years. He owns property on Hightower. Someone broke into one of his rental properties and the City Manager stayed on him forever and a day to get it repaired. He is asking the City to be consistent in enforcing their rules.

### **CITY MANAGER'S REPORT**

Richard Hardy, City Manager, stated that on Friday, September 22, 2023 the Doors to Freedom Unveiling will take place at 9:00 a.m. on the lawn in front of City Hall. Also, on September 22, 2023, the Valdosta State University Family Fun Night will take place from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at Unity Park. On September 25-29, 2023, Valdosta OnDemand will offer free rides to everyone. On Thursday, October 5, 2023, the Valdosta Police Department will have open testing at 6:00 p.m. On October 6, 2023, there will be a Costume Crawl at 7:00 p.m. in Unity Park along with live music by Mainstreet Band.

### **COUNCIL COMMENTS**

Councilman Howard stated that after listening to the people who spoke tonight we have a community that is hurting. He inquired as to whether we could waive the fee for special pickups. Richard Hardy, City Manager, stated that there is no fee for anything that can be placed on the ground; however, anything that has to go into the roll-offs will have a charge. Citizens can file for reimbursement through FEMA or through their insurance.

Councilwoman Tooley stated that she was delighted to see citizens come in and speak up. She always tells them to come to the Council Meeting and have their voice heard. If they have a concern, they will find that the City is working with them a lot. She asked the citizens to keep coming.

Mayor Matheson stated that there were ten organizational meetings at the Lowndes County Emergency Operations Center leading up to the storm including the night before with a game plan for First Responders and Public Works crews from both the City and the County. There was a post plan as well. The only time we took our crews off the street was for three hours at the peak of the storm. After that, they went right back out and stood in chest deep water trying to clear culverts and trees and keep houses from flooding. The post plan for assistance was executed very well and the EOC had a phone number, 671-2790, and they took in all the services and all of the volunteers. When a call came in for assistance, they would match them up with the groups non-stop. It was amazing to watch. There were thousands of calls for assistance. This was a storm that we have never experienced in our 166 year history. It was a Category 2 Hurricane and we executed very well. We have a post meeting next week to talk about how we can do it better and we appreciate all of the citizens comments.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

Mayor Matheson entertained a motion for adjournment.

A **MOTION** by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Norton, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to adjourn the September 21, 2023 Regular Meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:24 p.m. to meet again in Regular Session on Thursday, October 5, 2023.

---

City Clerk, City of Valdosta

---

Mayor, City of Valdosta