

MINUTES
SPECIAL CALLED MEETING OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL
5:15 P.M., THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2023
COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY HALL

OPENING CEREMONIES

Mayor Scott James Matheson called the Special Called Meeting of the Valdosta City Council to order at 5:15 p.m. Council members present were: Thomas McIntyre, Andy Gibbs, Eric Howard, and Tim Carroll. Councilman Ben Norton, Councilwoman Sandra Tooley, and Councilwoman Vivian Miller-Cody arrived late. The invocation was given by Councilman Andy Gibbs, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS

RESOLUTION NO. 2023-13, A RESOLUTION FOR THE PRIVATE SALE OF MATHIS CITY AUDITORIUM AT A NEGOTIATED PRICE

Consideration of a Resolution authorizing the City of Valdosta to apply for the Georgia Department of Transportation 5307 Grant Funding for Fiscal Year 2025 to continue the Valdosta OnDemand Public Transit System.

Chuck Dinkins, Finance Director, stated that the City of Valdosta identified a need for public transit and is working with the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) to continue to fill this need annually. The City of Valdosta has applied for 5307 Grant Funding from GDOT for Fiscal Year 2025 to continue Valdosta OnDemand Public Transit System. Current funding is available for expenses incurred during the current year. In order to maintain Grant Funding, the City must make application for a new 5307 Grant each fiscal year. A Resolution has been prepared authorizing the City to apply for GDOT funding for the upcoming fiscal year. The Grant will cover 50% of operational costs as defined by the Grant as well as 80% of capital costs. In addition, the State will cover 10% of certain costs until funding is exhausted. The City's total share of the Project should be approximately 30%. The remaining 70% would be covered by Federal and State participation to a maximum of \$1,578,860. Chuck Dinkins, Finance Director, recommended that Council approve the Resolution authorizing the City of Valdosta to apply for the Georgia Department of Transportation 5307 Grant Funding for Fiscal Year 2025 to continue the Valdosta OnDemand Public Transit System.

A MOTION by Councilman Gibbs, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously approved (4-0) to enact Resolution No. 2023-13, a Resolution authorizing the City of Valdosta to apply for the Georgia Department of Transportation 5307 Grant Funding for Fiscal Year 2025 to continue the Valdosta OnDemand Public Transit System, the complete text of which will be found in Resolution Book VII.

LOCAL FUNDING AND REQUESTS

Consideration of a request to approve the revised American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) proposed Projects and allocation amounts.

Richard Hardy, City Manager, stated that the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFR), a Part of the American Rescue Plan, delivered \$350 billion to State, Local, and Tribal Governments across the United States to support their response to and recovery from the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. The City of Valdosta received a total allocation of \$16,254,692 from this Program. The City has expended a total of \$9,453,797.63 of these funds with \$6,800,894.37 remaining. Following is a list of the Project's original allocation, revisions, expenditures, and remaining budget is outlined for reference: (1) Griffin Avenue Housing Project - \$3,300,000, (2) City of Valdosta (Facilities, Technology, etc.) - \$1,909,858, (3) AARPA Project Manager - \$250,000/Delay/Hurricane Idalia, (4) Land Bank Funding (4 Years for Executive Director) - \$120,000, (5) Land Bank Authority Seed Funding - \$150,000, (6) Purchase of Properties on South Patterson & Surrounding Parcels - \$1,300,000/Delay/Hurricane Idalia, (7) Small Business Development - \$2,008,442, (8) Valdosta On-Demand - \$500,000, (9) Neighborhood Rehabs - Housing Rehab (Paint, Weatherization, etc.) - \$850,000, (10) Mildred Hunter Center (Lighting & Court Replacement) - \$245,000, (11) Non-Profit Allocation - \$955,000, (12) Premium Pay to Employees - \$3,214,584, (13) Savannah Avenue Train Project - \$475,000/City's Match/Hurricane Idalia, (14)

Second Harvest assistance - \$926,808, and (15) Library Subsidy - \$50,000. The total current ARPA allocation is \$16,254,692. The reallocation of ARPA funds is for the purpose of funding the debris removal caused by Hurricane Idalia. This reallocation will be more of a delay based on the projected reimbursement by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). This reallocation will be placed back to its original destination once reimbursed. The requested re-allocations are as follows: (1) ARPA Project Manager - \$250,000 – delay, (2) Purchase of South Patterson Property - \$1,282,900 remaining - partial local match and partial delay, and (3) Train Project - \$475,000 (City's local match). The total reallocation of ARPA funds is \$2,007,900. Richard Hardy, City Manager, recommended that Council approve the proposed revision to ARPA Projects and allocation amounts.

Councilman McIntyre stated that ARPA funding generally comes with stipulations on how the money should be spent and inquired as to whether they were outside the guidelines by pulling this money back and spending it somewhere else. Richard Hardy, City Manager, stated that they were not outside the guidelines. As they looked at these items, we have the option of utilizing them as needed. This is a natural disaster and we can utilize this funding. We have the option of spending this money prior to the 2026 deadline. As we spend the funds and as we are reimbursed, the money will be replaced into the General Fund and we can use it as needed. Councilman McIntyre inquired as to how certain we are that we would be reimbursed the full amount. Richard Hardy stated that we are not sure on the amount, but we need to utilize this funding to take care of the problem on hand.

Councilman Gibbs inquired as to where they were at on narrowing down the Contractors and deciding who we are going to go with. He also inquired as to whether we were going with one Contractor or several. Richard Hardy, City Manager, stated that as soon as Council approves the reallocation of funding and we review several contracts, then a final decision will be made.

Councilwoman Tooley inquired about the reimbursement and whether Valdosta has been declared a State of Disaster. Mayor Matheson stated that we have not. We have been declared locally. We did ours the day before and the Governor did his declaration the day before the storm hit. The Governor has now made the official ask yesterday with a 30-page document and we are now crossing our fingers and waiting. Councilwoman Tooley stated that everyone is doing a wonderful job with the cleanup and inquired as to how much funding would be needed. Mayor Matheson stated that the City Manager realized at the beginning the enormous amounts of debris we would be up against and that it was something that we could not handle even with our six claw trucks and our manpower. Mayor Matheson stated that it was a \$2 million total. Councilwoman Tooley inquired as to where the money is going to come from if we do not get reimbursed. Mayor Matheson stated that he was confident that we would get the money back and it will come from ARPA funds. Councilwoman Tooley stated that when they say they are using ARPA money, they have to use it for what they said and inquired as to whether they were going to get the \$2 million back. Mayor Matheson stated that we are using it for exactly what we are stating, which is cleanup, and we are hopeful that we will get that money back. Councilwoman Tooley stated that we may need more than that. Mayor Matheson stated that with the scope and scale of Hurricane Idalia, it could break a community. If we do not get that Federal designation, then it could break a community. Councilwoman Tooley inquired as to whether they could wait and see. Richard Hardy stated they could wait but the material is just going to sit there for one to three months. With the safety that is involved and all the material that is out there, he would not risk it. He has asked for mutual aid from several surrounding cities, and those individuals have been working with us to remove the debris. The majority of those have returned back to their municipalities. Councilwoman Tooley inquired about the mutual aid agreement. Richard Hardy stated that the cities offered to help us. Mayor Matheson stated that for everybody that reached out to us, we asked for a claw truck and crew. This is a bigger mountain that cannot be conquered by just the locals and we need the bigger crews and the bigger capacity haulers.

Councilman Gibbs stated that a lot of the trees have been cut into 10 foot or 12 foot lengths and our claw trucks cannot handle that size load. In order for us to be able to handle that type of load, we have to more people cutting those trees into four or five foot lengths which means more time. We do not need to delay it any longer than we have to especially if we can pull it from the ARPA money. Councilwoman Tooley stated that she thought we had a lot of places to pull money from. We are taking this money and using it for something that we are not sure we will get back. Councilman Gibbs stated that even if they pull it from a line item in the Budget, at the end of the day, we still do not know if we will get the money back to fill that pot. Councilwoman Tooley stated that she has 24 hours to try to get it and ingest it. Mayor Matheson stated that it is called an emergency. Councilwoman Tooley stated that she still has to ask questions. Richard Hardy stated that it is not whether we have the money but

it is a cash issue. We have funding and every time we get a Grant, we have to spend cash and get reimbursed. A lot of the cash flow that we have is tied up in some of the other Projects that we have and we are waiting to get reimbursed. The material is not going away and it is going to get bigger and bigger. We want our neighborhoods and children to be safe. Based on his recommendation, it is the best thing we can do for our community. Councilman Gibbs stated that we now have bus stops that cannot be used because of the debris piles and children are having to walk. Councilwoman Tooley stated that she has a big tree down in her yard and she was told by her insurance man that it would take 12 days for them to come and look at it. She asked if she could cut it. The insurance man asked if it posed an immediate danger. She told him no but it is a big tree in her yard and her neighbor's yard and it needs to be cut. She thinks they need to just look at this for now and ask more questions instead of jumping to conclusions. Richard Hardy stated that he has driven the 35 miles in the City and it is not going to get any better. The longer we wait the more issues we will have. Based on his recommendation, it is the best thing for the community.

A **MOTION** was made by Councilman Carroll to approve the proposed revision to ARPA Projects and allocation amounts. Councilman Norton seconded the motion. The motion was adopted (6-1) with Councilwoman Tooley voting in opposition.

CITIZENS TO BE HEARD

Timothy Austin Crosby, owner of Crosby Stump Grinding, LLC, in Moultrie, stated that he also has a Tree Division, a Logging Division, and a couple of other things. The day of the storm, he received a call from Michael Smith, CEO of the United Way in Valdosta. During the storm, it was his Company that removed the tree off the roof. The local Police Department stopped traffic for him. After that, more word got out about his crew and what they have been able to do. Mr. Crosby stated that he was going to cut the tree in Councilwoman Tooley's yard for free if it is still there. He just wanted to show that he cares for the City. He is a 10th grade high school dropout and was homeless. The amount of support that he has received from our community is amazing. He wanted to thank everyone and stated that he is praying for us. He has not been home since the day of the storm. He has been staying at the Super Eight Motel and he is here for everyone. He has a lot of equipment and people who are willing to help him at any time. He would like the opportunity to help our community. He was in a meeting earlier today and stated that if he didn't have Staff and bills to pay, he would do the entire job for free. He is for the people because he got overlooked. He was a teen parent and he knows what it feels like to be overlooked and misjudged. He made sure that if he was ever in a position where he could help then he would help whomever he could. The people of this community need help and he would like to help. He thanked everyone for being so nice to him and his family.

Bill Love, 2207 Azalea Drive, stated that it is a danger on the sides of the roads. He handled a lot of timber out at Kinderlou these past few days and they hired professional tree movers for the stuff they were scared to handle. These are giant logs and if you have ever seen a stack of those come loose, it will crush you. They are stacked up all over the roads and they have to get them off these streets. The other thing that you are forgetting about is that the debris is drying out and it could catch on fire. The fire danger is also critical. We need to get this cleaned up as quickly as possible so the danger goes away.

Darlene Meyers, 3585 Mt. Zion Church Road, stated that she works with the seniors in our community and she volunteers to help those people who do not have access to Internet. She has to rely on Facebook to get bits and pieces of information about what is available. She knows that there are a lot of things available for low income people; however, middle class people are suffering as well. She knows a senior Vietnam Veteran who still does not have water. He cannot even drive down his driveway because of a hole. Ms. Meyers inquired as to what we are doing for the seniors and how the information is being provided to them.

Pauline Dawkins, 4618 Quartermen Estates Drive, stated that right now they are dealing with a horrific situation with all the debris and they need some help.

Joan Washington, 403 Georgetown Circle, stated that she is concerned about using the money that was already allocated from ARPA. They all need that money now because there is devastation everywhere. Ms. Washington inquired as to whether she heard it correctly that if FEMA approves, then the money will be placed back. Mayor Matheson stated that was correct. Ms. Washington inquired as to how long it usually takes to know if

FEMA is going to approve our County. Mayor Matheson stated that six Florida Counties have already been declared disaster areas. Ms. Washington stated that it should not be longer than a week. Mayor Matheson stated that it should be a day. Ms. Washington stated that although we are planning all of this and if we know in a day, she inquired as to whether this would be put aside and the FEMA money used. Mayor Matheson stated that they could discuss this with her after the Council Meeting.

CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

Richard Hardy, City Manager, thanked the City of Valdosta employees who worked throughout the storm. It was amazing what they accomplished and they made sure that others were taken care of. They moved debris, helped individuals out of their homes, cut trees, cleared lanes, helped the local electrical companies to ensure that everything got back on-line, and made sure citizens had water. They worked 12 plus hours to make all this happen and they are to be commended for their efforts.

Richard Hardy, City Manager, stated that the Valdosta Fire Department 9-11 5K Run will be held on Saturday, September 9, 2023 with registration to start at 7:00 a.m. at the Toombs Street Parking lot. The race begins at 8:00 a.m. next to Bennie's Alley. The Main Street Makers Market will also be held on Saturday, September 9, 2023 from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at the Historic Courthouse Square. On Monday, September 11, 2023, the annual 9-11 Ceremony will be held at 10:00 a.m. at the Lowndes County Historic Courthouse front lawn. On Friday, September 22, 2023, the Doors of Freedom Unveiling Ceremony will be held at 9:00 a.m. in front of City Hall. Also, on Friday, September 22, 2023, Valdosta State University Family Fun Night will be held at 6:00 p.m. at Unity Park.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilwoman Tooley inquired as to why the Special Called Meeting was held at 5:15 p.m. Richard Hardy, City Manager, stated that we already had our Regular Council Meeting scheduled for 5:30 p.m. and the software that we use to create the Agenda would not allow us to override it so the only thing that we could do was to change the time. Councilwoman Tooley also stated that she wanted to thank everyone for cleaning up all the debris from the storm.

Councilman Norton stated that it is people like Mr. Crosby, who came in from another city, and our Staff who have really lent a hand to help our citizens to survive this. We do appreciate all that you are doing and what others are doing. This has been an eye opening experience and the damage has been extensive; however, the support within and outside of the community has been phenomenal.

Councilman Gibbs thanked the Public Works Department, the Police Department, the Fire Department, the Utilities Department, and the City leadership for all their efforts during the storm; however, the one thing he can say is that he has had a lot of folks throughout his District who were very thankful for all the information that we shared with him. He would like to thank Sharah Denton and Meghan Barwick. They did a fantastic job when it came to Facebook and getting the information out there. Sometimes people were a little impatient about wanting to know what was going on, but at the end of the day, he has fielded a lot of information to people. Every time he turned around, they were sharing information about some road being closed or a drop-off site for water. To the citizens, information is important to keep them calm and for them to know that we are here listening and doing something. He just wanted to give a shoutout for that along with everybody else.

Councilwoman Miller-Cody stated that she wanted to thank the 911 service and South Georgia Medical Center (SGMC). She wanted to publicly say that the day after Hurricane Idalia hit, she and her husband went out to assist citizens in the area. That same night, her husband had an attack and coded. She could not do anything to help him get up so she called 911. They came in the dark not even knowing where they were going. They came to see about her husband and they did not ask who she was. She was just a citizen. They took her husband to the SGMC Emergency Room. They were the greatest and the service was superb. She wanted the SGMC Board to know that they gave her husband the greatest service that could ever be asked for. She brought him home yesterday at 3:00 p.m. She was very thankful for everything and for everyone who checked on her and her husband.

Councilman McIntyre stated that he wanted to echo the sentiments and all the things that have happened in the past week. There is one incident the day of Hurricane Idalia that happened on River Street. As the trees were falling, there were two females in a car who had to swerve to miss the trees. Their car ran into the ditch which was full of water. There were three individuals who were out there during the storm, Mike Jackson, Corey Barron, and Mike Harrell, who assisted in getting the females out of the car. They pulled the car out of the ditch and got them to a hotel. That was just the start of what was going on. They stayed out there all day. It is people like that in the community who could have been at home but they were not. Councilman McIntyre thanked them personally and everyone else who was out there when they did not have to be.

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 7, 2023 Special Called Meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 5:55 p.m. to meet again in Regular Session on Thursday, September 21, 2023.

City Clerk, City of Valdosta

Mayor, City of Valdosta